

WALTER K. WILSON, JR.

Lieutenant General Walter K. "Weary" Wilson, Jr., began his association with the U.S. Army when he was born on August 26, 1906, at Fort Barrancas, Florida, where his father was stationed as an Artillery officer. Subsequent assignments took the Wilson family to Washington, D.C., and to Hawaii, where the younger Wilson decided on a military career. After attending the Army's West Point Preparatory School at Schofield Barracks, he entered the Military Academy in 1925 with plans to seek a commission in the field artillery. His class standing upon graduation in 1929 made him eligible for a commission in the Corps of Engineers. He accepted his father's advice, entered the Corps, and embarked on a distinguished career that spanned 36 years.

Wilson's first assignment as a young second lieutenant was as assistant to the District Engineer in Mobile. Fourteen years of troop command, staff assignments, advanced study, and a teaching appointment at West Point followed. In October 1943 he reported to India as Deputy Engineer-in-Chief in the newly formed Southeast Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten. He remained in the China-Burma-India Theater throughout the war, spending the last eight months commanding American troops and overseeing the demobilization effort.

Returned to colonel from the rank of brigadier general, which he had achieved at the age of 38 while in India, Wilson took command of the St. Paul Engineer District in June 1946. From there he went to Mobile as District Engineer in 1949. This was his first experience with a heavy workload in both civil works and military construction. Wilson left Mobile for a brief term as South Atlantic Division Engineer and then moved to Morocco for a two-year tour as Mediterranean Division Engineer. Drawing upon his experience in Mobile, he guided the Division through the complicated process of conversion from cost plus a fixed fee to lump sum, fixed price contracting. Wilson also gained valuable experience managing projects for the Air Force.

General Wilson was Deputy Chief of Engineers for Construction in a period when the Corps became heavily involved in major construction projects supporting the ballistic missile and space programs. In August 1960 he left OCE to command the Engineer Center and Fort Belvoir,

but his broad-based background in the Corps' civil and military activities and the respect he had gained in Congress, the military, and the construction industry led to his selection as the 40th Chief of Engineers by President Kennedy. As Chief from 1961-1965, Lieutenant General Wilson guided the Corps through a difficult period of Army reorganization which saw the Corps retain its chief while other branches of the Army lost status. Pursuing his philosophy that "the head man should see and be seen," he traveled extensively, visiting Corps field offices and projects and Engineer troops.

Among the citations, decorations, and public service awards he received are the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the French Legion of Honor, and the Department of Defense Distinguished Service Citation. In 1962 Kiwanis International and the American Public Works Association honored General Wilson and the Corps of Engineers by naming him one of the top ten Public Works Men of the year. Three years later he received the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Medal for Outstanding Leadership.

After retirement from active duty in 1965, General Wilson returned to Mobile as vice president of Southern Industries Corporation, a conglomerate whose subsidiaries produce and market aggregates for the construction and chemical industries. In 1966 he also became chairman of Mobile's Task Force 200, an industrial development agency of the Chamber of Commerce. In addition he chaired a board arbitrating construction claims on the Hell's Canyon project and led an inspection team reviewing construction programs in Vietnam for the Secretary of Defense. From 1971-1975 he served as a member of the U.S. Military Academy Planning Board which was established to advise the Department of the Army on the Academy's construction expansion program. General Wilson was credited with first recognizing the need to construct a high-level bridge on Interstate 65 over the Mobile River because of anticipated waterway development. In 1978 the state of Alabama named the bridge in his honor.