

Interview by Albert E. Cowdrey
Historical Division
Office, Chief of Engineers
with
Lt. Gen. Frederick J. Clarke, USA (Ret)

17 January 1974

Cowdrey: Looking' at documents, it% very hard, of course, to realize how things actually did work. **Now, I** already asked General Welling about this, suppose **I** just try to summarize what he said and you **can** add anything you like. ¹⁶ First, **I** asked him how the Board of Commissioners functioned: whether he was an actual working executive. He said he was primarily a ceremonial **figure**, that he spoke for the Board of Commissioners on public occasions. And that he was always one of the civilian Commissioners so far as members went. I asked him whether the Engineer **Commissioner** was the head of any department functioning with an executive function and if he also voted on District regulations and therefore had legislative functions. He said yes, there were several departments each headed by a division chief who reported to the Engineer Commissioner. Now another rather **con-**

16 MG Alvin **C. Welling** (1910 -) U.S. Military Academy, **1933**. Corps of Engineer;. **ALCAN** Highway, 1942 - 43. Chief of Engineers, 1944 - 45, and G-4, India Burma-Theater, **1945-46**. District Engineer, Baltimore, **1948-51**. -Executive Officer, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1951 - 55. Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia, 1957 - 60. Commanding General, Corps of Engineers Ballistic **Missile Construction Office**, Los Angeles, 1960 - 61. **Deputy Commanding General, Air Force** Ballistic Systems Division, 1961 - 63. **Retired**, 1965.

fusing area to me was the relationship between all the different Corps people in Washington: the Corps members, the National Capital Planning Commission, the Engineer Commissioner, the Washington District.

Clarke: Well, let me start back on the first.

I'm not sure my view on the president of the Commission would coincide with **Al's**, but of course we had different personalities involved. When I came along, the team that had been working with Al Welling had disappeared from the scene. We had a curious situation when I first went in. One of the Commissioners, **Karrick**, had resigned and then died shortly afterward. **He'd** been appointed Ambassador to some Central American country. He was not replaced. And there was a Republican named McLaughlin who had worked with Al. Al and he had just been opposing each other completely, and I do think in the case of McLaughlin he was much more of a figurehead of the Board of Commissioners.

than was Tobriner when he came aboard with different personalities. And I think Tobriner took much more interest in the running of his department. When we finally had three commissioners-- and this took some time because of the fact we were changing from a Republican to a Democratic administration -- but when we finally had the three we did divide the areas of the city government into three parts for day-to-day administration. **The president** of the Board of Commissioners too, essentially, the public safety, the police, and the fire department. He was involved in the day-to--day general administration of those parts.

Cowdrey: Excuse me just a second, it was up to the Board of Commissioners how to **divide** the city system?

Clarke: There was nothing prescribed in the charter at all. The charter just said there would be three Commissioners, one of whom would be an Engineer Officer. The other civilian Commissioner took all the areas of public health and welfare under him. And then the Engineer Commissioner had what I think had been traditionally his -- all the areas that had to do with the physical part of the city plus a couple of others that were hung onto him because, I guess, he happened to be in uniform. I found I had Veterans Affairs. The Engineer Commissioner had always been a military man.

I don't know that it fitted better under the Engineer Commissioner than it would have under the others.

But, **anyway**, I had that.

But in the day-to-day running of all the **depart-**ments that had to do with the physical side of the city, there was no doubt in the minds of those department heads that they reported to me for guidance. I I ran those departments without any problems. We had some wonderful department heads. In fact, I told my fellow Commissioners I had the easiest job of all. I had good department heads, they understood their **business**, they were professionals, and they'd been there a long time. Probably 'the thing that made it easier was that on the physical side of the city -- although we might not accomplish it -- at least I could see a solution to the problem of the city. Whereas they were dealing in the most difficult areas of the social problems, where you couldn't quite see what way to go, you tried to arrive at a solution. And I do think at least during the time I was there, the other two Commissioners pretty well stayed out of any problems within the areas that I was working in.

With one exception, I **don't** think they ever disagreed with me on any approach to the problems of the physical side of the city. The one exception had to

do with whether we should build what was then called the center leg of the freeway. This would have gone through the area of the East Capitol Hill about 12th to 14th Street east. And it had a lot of social problems, relocations of people, a great deal of community unrest over the idea of building it. The two of them together voted against me on that. I think that's the one real occasion where we ever had **a real** serious disagreement on anything within my province. I used to tell people that Al Welling had left me a pretty legacy; he had built all the parts of the freeway system where people were not involved. By the time I came along, we had arrived at what I called the "**bulldozer** in the bedroom." **But**, if you know Washington, the parts of the freeway system that had been completed had tied in with the urban renewal area in the southwest. After they'd moved everyone out of there, they built the freeway. There was no trauma moving people out of the way for the freeway.

