

But then as we got near the end, and I'd been keeping in touch with Johnny Hughes, who was the Engineer for the ground forces at Fort McNair, and he was telling me that he was saving the 1113th Group for me.⁵¹ If I could get free, I could take it to Europe. One day about the first of September--this course ended about the middle of September--I got told that General Wedemeyer wanted to see me.⁵² I knew who General Wedemeyer was. He was in plans in the Pentagon at that time. He was a brigadier general and was pretty well known, but I didn't think he even knew who I was, and he probably didn't. I reported to his office and he sat me down and said he had some very interesting news for me. He had just come back from Quebec, where there had been a conference with the British, a combined chiefs type thing, and Mountbatten had been there, and they had decided to set up a new command out in the India-Burma-China area, Southeast Asia Command.⁵³ This would be commanded by Admiral Mountbatten, and there would be a joint staff--Army, Navy, Air Force; British and American--involved. There was to be a British major general of Engineers as the engineer in chief, and his deputy was to be an American. It would be set up in a slot for a brigadier general, and would I like to go with him and fill that slot. I said, "No, sir." He said, "What? Why?" I said, "Sir, I activated the 1113th Engineer Combat Group, and I got them ready, and I thought we were going to go win the war in Europe. They're holding it for me to go back to, and this to me is more in line with what I have been spending my life getting ready for." "Well," he said, "let me put it to you differently. General Marshall has decided that every graduate from this first joint Army-Navy staff college will go to a combined staff. There is a requirement for an Engineer officer to fill this slot promptly. You are the only Engineer officer in this class. It might lead to being a brigadier general very promptly." (And I didn't believe that.) "How would you like to go with me?" And I said, "I'd love to!" So that's how I got with that and it all leads back the same trail.

Q: Do you mean that you had been preparing for a combat position rather than a staff position?

A: I mean a command of a combat unit. You always thought in terms of, well, someday I'm going to be the division engineer of the such and such division and command that regiment. But I never quite made it, and I was always disappointed that I didn't get to do that, because that's what you had been training for, at least I thought you had. This is again where I was trying to control my own career very unsuccessfully, and the way it turned out it was completely in my interest.

Q: What were the major activities you were involved in in the China-Burma-India [CBI] theater? Didn't you go to India, where Desmond Harrison was the British major general above you?⁵⁴

A: Well, everything was hurry, hurry, hurry to get there. The course ended and we had a couple of weeks leave and then collected in Miami to get on the airplane and fly over to win the war. I got to Miami and sat around for a week or so waiting for a ride. I had some other friends there, and each day we'd think, well, if they're not going to send us out today, let's go rent a boat and go out deep-sea fishing. But each time we thought we had better be handy for the call. So we finally got going. We went down through South America and went from Natal to Ascension Island, which was sure just a little spot of nothing, and then on up into Accra. Then we got on a C-47, and we went from there to India, which took one heck of a lot of stops. We never spent a night. We had to sleep in bucket seats. We stopped for a meal once in a while and a bath, but we just kept going. We got to Karachi in Pakistan, and we thought, now we'll get right up to New Delhi, but we just stayed.

After about three or four days we tried to find out what was happening, but it was the old hurry--up-and-wait deal. Finally somebody got wind that we were down there, and so suddenly we flew into New Delhi. So I reported to this British major general. About that time General Wheeler, U.S. Army, who had been out in that theater, had moved over to Southeast Asia Command as the principal administrative officer (PAO), and General Harrison served under him, so I was in that chain.⁵⁵ I didn't stay in Wedemeyer's chain. Wedemeyer was in the military planning side.

I reported to this British major general and his first question to me was, "When are the rest of your staff coming?" Well, Wedemeyer had assured me that we were not going to take many Americans. We were going to let the British carry the ball on this. So I said, "You're looking at him. I'm it." He said, "No, you are not. I've been serving with your folks over in England, and you have far better Engineer construction people than we have. We're pretty good on troop planning and so on, but you're far better than we are on the other. So what we're going to do, you're going to try your best to get people who will fill these slots in this organization, and the ones you can't fill then I'll fill from the British side, but we'll get as many good Americans as you can." This was a complete reversal from what I thought, but that's what we tried to do, and we got a pretty good-size staff and some pretty good people.

I was his deputy, and he was a good guy to work for. He tried to smooth me over some in spots, but he also backed me up frequently. It was pretty tough because not only was I now into an international organization, but I was into one modeled on the British Royal Navy, and they weren't a bit different from what I had run into up in Newport. Their method of running a headquarters on shore was just as if you were on a ship. I mean every night they picked up all the classified papers of any kind and locked them in a safe. Not individual offices, just the central one, so that the next day it would be an hour or two before you could get your working papers back in your hands.