The bridges had been a matter of great discussion because of the aesthetics. But, again, you weren't involved in moving people to get the bridges built. But we started to probe to put the freeway through the residential areas of the city, it just became an

almost **impossible** task. Actually, **it's** the same situation today as it was about fourteen years ago.

Well, the southwest freeway was to continue on around by the stadium, you know, and eventually there was to be a loop around the central part of the city, the so-called Inner Loop. It hasn't been completed. The new center leg now goes in front of the Capitol steps to about E Street, and I don't know of any plans today to continue it. The section that **was** to go through the park, of course, was stopped for aesthetic reasons. The Georgetown section of the freeway was never completed. That was about the only issue I ever recall where the other two Commissioners got into my business and as a matter of Commission policy withdrew their support to the center leg of the freeway. I think I enjoyed a very amicable relationship with the other two Commissioners. We opened the Commission meeting to the public during the time that **I** was there. Prior to that time the meetings had always been held in executive session. We found that a good mechanism for discussing problem areas was a cup of coffee in **the** morning with the three of us sitting down in one of our offices talking about the problems of the city -- so that at least among the three of us it had been pretty well

discussed and thrashed out by the time we ever went to the Commission meetings. But all the votes were public and there were very few items that came up on which there was **any real** dissension among the Commissioners; and even where the votes came out **two-to-one**, I don't know of any injured feelings that resulted from all this, because we did try to maintain a good rapport with each other. But **I'm** sure from my limited knowledge of previous Commissions that this was not always so, there were some hot and heavy arguments over many problems of the city. Tommy Lane had been heavily involved in the educational aspect of the city. **I** remember reading the newspaper accounts long before **I** ever thought I would become a Commissioner involved in that.

Welling had some very difficult jobs to do and he ran into a great deal of opposition, not necessarily from those in the Commission, but from groups who had an interest in the city, primarily in the Interior Department. But I think he won out and won his battles in respect to what he was trying to accomplish. He left me one curious legacy. **I don't** know whether he ever told you about it.

In putting the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge in, when I came aboard as Commissioner, that thing was

construction halfway across the river and designed only halfway across the river. The Virginia side of it had not been approved. **We'd** never gotten the approval of the Park Service and all the others involved as to what the Virginia side would look like. So, actually, we had a bridge under construction halfway across the river. And one of the first tasks that I got involved in was trying to get at what the other end of the bridge was going to look like and getting it under construction.

Most of my problems when I was Commissioner were not within the city government itself, they were primarily in dealing with outside agencies. I guess if I had any real problems they occurred within the National Capital Planning Commission -- and probably more specifically with the Department of Interior and with the Park Service. Primarily in trying to get the **Dulles** Interceptor Sewer Line located, we came to the Park Service -- and the highway program which we were pushing at that time.

I guess in trying to take a broad look at the city, actually it started before I came aboard -- I think we pushed it along quite a bit -- getting the subway system started was a big effort. We were pushing when I was there to get the compact between

the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. That fell to my lot as Engineer Commissioner and I spent many a night in meetings with those two States trying to work out the wording of the compact which finally was approved and produced. This was the foundation for the present Metro System. It took I suppose almost three years to hammer out the language to go into the compact: And most of that was done in meetings in my office that, ran, I guess, about every two weeks, which started about seven o'clock at night and ran on till midnight and beyond. And this was- in trying to work out the specific language. So, I guess in a way you could say the Engineer Commissioner played a very heavy role in getting that started.

Cowdrey: The Corps still does have some people in Metro doesn't it?

Clarke: Well, at Metro, nobody on active duty. We've got a lot of retired people over there. Jack Graham, who was the top man over there, of course, is a retired major general, who headed up our Civil Works Program. And then the staff had a significant number of retired officers and civilians that had served with the Corps in the past. I guess the Engineer has a large part to play in the development of the city.

Cowdrey: **Yes**, I have a note on General Jackson Graham and Colonel **Bocci**.

Clarke: **That's** Bocci. Well, actually, Jack Graham -- Roy Dodge is his chief of engineering. **Garbacz**, Ed **Wadell**, these are the ones that quickly come to mind. Schuyler Lowe, who is the top administrative man in that, originally started out with the Corps and then was the top administrative man for the District government for a long time and retired from that and went with Metro. And then among the contractors who were working with Metro there are quite a few Engineer Officers. Wilhojt, for example, is the head of the local **Bechtel** organization working with Metro. And **he's** got Al Rosen with him. I suppose sprinkled through that organization you might find thirty or forty. It might be worthwhile talking to Jack Graham.