They had systems which were awful hard for we Americans to accept. They had a basic principle of writing a memo or staff paper or something and then sending it around. And everybody would add a little note, and they called it a minute. They were running out of everything in India in those days. They ran out of paper clips, so they used thorns. The main supply in this was through the British channels. They used little slips of paper. They had a string with a little piece of metal on it. You stick the metal through the paper and then you would turn it flat and it would hold it. There would be a big stack of minutes. They were all done longhand so that I couldn't read half

of them, and I couldn't tell who had acted on anything. To me it seemed these things just kept circulating. I never saw anybody take action on anything. It was somewhat of a surprise.

One day I decided I was going to correct this, so I found a paper that I thought was something we ought to do something about right then. So I took all these little pieces of paper and threw them in the wastebasket, and on the basic paper I directed that we do so and so. And it took them about a month to straighten that out. I guess I probably got my lesson from it, but at any rate they kept right on using the same system, so I didn't gain much, but we began to understand it better. They wanted to do well.

Our PAO in the engineer division was British, what I would call a warrant-officer type, and he had been indoctrinated in the military so long that it was some deal; you had to learn how to live with it. It was a little hard to learn how to live with it, but I finally deduced that the main thing Southeast Asia Command could do to help us really win the war was to see if we couldn't support the U.S. forces that were trying their best to get over to China. In my position I'd have some chance of working on the government of India. It was a separate entity, but it was responsible for supplying the logistical support. Southeast Asia didn't command the government of India. It was a guest there, but it had to call on it for help. The U. S. side was sitting there, and it didn't command the government of India. The government of India ran their military and everything, just the way they had always run it.

You've heard of the expression "red tape." Well, I saw how that got started. I went to call on the engineer in chief, India. His offices were a one-story deal, concrete block, probably had been there about two years and probably nobody had whisked a feather-duster around in that time. They had tables instead of desks, and underneath the tables there were stacks of documents tied up with red tape, literally red tape. And every place I looked and every office I went into [there] were these stacks of papers. Who knew what was there, I don't know. But there they were, tied up neatly,

and India's not a very clean place: the dust on it was thick. It really shook me. You had to learn how to work with them.

Q: Was it largely due to pressure from the Engineers that the Indian government acted?

A: I think we did some good. I worked primarily with [the British] Brigadier Billy Hastead, he was slightly older than I and was the deputy for Air for the government of India's military engineer in chief. He could see the point; I could see the point. I could go from him to the Engineer section of the China-Burma-India command, which was American, in New Delhi and kind of work them together. It wasn't easy, but we did accomplish some things.

Q: How did it work having Engineers at so many different levels--in the Southeast Asia Command and under General Stilwell, and so forth?⁵⁶

A: Theoretically at the top, although it really wasn't the top, was Mountbatten. He was the junior commander in the whole area in age, and he had Southeast Asia Command. He was Supreme Allied Commander. But his forces that he truly commanded were a British general, the oldest general still on active duty in the British army for the ground forces; the oldest air force flier for the RAF [Royal Air Force] support; and the oldest admiral. It was a committee and they had to, you had to get them all together, and to make it worse, Joe Stilwell was Mountbatten's deputy.

Q: Was Stilwell's position clear?

A: Oh, yes, it was clear. It was very clear, but he didn't give a hoot for the British. I think he visited Mountbatten's headquarters twice in two or three years, and he was his deputy: He was very suspicious of anything they tried to do, and I guess probably it worked both ways. He could have been involved more, but I don't much blame him because nothing was happening. You couldn't get this committee to produce. The basic thing is the British were a damn sight better in planning the details of an operation. We were going to take some islands over there in the Bay of Bengal. We



British-American Cooperation in CBI. Major General Raymond G. Wheeler (l.) consults with his boss, Lord Mountbatten.

were going to do this, and we were going to do that. And each time the Southeast Asia Command staff would come up with the requirements, which were so tremendous that nothing happened, you couldn't do it.

Where on the other hand, generally speaking, the Americans would do a fair job of planning what was required, if they didn't have enough, they'd make do with less. And they'd go ahead and start, and maybe they'd get clobbered, but at least something would happen. Two or three times we got organized for some exercise, for a real war effort, and just then they decided to cross the Mediterranean, so they took all the shipping away. So it was a very frustrating experience for the Mountbatten-level people and a lot of the rest of us because every time we'd have something that looked like now we're finally going to do something, something would come alongn--there'd be a storm, a bad battle someplace, there'd be a requirement for shipping someplace--I didn't know when they were going to land in Europe but of course that withdrew all the shipping again. You had Southeast Asia, which was theoretically the overall command. But in fact, frankly, Mountbatten couldn't order Stilwell to do anything. He just had to try and suggest, promote. I don't think he could really order any one of these three major subdivisions to do anything. He had to get them together. It was frustrating for Wedemeyer. His job was to draw up these plans.