One thing about the Metro System and all: before they created the present organization that Jack Graham heads, there was an interim organization created to do the planning for Metro (National Capital Transportation Agency). It was pretty heavily a political organization-- at least the head of it was. I used to get **into some** pretty heavy arguments with him -- his name was [**C. Darwin**] Stolzenbach. I **don't** know what he is doing now. One of the first things

he **did** was to take a healthy crack at the highway program; this was quite upsetting. First of all I don't think it was the mission of that group to do it. The mission was to plan the Metro System. But they took a healthy crack at the highway program and wanted to defer all of it until the Metro System was completed. **And**, now of course, this philosophy is repeated continually now as I-66 is being studied. But because I was staunchly defending the highway program, some people cast me in the light of being anti-Metro and that wasn't my position at all. My position was that Washington needed all it could get to solve its problems and from my studies it didn't look possible to build all the Metro System that we would need or all the highway systems that we would need to take care of their problems. We had to get as much as we could. Then I got into an argument with the **subway planners** on two aspects. First, I said their cost estimates were too low and they were deceiving the public. Their answer to that was, "Well, you're anti-subway; and, therefore, you are criticizing **it**."

And, secondly, I took issue with them on their position that the fare box would pay back one third of the cost of the subway -- and this didn't look

reasonable to me either. The estimates, of course, have gone way up since then for many reasons, but one of them, I am sure, was that the estimates initially were very low. And secondly, when they tried to float their bond issues -- their revenue bonds -- it was obvious they couldn't be sold without the hundred percent backing of the States, and the District, and the Federal Government, recognizing that people just don't buy revenue bonds in public transit systems any more. So, I find, even twelve years later, people coming up to me and saying, "**You're** Clarke. You used to be Commissioner. You were against the subway system." I **wasn't** against it; I just thought we were hoodwinking the public and the Congress with the estimates and the proposals on bonds. In fact, one of the concerns that I had at the time, I said we could almost make the Metro System a free system. There would be certain advantages in the costs to the population of the area. It really would boil down to charging everybody for the Metro System. But that didn't go across.

Going back to your **point**, did the Engineer Commissioner act in a legislative capacity? The answer is yes. On every issue that had to have the approval of the Board of Commissioners, he acted on them -- he

was equal with the other Commissioners. **Now,** we did have a practice -- continuing a practice they had in the past -- certain areas that were noncontroversial and minor in nature were sort of read into the record before the Commission meeting. In other words, they were included in the minutes as if they'd been approved, but they weren't discussed. And these were actions that either the Engineer Commissioner took in his department or the other Commissioners had endorsed in theirs. But these were, as I say noncontroversial, minor items, always available for questioning if anybody wanted to question them. But anything that was broad or important, requiring the commission's approval, the Engineer Commissioner was co-equal. Budget matters, city ordinances, this type of thing -- all came before the Commissioners.

Cowdrey: I see. Before we leave this general area, who built the beltway?

Clarke: The beltway was built by the States, of course, and the Bureau of Public Roads financing. The importance of the Engineer Commissioner in that was in his role as a member of the National Capital Regional Planning Council where the Engineer Commissioner had always been the District's representative. I don't know whether that was specified by law. I think it

may well have been that he would be the District's representative on that. **And**, of course, they approved; and, **actually**, the basic approval of that occurred before my time -- probably occurred back in 1955 or along in there. I suppose when Tommy Lane was Commissioner.¹⁷ Once that was approved by the Planning Council, the Engineer Commissioner didn't have direct responsibility for it.

It was funny how many extra jobs the Engineer Commissioner picked up. At one time I added up all the boards and commissions that I was a member of -- usually **ex-officio** -- and I think I ended up with twenty-one or twenty-two. But the significant ones were: the Engineer Commissioner was chairman of the Zoning Commission. He was by law a member of the National Capital Planning Commission. He was by law a member of the Public Utilities Commission. During the time that I was Commissioner, we set up this

17 MG Thomas A. Lane (1906 - 1975), U.S. Military Academy, 1928. Corps of Engineers. Commanding Officer, 30th Engineer Topographical Battalion, Ft. Belvoir, 1941 - 42. Executive Officer, Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1943 - 45. District Engineer, Little Rock, 1948 - 50. District Engineer, Okinawa, 1950 - 52. Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia, 1954 - 58. President, Mississippi River Commission and Division Engineer, Lower Mississippi River, 1960 - 62. Retired, 1962.

regional regulating body for transportation, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Commission, which had to do with regulating bus fares, and routes, and taxi fares, and that sort of-thing. **I** happened to be the first chairman of that one. **I'm not sure** I could tick off all the others. Oh, and the Council of Government, which had actually started before the Metropolitan Council of Governments, also started before **I** became Commissioner. They were trying to deal with the problems of the region and the first problems that they started to tackle were the physical problems of the area -- they sort of shied away from the social problems of the Washington area for obvious reasons. But the Engineer Commissioner played a significant role in the water and sewage problems in the area as **we** began to discuss these on a regional basis.