Q: How would you characterize Mountbatten? How did he get the command?

A: He was one of the best people I dealt with. He had personality, and he had intelligence. He was a charming guy and a good-looking guy, and he had been a hero. He had been a destroyer commander and had it shot out from under him. He had been in their combined group that landed on hostile shores.. He had been in on some of that kind of business. He had a name on the British side. He was also a cousin of the king of England, which didn't hurt. He was Prince Philip's uncle, but Mountbatten himself was related to the king, closely related. I knew Prince Philip there as a young staff officer.⁵⁷ A blonde, good-looking

young man in Ceylon. He was there. Mountbatten, if really given full authority and a willing group of subordinates, probably could have accomplished a heck of a lot more. On the other hand, I don't think the Americans would have acquiesced to giving him that.

Q: Stilwell had a theater engineer, and there were engineers in the Southeast Asia Command and in the Indian government. What was the relationship among them?

A: Here's what you had. The government of India owned the territory, owned the manufacturing means, owned the labor means, and it owned the railroads. It was the government. It had its army. It had a commander in chief, India. They were there. They had gone through the brunt of the early days. They had supported what little effort had been made. They'd backed up Burma to the extent it had been done. They had taken lickings. They had been expanded.

Now on top of them you then superimposed the American forces. They are living in somebody else's land, and they looked to this somebody else to give them much logistical support and help with rail movements, everything. If they wanted to establish another camp or facility, they had to go through the procedures to get the government to agree and let them have it. But they're a pretty big presence. As a matter of fact, they're probably almost as big as the military belonging to the government of India.

Then you come along and superimpose on all of that this new Supreme Allied Command with theoretical command over all of them, coordinating control, but actually it had to more or less operate by getting agreement. So we had an Engineer officer in the person of "Speck" Wheeler, who would get to be a lieutenant general. He was a deputy to Mountbatten also on the administrative side, which is basically the logistical side, but he was basically an engineer. You had this British major general of engineers who was an engineer.

Our SEAC engineer division was itself a great mixture of British and U.S. engineers, Australians,

New Zealanders, Canadians--troop specialists, intelligence types, planners, and doers. And we couldn't throw our weight around. If we did, we would get everything screwed up and nothing would happen. But we had to try and get our people to operate on a low key and use suggestion and persistent effort.

Then shortly, after we had been there about six or eight months in New Delhi, Mountbatten got fed up and decided he would move his headquarters down to Ceylon, where he would be a little independent of the government of India and things might cure themselves. Well, this was fine. I went along with him. We all rushed down there. We lived in a teagarden. It was very nice, a nice climate and so on, and was halfway up the mountains down there.

We hadn't been there very long before I got called in and told, "Well, nothing's happening. We're losing out. We've pulled everybody out of New Delhi. We've left British Brigadier [James F.] Benoy back there, but you're missing.⁵⁸ You were doing more good to us back up there working with the Americans and the government of India engineers in getting things put together and moving. So we're going to send you back up there as the rear echelon. You'll have Craig Smyser, who is an American Army Engineer, but you have got to go back and work with **Benoy.**⁵⁹ He's the official rear-echelon representative. You just work with him and see if you can't get more of this support that you were developing before." So I went back to New Delhi.

The first time I was in New Delhi I lived about a month or two in the big hotel. My roommate was a classmate, Frank Merrill. But along about a month after I had gotten there, they decided to set up this special combat force, and he got moved out to go take command of it. Colonel [Charles N.] "Reuben" Hunter had already brought it over there and organized it. Frank was one of Stilwell's boys, so he went down there.

Then I got moved to a palace, Bikaner House. Mountbatten lived in another beautiful place, which incidentally had a bedroom with mirrors covering

the ceilings and the walls. It was something. The maharaja that built it wanted to be able to see who he had with him from any position. [Desmond] Harrison lived in the same palace with Mountbatten. Craig Smyser and several of what they called senior officers, most of them brigadiers or major generals, also lived at Bikaner House. There were just a few of us that were still colonels, Americans in particular. This was a beautiful palace, marble with tremendous high ceilings. I got ranked into the senior son's quarters. The rest of them didn't realize what a break I got because it was off on one flank of the palace, separated pretty much from the rest of the building, and it had hot water, its own hot water heater. Every other lieutenant general and major general and everybody else living in that place, their bearers had to go out and heat their bath water over a charcoal fire, but I had an electric hot water heater, or gas, I've forgotten which. But cold! It's kind of like this climate here [in Mobile]. It gets down around 30 [degrees] here and if you don't have any heat it's cold. Well, that marble palace was primarily used as a home during the summer by the maharaja of Bikaner. In the winters he was in his own bailiwick--there wasn't one sign of heat in this thing. It was just plain cold. We ate in a British mess. I asked one day, "Don't we have a mess officer?" And they said we did. 'How often does he inspect the kitchen?' I asked. They said, "He has to eat here!" Well, that was serious. So I normally had "Delhi belly" every Monday. Our offices were in what I see on the TV whenever we have people go and visit--big red stone buildings up where the legislature and government offices were--and we had some of that--My main transportation was a bicycle. I rode three or four miles on a bicycle. That was fine in the winter but in 120-degree temperature it got a little bit hot. But it was certainly a lot better than living in the jungle like they were doing in some places. So we had nothing to complain about. Now I am off the track.

We were talking about all the different Engineer commands. Now let me see. Tom Farrell ended up as the Engineer for Stilwell.⁶⁰ Dan Sultan later on was Stilwell's deputy in Delhi, and then Stilwell

was removed, and Dan Sultan took over.⁶¹ He was an Engineer officer, too. Tom Farrell, Al Welling, oh they had quite a crowd of Engineers there.⁶² As I say, Craig Smyser was working for me, and he escaped and went over to the Farrell Engineer section, where he thought he was doing more good. Probably he was. Lew Pick got over there about the same time I did and took over the Ledo Road. He was an Engineer, and most of his key staff were Engineers.

Joe Cranston had been the Master of the Sword, which is the athletic director, in essence, at the military academy when I was a cadet.⁶³ He was commanding the intermediate section, but it was full of Engineers as well. Neyland, football coach from Tennessee and an Engineer, who had retired and was called back--was commander of the base section in Calcutta most of the time when I was there.⁶⁴ He was an Engineer. It was an Engineer theater. I can't say it was any well-thought-out approach to life, but I more or less tried to stay out of people's way, and get in on the conferences as much as I could, kind of ease in the long-range direction of what my bosses were aiming for, but not make a big noise, if you know what I mean.

And this turned out to be right successful. As a matter of fact, when the war ended, Speck Wheeler became the Chief of Engineers. I'd gotten to know him very well because I used to go out and wait at the airport to meet him. In fact, he woke me up one time when I was sleeping on the back seat of the car. And he said, "What's this, you're worse than the apostles of Christ going to sleep:" But when I came back from the war, here's this man as Chief of Engineers. Lew Pick--I had made a lot of visits to his territory, I tried real hard to get him the things he needed--I don't think he particularly paid much attention to me or knew much about me--but I never did cross him. I sat in up there at some conferences when we were trying to settle between the Air Force command and the Army command--who gets some of these Engineer battalions that are coming? Because there were some of them coming over there that were labeled aviation engineers, and the Air Force wanted to control them. But everybody in the road area wanted to control all of them and to allocate effort. I

remember sitting in the back of the crowd very quietly watching Lew Pick do a darn good job of winning his way over that thing, which I thought was the right way anyhow. We didn't have enough of anything-nobody had enough.

Q: Are you talking about the movement to centralize the Engineer construction effort rather than let it be--

A: Frittered away.

Q: Yes, and doesn't this have to do with the Air Force rivalry? For example, there were the roads and there were the airfields, and the Air Force wanted to have control.

A: That's right, and the big thing was, shortly after I had gotten out there, they started preparing to receive B-29s.⁶⁵

Q: Was that one of the biggest projects?

A: Oh, yes. It was a hell of a project. And they sent all kinds of people over there, engineers of one breed and another, to get things ready. And they *were* going to come pretty soon, and they wanted to be able to hop from down near--from Bengal, down near Calcutta--they wanted to be able to fly over to some new fields to be built up at Chengtu. They wanted to be able to fly with their bomb load, land up at these fields that were to be built up in China, top off with fuel, fly over, and bomb Japan, come back and get fuel, and come back down to the Calcutta area. At that time none of us knew a thing about the B-29. We didn't know the characteristics. We didn't know what thickness of pavement was needed. It turned out that one of the Air Force types had all of those specifications locked in his drawer, but he hadn't thought there was any necessity to let some of the rest of us mundane folks see those kind of things.

Q: Were you supposed to go ahead with construction without any further specifications?