We got into the air pollution bit. We got into traffic. Al Welling did a beautiful job on that in trying to get these people together to try to solve on a common basis the traffic problems we were heavily involved in. Oh, there were some other things the Council of Governments got working on such as hot pursuit by policemen. The Engineer Commissioner **wasn't** involved in that one particularly. But I think it was one of the advances in regionalism, anyway. And, of

course, they began to take very heavy interest in the work being done by the Regional Planning Council and **since the** Engineer Commissioner was on both the Council of Governments and the Regional Planning Council, I found myself Chairman of the Council of Governments and the Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Regional Planning Council. I was a nominal head of each of these at one time. It was **an** unusual position.

I think one of the reasons the Engineer Commissioner got into so much of this was that he was not a political beast. He was put in these as sort of an objective arbiter of problems and didn't have the parochial ties that some of the other people had, or the political ties some might have had. Perhaps he could handle some of these things in a more even-handed manner. I think we made some pretty good strides on the sewage problem, although today, with the growth of suburbia, there are still problems occurring because of lack of capacity -- but I think we set the framework of how these things could be handled.

Cowdrey: General Welling talked a lot about the **Dulles** Interceptor.

Clarke: Right. He was the man that did a wonderful job in getting that thing through, and getting it approved, and getting it built. Actually, most of the building of it occurred in my time, but at least he got it started. And **it's** one of the few things that I know of where the final product came in within the original cost estimate. And **that's** pretty good. He estimated twenty-eight and a half million dollars, and it cost just a little bit under that when they got finished. **I'm** not sure **it's** finally finished yet, I think there are still a few segments of it that have to go in. But **it's** a very difficult job, trying to coordinate the construction of it with a lot of other construction that was going on within the city.

Cowdrey: Does it run through McLean?

Clarke: Right. It starts out at Dulles with a couple of spur lines, comes down, crosses the Potomac River below the Great Falls Dam, and then goes in a tunnel for a couple of miles. And then it comes down the bed of the C & O Canal -- through Georgetown./ For a while, people were talking about the section gap because it took quite a while to get that section through Georgetown, because at one time they thought of doing that as they built the highway up through there at the Three Sisters Bridge. Finally, they

couldn't wait any longer to put that in. Then it comes down right close to the Lincoln Memorial; and, again, they thought it was going to wait until the highway tunnel by the Lincoln Memorial was built and build a sewer line in there at the same time. **And,** again, they decided they couldn't wait. Then down through Potomac Park and across the Anacostia River and onto Blue Plains. I haven't followed it exactly, but I suspect that there are elements still missing **so it's** probably not too **effective yet.** But I give the credit for that to Al Welling, **he's** the man that put that in. In fact-, when Al left, he said he had enough projects on the board to keep me and my successors busy for the time that we would be there -- and it was pretty well true. Al was a great believer in getting things started and he was right; you had to get things started in the city.

I mentioned the bridge halfway across the Potomac., He started the freeway up through Georgetown by building one bridge across Rock Creek Park. And I extended it about four blocks before I was stopped. I put that much of what is there. And ultimately something will be added to it, for it has to be completed.

Cowdrey: This freeway in Georgetown, is this the **White-**
hurst Freeway?

Clarke: Well, this would be really an expansion of the
Whitehurst Freeway. The Whitehurst Freeway, as I
understand it, was put in just before or during World
War II.

Cowdrey: **Yes,** it was quite old.

Clarke: Old Captain Whitehurst, I guess it was who built
it. **It's** named after him -- another Engineer.

Cowdrey: Another Engineer?

Clarke: Everything is named after Engineers. It was
Captain Whitehurst. But, it **wasn't** adequate to carry
the planned traffic down through there. So there al-
ways has been on the books an expansion of it and, as
I **say, I** got it up to just about 30th Street but then
it was awaiting the Three Sisters Bridge development.
What the Park Service was going to do with River Road
and joining it to a parkway up through Maryland, and
all those decisions have been deferred so the freeway
stops there -- I mean, the expanded freeway stops
there. The old Whitehurst Freeway still goes on but
it's not a very adequate thoroughfare through there.

You know, **I** am always astounded at the Engine.er
names that you find around town. People don't recog-
nize them as such. Beach Drive in Rock Creek **Park,**

for a long time, I thought was what is said, a Beach Drive. But it turned out not to be.

Cowdrey: Lansing Beach:

Clarke: He built it, of course.

Cowdrey: The trouble with this thing is that there's too much material really.

Clarke: I used to live at Fort **McNair**. For the last couple of years when I was Chief, I brought an environmental advisory board in. I used to have them down for cocktail parties, and say, "Now look, today in the environmental world you wouldn't allow us to build on **Hains** Point. **That's** nothing but dredgings from the old Washington Channel." And they all appreciated the point. Which proves that some things a man does begin to acquire an institutional status and you couldn't possibly change it.