A: Well, the answer was, in my case, I was just up here. I just knew it was happening. People would say, "We're bringing this in, help them all you

can." We had to twist the arm of the government of India to get the sites. Then the promises were to send U.S. battalions over that were to build these fields with no problem. It wouldn't be any drain on the government of India at all. It wouldn't be any drain on the rest of the military effort. They'd come complete. Then the word came, "We can't get them off yet, but we've got to get started. Can you do anything to get the government of India to go ahead and start building these fields?" This just didn't come to me. I was just getting it on the part of the whole crowd. Well,, they had no equipment. And, as far as the Air Force was concerned, this was going to win the war. Suddenly we had Kromer and some other American engineers showing up to build airfields down around Calcutta, B-29 fields, without hardly any means except bodies. And where was the labor coming from?⁶⁶ We were going to get the engineer service of the government of India to furnish labor and little mixers, hand mixers, to mix the concrete. It was fraught with troubles. It couldn't move fast enough. It couldn't build to the specifications our Air Force wanted. The other people thought it was just crazy to demand so much strength and so on.

But by a great deal of cooperative effort, not just of our Southeast Asia Command, we got the U.S. theater, and Billy Hasteed, the Air Force engineer for the Government of India, together. He worked under the engineering chief, who was a grade or two higher. Hasteed saw the point, realized the requirement, and helped us no end. I think I was somewhat influential in helping get him pulling in the right direction. But, if you can believe it, we were trying to build four or five big fields with tremendous runways for those days, with nothing but pick and shovel and little trucks and concrete mixers. They had some rock--crushing equipment. A lot of it was done by hand. But they had to have a whole battery of the things lined up in order to do anything, and it was not fast. Yet the Indian side had been more or less forced to accept the target dates and get going when it was really obvious that they couldn't possibly meet those target dates under any circumstances. This caused every fly-by-night that came through from the Air Force, including my friend LeMay, who would

jump all over the fact that it was those damn Indians that were so slow in this.⁶⁷ But the promise had been that the Engineer troops were going to arrive in a package to build these things.

Q: But what happened, didn't they have the troops?

A: They didn't have them, and they didn't have the shipping.

Q: Was that true of the equipment, too? Why didn't you have the equipment you needed?

A: Well, the reason was because the effort was going faster than the logistical system could bring it. And the real thing, you see, you were in a competition. They wanted that same equipment out in MacArthur's theater, and they wanted them in Europe, and they wanted it in the South Pacific. We were pretty much near the bottom of the totem pole. We got just kind of token deals pretty much. Now that's not quite a fair way of saying it.

Q: Your whole effort was related to the position of China against Japan, to strikes out of China against Japan. It sort of rose and fell according to that relationship, didn't it?

A: That's right. Remember now that Stilwell had no respect for the British, in fact no respect for the Chinese either, to amount to anything Incidentally, I had known Joe Stilwell slightly since I had been at Benning. The more I saw of him and the more I saw of the war, the more I realized that he was one of the finest infantry battalion commanders that we ever had, but quit right there. For background, my father in 1941 activated the III Corps in Monterey, Fort Ord, and who should have the 7th Division in the III Corps but Joe Stilwell. As corps commander my father used to go over there pretty frequently, and he said he never found Joe Stilwell any place but out marching near the front of the point of an infantry maneuver some place. He never saw him near the artillery, near the Engineers, near the division logistical side, and this was borne out very much by what happened. "Uncle Joe" was happiest when he went out under a banyan tree in Burma surrounded by a handful of his pals and conducted a little combat war, which he

did well. His deputy back in New Delhi was never quite sure what he had decided, what he was doing. It wasn't the best run operation in the world. On supplies, that was halfway around the world. It took them a terrible long time to get supplies. And when you got to India, you put it on rail, and you had to switch from one rail system to another, you had to get on a ferry, and across a river and go on a different gauge railroad.

Q: Were you involved in any railroad work?

A: Just in the general deal that the railroad was there and was serving the effort, and our general mission was to see to it that everything got up to these forward areas that was necessary. Paul Yount was sent over there, another Engineer officer, the same one who had been out at Schofield Barracks with me, and he was brought over from Persia to run the railroads, and he improved them no end.

Q: What about your involvement on road construction?