I don't know, I suppose during the time I was there, I don't know how to categorize which were the most important efforts. I look back at efforts to get that transit compact going. That was significant, trying to expedite redevelopment activities in the city. That was a peculiar setup. I think if one had to go back and do it all over again, one might change the way the Redevelopment Land Agency was set up, as an independent corporation. It didn't get the push

that things like the highway program, for example, got which were in a city department. I realize that redevelopment has all kinds of impacts and can see why they set it up as an independent corporation. But if the object of the exercise was, in truth, to get a redeveloped city -- I guess in retrospect -- if they put that under the Engineer Commissioner I think it would have moved faster. We had a lot to say about it, but in many areas it was sort of like punching at a paper bag to get things done.

I had one of my assistants, Tom Fullerton, who had been there under Al Welling and stayed on for most of the time that I was there. He spent practically all of his time working on that redevelopment plan.

Cowdrey: He was the Assistant Commissioner?

Clarke: He was the Assistant Commissioner. He was a colonel, I guess a full colonel. At one time I said, and I still believe it, he knew more about the problems of redeveloping a city than anybody in the United States. Because, as a *matter of **fact**, what success we had in redeveloping, I would give him the credit -- not the corporation that was there -- but **Tom**, working and prodding and pushing. He was in a very difficult area, but he couldn't do everything that had to be done. Tom had some wonderful ideas.

don't know how far you want to carry your story -- but if you could ever get someone like Tom to talk. **Why**, I think he was closer to the problems of the city in many respects than the Engineer Commissioner because there was a ceremonial aspect to the Engineer Commissioner that precluded you from getting down into the tough areas. **But** Tom worked hard on trying to take all the areas that were not scheduled for redevelopment and trying to upgrade them by relatively simple things like being sure that the trash is picked up in the **area**, and getting the neighborhoods mobilized. And he worked on getting block captains to get the people **together**, and he got the property owners to go down and paint up. He took some areas over in the East Capitol Hill area where, as I say, we were not scheduling any redevelopment activity or tearing things down and rebuilding, but working hard with what limited resources they had to upgrade the quality of life in those areas, and some of that has stuck and stayed with those areas. The people got together and did things and the city helped and this sort of thing is developing leadership with emphasis on **the** city program. And I give Tom a great deal of credit for that.

Cowdrey: **I came** across a Congressional document that had two reports, 'one favorable to the RLA proceedings and the other highly critical of it. It **came** out in 1964. I know there were criticisms of moving people out helter-skelter. If you could comment on those.

Clarke: **Well,** they had an almost impossible task. They were required by law not to tear down until the people in them had acquired decent, safe, sanitary housing. And they probably did tear it down more quickly and push people out before they had a hundred percent assurance that people had moved into decent, safe, sanitary housing. **On** the other hand, the people were not then in decent, safe, sanitary housing; in fact, they were in the worst housing in the city. And I think it was probably true that the people ended up in better housing than they had been in. It probably cost them more which, of course, caused the people to object. There was an aspect of this, too: people were not inclined to move out and be energetic on their own in trying to find a place to live.

Cowdrey: It probably was frightening, too.

Clarke: **So,** I suppose some people were anxious to say they were ruthless in RLA. But on the other hand if they had not had some **element of** being ruthless, they never would have gotten it all and **a** combination of

the carrot and the stick, trying to help people find housing and on the other hand keep pushing them to make them get out on their own.

Cowdrey: Do you recollect the time you were hung in effigy?

Clarke: Well, the episode was one I **wasn't** sure of until the next morning when I picked up the newspaper and found my picture on the front page -- a very big picture on the front page. I don't know. I think each Engineer Commissioner tackled the job with enthusiasm and was striving to do his best to be sure that the physical development of the city continue. I suppose for almost a century that there were Commissioners -- I don't know of any who really weren't held in the highest respect. They did bring into the city always a professional approach to the problems that they were working with. But, **I** heard people say that the city was never better served by its Commissioners by and large than by the Engineer Commissioners. I think I was fortunate when I was there to have two fellow Commissioners who worked hard at their job. The stories I heard which were not always true, of earlier Commissioners -- some **were**, in truth, figureheads and left the city to the running of department heads. **I'm** not talking about

the Engineers, **I'm** talking about the others. But it wasn't so when I was there.

Of course, the other thing to change that was happening while I was there was the growing concern to change the form of government.

Cowdrey: I was going to ask you about that. what was the pressure? Who was applying it?

Clarke: Mostly, I guess, if you **have** to classify it, it was what **you** could call the liberal elements around the city. But it acquired a real strength, of course, when Kennedy came aboard, and I think was added later certainly by Johnson. Much of that push came from an office that Kennedy created which was sort of a Special Assistant for District Affairs. When I was there they put in Charlie Horsky. Charlie came aboard; **and**, although personally I got along well with Charlie, we certainly were two different inclinations. He was obviously much more liberal than I and he was not quite in sympathy with my desires to keep pushing the physical development. He was more concerned with the social problems of the city and I think really the impetus for a change in the form of government really started with him.