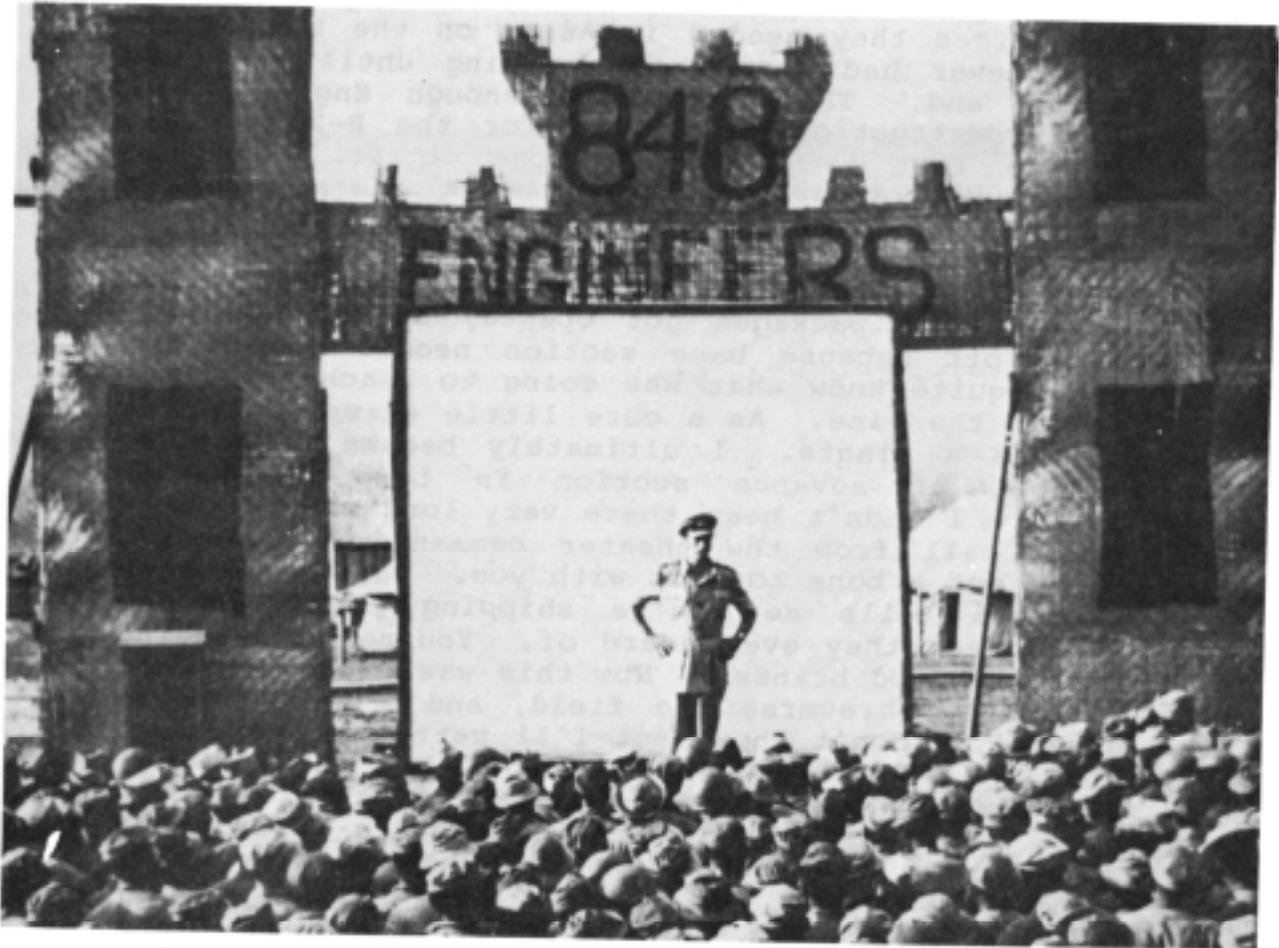
A: The thing is, I was involved in all of that but only from the viewpoint of higher headquarters, and from my own initiative only from the viewpoint of how do we help. I'm not going to fight them or argue with them. How do we help them get it? Who can I go see, or who can I send a staff man to? How do we maintain contact in order to accelerate it?

Q: Did you get involved in the controversy over the Ledo Road, where it was to go?

A: No, nobody asked us. In fact we would have been stepping on the U.S. theater's toes if we had done so.

Q: What was your relationship with the Air Force and the Services of Supply?

A: This is all part of this picture I'm talking about with the B-29s. Again, I couldn't order anything. I could sympathize. We could send messages back supporting. The best thing we could do was to try and get people who had the means together with those who needed the means and talk them into getting together and moving, and they did. It was



Lord Mountbatten addressing Engineer troops in CBI.