Of course, going back **to what** I said: the highway program by this time --' which was the one he and I disagreed on most --was getting to the point of the bulldozer in the bedroom, trying to get into areas where people had to be moved out of the way. He was very sympathetic to the needs of the people. And people kept drawing up these horrible numbers of relocations that were required, and I kept telling him, "**Look,** we're talking about a six-year building program. And the number of people we're talking about having amounts to one family per working day. **Now,** we ought to be able to do that." **Anyway,** Charlie became convinced that he couldn't sway the Engineer Commissioner in my case. I know when I left, I got the word indirectly that when they were interviewing my successor and they brought him on board, Charlie **Duke,** I got the word indirectly through a friend of mine that Horsky said, "**Now** we have a Commissioner who is sympathetic to the needs of the city." So he didn't think I was. So he kept pushing for this change, and, finally after Charlie Duke left, they brought Bob **Mathe** in but by this time it was getting pretty well ordained that the White House was going

to reorganize the city government. And when Bob **Mathe** came aboard, I'm quite sure he came aboard with the understanding that it would be a very short term, and they would change the form of government. But I suspect that one of the reasons was that since the Engineer Commissioner was not political, Horsky felt it was very difficult to impress his will. Now what the President wanted I never knew. But I got into a couple of discussions with Horsky where he said, "Well, the President wants you to do this," and I said, "That's fine, but I'd like to have the *President tell me that that's what he wants me to do." Well, this never occurred. For example, I got told one time, "The President wants you to make a speech supporting the change in government at the Fourth of July celebration down at the Washington Monument." I said, "**You've** got to be kidding. I'd like to have a note

18 BG Robert E. **Mathe (1920-)**. U.S. Military Academy; 1943. 249th Engineer Combat Battalion, American and European Theaters, 1943 - 45. HQ, Third Army, 1945 - 46. Army Mission to Venezuela, 1951 - 54. Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1960 - 63. **District** Engineer, Sacramento, 1963 - 66. Engineer, VIII Corps, 1966. Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia, 1967. Retired, 1967.

from him or something saying this is what he wants."

Well, it never came and I never made the speech.

But there was a great deal of friction between the Special Assistant to the White House and certain elements of Congress. Particularly the House **Committee**, which one of my fellow Commissioners called the Backward Anti-Negro Committee and they may well have been, because they were headed by a group of Southern conservatives. But they were the people who were passing laws that governed the city, and, to some **extent**, the White House had the same problem with the Appropriations Committee which were also governed by a pretty conservative group. And I was probably truthfully more in sympathy with what the committees were trying to do and in trying to advance certain things in the city than what Charlie Horsky wanted. Well, I think all this finally led to the conclusion that they didn't want any Army Officer in there trying to run their city. **And**, of course, there had been a campaign against this for many years in the newspapers, and I must admit in retrospect, looking back, there wasn't any reason for an Army Officer to be in there except that traditionally we had been there and had done a good job. Well, when they finally came out with legislation, I guess it was by Executive Order,

they did leave a proviso in there that up to three Engineer Officers could be assigned to the city. They've never been assigned-there. I guess this came about when. I was Deputy Chief. And somebody called me from the District government, Walter Washington's office, about them and we mutually agreed that we would not assign any Engineer Officers to help run that city. It would be best for both of us to sever relations about that time.

I don't know whether by and large the fact that we had an Engineer Commissioner helped the reputation of the Corps of Engineers or not. I am vain enough **to** think that it did in certain circles where people thought we had done a good job. .But **I** think it also opened up the Corps to an element of criticism that they wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

You asked another question there, what was the relationship among the various Engineer Officers around the city? Of course, when I was Commissioner, the Washington District went out of existence and left only the area office for construction in the area. We really had very little direct contact with that system. And the Engineer Commissioner **didn't** have to play much of a role in that. This was handled by the Department of Sanitary Engineering which has

water and sewers under it, and they had a very fine liaison with the old Washington District, and then later with the Baltimore District **and with** Mr. Watt who was head man down at the water plant. And it, in truth, operated as if it were part of the city government except it took some administrative guidance from the Baltimore (District. But the city budgeted for **them**, for their operations, and worked on the capital budget plan. The relationship was a very easy one there., ,

The Corps realized it had a job to **do**, and was doing it for the District of Columbia, it had been doing it for many years and it went along pretty well. I never heard of any friction at all in that area. While I was there, there were a couple of times that I was approached by the head of our Department of Sanitary Engineering as to whether the city government **shoudn't** take over the water plants. And my attitude always was, and I talked to the Chief's office about it, if you could show where it would save any money or make it look better, fine. Well, there weren't any problems, so it just never occurred. And later, while I was Deputy Chief and Chief, the question would come up periodically. And our answer was always the same. **"If** it looks as if it could be run better under the

city government than the way **it's** running, then **fine.**" I think people have said, "Well, if they ever create the regional system under some sort of a compact arrangement, then, very appropriately, the running of the water system of the City of Washington, the wholesale part of it should go to the regional set-up/ But I never sensed any real agitation one way or the other. It was always low-keyed, the inquiries that were made.

With respect to the Washington District, or even the Baltimore District after the Washington District went, the city government really didn't have much of a tie with them except in the same way that any government would with a district engineer. Flood control planning, this type of thing, the city worked with them on that. But there was no really special arrangement. Of course the Chief of Engineers, by law, was a member of the **National Capital** Planning Commission. He personally never showed up at the meetings. He always delegated that to either an officer or one of the civilians. While **I** was Commissioner, we had two different people. We had Carl Brown, who was in uniform then. He was the resident member of the River and Harbor Board, acting as the

Chief% representative and was a very fine hardworking man. He did contribute much to the Planning ~~Com-~~ mission. And then we had Mr. **Zach**, the fine old gentleman who died, the landscape architect. He was over in military construction in charge of planning there. He came for awhile. In a way both of these people usually checked with the Engineer Commissioner as to how he felt about problems that were up in front of the Planning Commission. And during the time that I was there, their votes always coincided with mine. I had some sort of an understanding with the Chief of Engineers that if there was to be a difference in our votes the Chief of Engineers and I, as Commissioner, would talk about them. It never occurred. They all never had any problems. I guess, to some extent, the Engineer Commissioner had a captive vote there, but not fully. But at least during the time I was there on all the questions that came up we did vote the same way.

I could say the same thing though with respect to other ex-officio members of the board; a man -from the Public Building Services and a man from the Public Roads and all. We were always voting the same way. Not because we had agreed to any sort of an alliance or anything, but it just seemed to work out that way.

The people that we had most of our arguments with were the representatives of the Park Service, understandably.

I never got any guidance from the Chief's office on anything. I was completely independent of them. The understanding I had with them when I went aboard was, "**You're** on your own. If you ever want some advice, then come on over and we'll be glad to give it to you." But there was never any pressure from the Chief's office.

Cowdrey: I wondered about the appointment of the Engineer Commissioner, General Clarke, did the Chief send a list of people? Where did the President get names to pick the Engineer Commissioner from?

Clarke: Going back to the time I was appointed, I don't know how many names were submitted. But the Chief of Engineers submitted at least my name and I don't know how many others, if any. Then I was called in for a series of interviews without knowing precisely what it was about. But I must say nobody told me precisely what it was about until I got to the White House. I had to go through first a very brief interview with General Itschner. He said, "I called you back here and I want you to go over and talk to Dave Kendall." He was one of the assistants at the White House.

The secretary said, "**I** can't tell you what the job is, you can probably guess, but **I can't** tell you." He said, "We've looked over your records and we think **you're** qualified." So I went over to the White House, and then Kendall said, "**We're** considering you for Engineer Commissioner. Don't tell anybody you're in town for that purpose. **We've** looked over your record, and if you have no objection, we'll appoint you." That was about the essence of the interview. And I said, "**Well,** can I go back and talk to Al. **I'll** tell him that you're coming." **I** went back to wait orders. **That's** all I know. The **Chief's** office obviously had a strong voice in it. **I don't** know how they picked Charles Duke. **I** think, again the Chief's office was looking around for names and picked Charlie.

I was involved a little bit in the matter of picking Bob **Mathe**. And one of the strong points of picking Bob **Mathe** was the fact that he had already been in the District Government as one of the assistants to the Engineer Commissioner. And it was on that basis that we put his name forward. As a matter of fact, I think that was the only name we put forward and put into the secretary's office and then sent to the White House later. **I'm** quite sure we did not

nominate any one else. The White House wanted Bob **Mathe**.

I suppose over the years the strongest voice in the selection of the Engineer Commissioner was the Chief of Engineers. **I can't** be certain. Actually, as government got bigger, you know the Federal government, the relationship of the Engineer Commissioner to the White House or the Commissioners to the White House changed considerably. And I was always struck by old Mrs. **Kutz** who died not too long ago. She **was** in her nineties. Her husband had been Commissioner three times. My wife and I **used** to see her quite often. She was a very tiny little lady with a black velvet ribbon with a little cameo always on her neck, a very precise little lady. She had enjoyed the times when her husband had been Commissioner. But she met us one time after I had been Commissioner a short time and she said, "**Tell** me, dear, are the Eisenhowers treating you properly?" My wife and I said, "Yes, I guess **so**." We had been invited to the White House for one of those **big** mass affairs, a musical, and had enjoyed it and shaken hands with the President. He **didn't** know who I was. So she **said**, "**You** know, when **Papa**" -- as she called General **Kutz** -- "and **I** were **there**, we went to the White House at least every two