Breaking Out of the Hills into Burma. Wilson (r.) with Major General Lewis A. Pick (c.).

slow, but it was an improvement. They never had the forces they needed in Assam on the Ledo Road. They never had enough of anything until the very bitter end. They never had enough Engineers or good construction capability for the B-29 fields. And as fast as they got close to it, then the emergency got over and you began filtering that stuff off someplace else. We had a terrible amount of equipment requirements, but it had to come ashore in Calcutta. Sometimes it got broken down, some of the packages got opened, and things were taken off because base section needed them. You never quite knew what was going to reach the other **end** of the line. As a cute little example, let me digress a minute. I ultimately became commanding general of advance section in Ledo [September 1945]. I hadn't been there **very** long when I got a phone call from the theater commander. He said, "I've got a bone to pick with you. Base section in Calcutta tells me you're shipping them all the worst beer they ever heard of. You're not sending them any good brands." Now this was when they were **starting to** reverse the field, and I said, "Well, general, I don't know, but I'll certainly look into **it** and I'll call you right back." He said, "Okay, you do that." So I asked my staff if this had **been so**. They said, "Yes, **sir**, that's absolutely right," and I asked them why. "Well," **they** said, "we were the ones out front to begin with up here. And the first two years over here Calcutta never shipped us anything but these no-name beers. That's how we built up this stock. Half of what we got would be this stuff, and it didn't sell, and it had just been stacked up in the warehouses. So now that we're going the other direction, we thought we'd send them that back first." I said, "That's fine. Let me check it through." So I called the theater commander and he said, "Is that a fact?" I said, "Yes, **sir**." He said, "Well, just keep right on doing it that way then. At least for the next war, they'll get the lesson?"

This is just a small point, but it happened. How things got done was more or less in **spite of the** organization to a large extent, and **alot** of people **putting** out a whole lot of effort. I don't want to give you the wrong impression that the government of India forces weren't trying, because they were. Particularly this Brigadier Billy Hasteed would come through and try.

But the worst of it was they would make a terrific effort and rob some job of their own that they thought was important also down there, and then some Air Force fly-by-night would come in and just raise living hell because there wasn't any more progress. They'd say, "Look at these 'wogs' [Indians], they can't do anything by hand. How do you expect to get anywhere?" Well, the answer was everybody was doing the best they could.

Now the Chinese were required to build three bomber fields and a couple of fighter fields in the Chengtu area, and they had no equipment at all really. They had no asphalt. They had no cement, and everything that got up there had to fly over the hump, and flying over the hump was a pretty slow process. They said they were going to build those fields in three months. It was taking us two years to build them down where we were worrying with it. They finally got started on them, and they built the damn things in three months. But what fields! They would go to a village and say, "I want 10,000 workers tomorrow." And 10,000 workers would show up the next morning and they said, "Okay, your job is the side of that hill over there. You break out the rock and carry it over and dump it over here." And another 5,000 would be told, "You take it from here and go along the runway and break it into little pieces." And they had 30,000 people working on one field, and they did it. They built homemade rollers, big concrete rollers. It took about 40 to 60 men to pull them. That was the motive power, and that was their compaction means. But they built the damn things, and the Air Force flew them. They got their fields finished before we got the ones down in Calcutta. The Air Force started flying, and they'd land, and they successfully did it. After about a year those fields were just absolutely hopeless. By that time the war had changed anyway, so they just quit.

Shortly after I had gotten there I decided I better get over to China and see something for myself, CBI theater. I got permission. I had orders that said I could go anywhere. So I went up to Chabua, which was the takeoff point for most of the hump flights, and tried to catch a ride. It was pretty tough because going that way everything was full. But I found a friendly Air Force pilot who said, "If you

want to go on a supply plane, I can let you lie on top of a bunch of airplane tires and stuff like that." That was all right with me, so that was how I first flew the hump. There was no heat, and it was cold, and every now and then the crew chief would open the door and walk back and take an oxygen thing out of his mouth and say, "You want to suck oxygen?" And I said, "No, thank you, I'll try without it." But I flew to Kunming and went around and saw a little bit, went down to the Lingling, Kweilin area. I spent about a week there. This was about January of '44. I hadn't been there very long when it was obvious that I had to get out because the Japs were coming with a major offensive drive. We had been in much better shape in '43 in that part of the country than we were in '44, so I had to fly on back and get to where my knitting was. But it gave me a chance to see a little of how things were done there and what was necessary and sympathize with them.

Q: What do you think was the greatest challenge from an engineering point of view--the roads, the airfields, or the pipeline?

A: Oh boy, that would be a draw because they were all interrelated. You had to have the airfields to get supplies up there. You had to have the road to build the pipeline and keep it operating. You had to have them all, and they were all tough. The big difference was that up on the road you actually went through a combat period there where the road was pretty well under frequent attack. Then they robbed two or three battalions from up there and turned them into infantry and threw them in the battle in Myitkyina.

Q: In which area do you think the most success was achieved before emphasis shifted away from the China-Burma-India theater?