weeks **for** lunch with the President. We were the city fathers. And we were always being asked to the White House for things, to represent the city, and had a very close relationship with the President." But this **disappeared** as government got bigger and bigger. I never did have an audience with the President on any of the **city's** problems. My fellow Commissioners, while **I** was there, never got to see the President on any of the **city's** problems. And **that's** where the special assistant came in. I suppose had we had an issue we wanted to take to the President we probably **could've** gotten there, but it never arose. But again **I** think the fact that the Federal government had gotten so big, the President had much bigger fish to fry than worrying about the city government. It was awfully hard to ever feel the President's personal finger on what was happening. Of course, most of the time I was there Kennedy was President. **I** met him several times, but that was the only contact with the President. **I** used to meet the Vice-President at ceremonial occasions, but he obviously had no interest -- it was Johnson at the time. So, most of the influence, of course, from the White House came through the special assistant. This was his only job, and he took a deep interest in the city. **And**, to some

extent, the creation of the special assistant diminished the power of the President of the Board of Commissioners. Because where previously people might have gone to the president of the board to accomplish something in the city, they then began going to the White House to put pressure on to accomplish things. And I suppose this was a change during my regime, and a sign that the end was coming, and the creation of a different form of government.

Cowdrey: Did you leave office in '64?

Clarke: It was '63. Charlie Duke came aboard. You haven't interviewed Charlie yet?

Cowdrey: No, I haven't talked to him.

Clarke: You might talk to Bob Mathe if you want to. Bob's with the Inter-American Bank.

Cowdrey: Yes, I wrote to his home. And I wrote to General Lane and General Prentiss.

Clarke: Lane is in town. I see him quite often.

Cowdrey: He lives over in McLean.

Clarke: Yes, he has an office here in town.

Cowdrey: General Prentiss sent me a newspaper special. He said I could read up on it.

Clarke: I happen to have and I suppose because somebody collected it for me -- and I suppose Al Welling and others may have it, a boxful of clippings that

somebody clipped for me in the office and gave to me that mentioned whatever the Engineer Commissioner was doing in the three years I was there. **I'll** be glad to give it to you; you might want to thumb through it and get a flavor of some of the things that went on. Let me dig it out, and we've got your telephone number here. We can make arrangements so you can look at it; as far as **I'm** concerned, you can take it with you and thumb through it and keep it as long as you want. I haven't done anything with it since I collected it, but they are arranged chronologically. You hit some of the editorials later. The Washington Post always had its suspicions about whether the Engineer Commissioner was a good thing -- in fact, they were critical of the system that created the Engineer Commissioner. The Star was a great supporter of the Engineer Commissioner.' I could always call one of the editors of the Star and get an editorial. **I couldn't** dictate exactly what he was going to say, but I would say, "**Here's** something that needs editorial treatment." And **he'd** do it. **I** did establish a practice, which **I** think paid off, of periodic luncheons with the staffs of both the papers, and I ran an open-door policy for their reporters. They could come in any time, talk about anything on the

record, off the record, and they never violated anything off the record. I found that reporters are like any one else, they have to make a living. All they have to do is fill so much space every day. And if you can't fill it, why you get fired. They used to call me Saturday afternoon. Every Saturday afternoon **I'd** get a call from the City Hall reporters of the Post and of the Star saying in essence, "General, don't you have anything I could write about tomorrow?" And **I'd** glance through and say, "Well, we're thinking about a change in the housing inspector's routine." And it would be a big headline for some little item. But it was good to have the rapport with them, and I got to know them fairly well, **and** I think we were good friends. **And**, as **I** say, they never cut my throat.

Then, of course, one thing you learn quickly in that game is never lie to them. You can always say, "I won't tell you." But don't tell them you **don't** know something if you know it. Because they have ways of finding out things, they have all kinds of contacts. **Well**, they had a couple of things that happened. We had a scandal, in a way -- some of our water inspectors were moonlighting driving cabs -- and they got caught

doing it during the daytime. Obviously, they were cheating. And the newspapers came to **me** and said, 'What are you going to do about it?' I said, "**I'm** not going to do anything. They work for Dave **Auld** down there. Dave **Auld** runs that department, and **he'll** take care of **it.**" And they said, Well, aren't you going to have a big investigation?" And I said, "**No.**" They-could have blown this kind of thing up, "The Commissioner refuses to do anything." So we sat around and talked. And I said, "**Look,** you've got to understand **that's** Dave department. **I've** got faith in 'him. I understand him. I have complete assurance that **he'll** do what's necessary and **I'm** not going to get in the middle of **it.**" So they finally agreed; so what might have been a big scandal with the Commission working on it really passed off finally as a small disciplinary action. But if I hadn't had a rapport with them I **don't** think I could have gotten away with it. It was always interesting dealing with the newspapers. They were always looking for stories, of course, where the city had done something wrong. Then they found out we were allowing people to occupy buildings before the final safety inspections and all had been made. And they were going to make a big thing of it. So they

came to me with the story and wanted my comments. And my comment to them was, "Well, you'd better go back and look at the building that the Post is operating in. It's a relatively new building. And find out whether they occupied it before they got final clearance." Of course, they had. But by and large I had no real problem with the newspapers.