A: Oh, it's all interrelated. The flying boys had the best time because when they got someplace they usually had a dry bed and a warm bath. The people that worked on the road had some pretty tough life. To me it was amazing to see as much accomplished as was accomplished. That was some rugged terrain. I made every trip I was able to get away with up to look at what was going on and see the works.

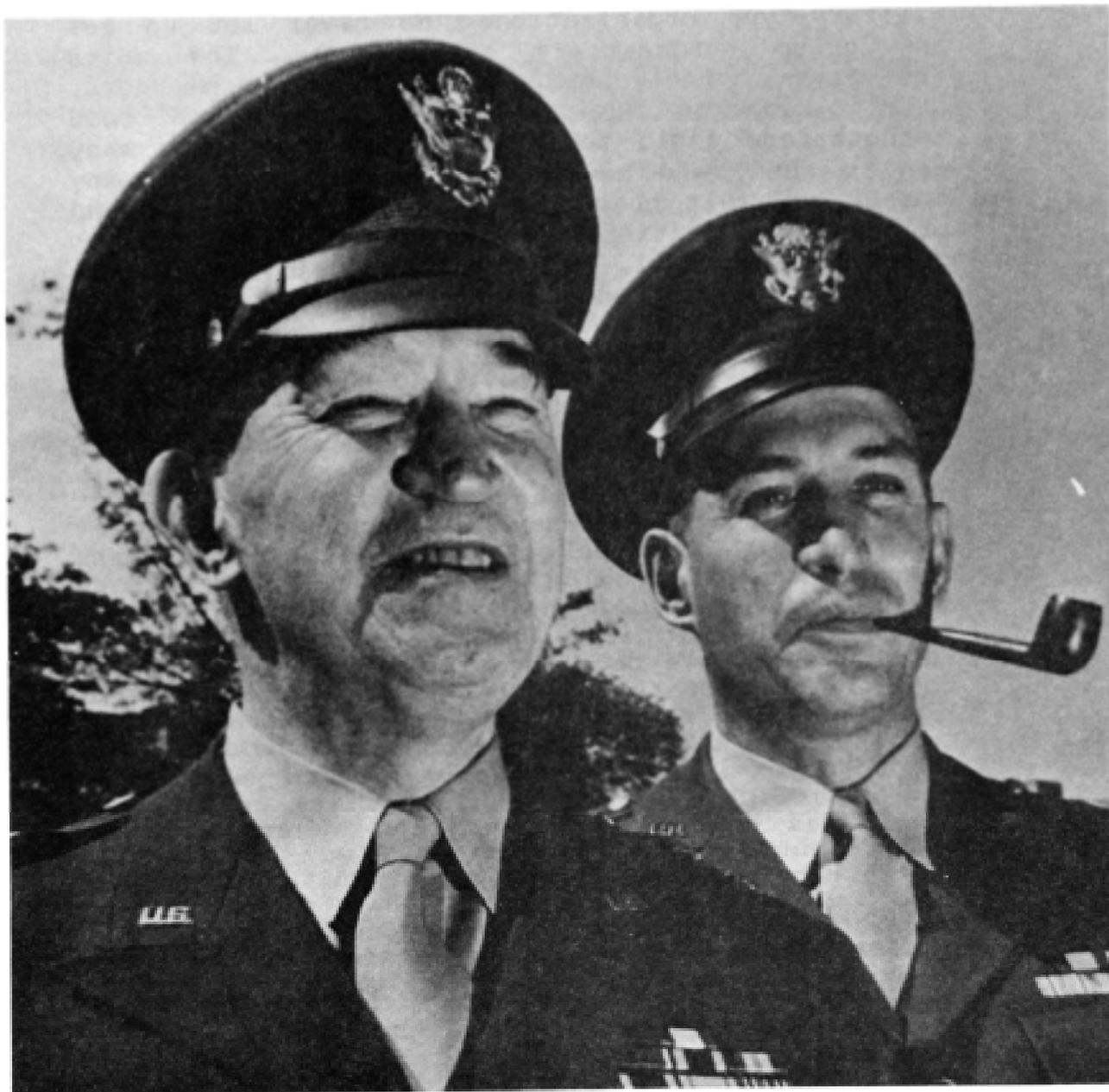
In building his road, Lew Pick established what a lot of us called the gestapo road headquarters, which was more or less independent of the military-type organization. He never let us get any group headquarters over there. The units themselves, pretty much the battalion commanders, were owners of equipment and people, and road headquarters would tell them what to do, how many men to send, and how many vehicles, and how many dozers. I felt that we had developed a group and brigade organization that could do a better job over the long haul, but Lew Pick could make people work. He really produced results.

Q: He really set up some pretty short-term completion goals, didn't he?

A: That's right, and he got them working. He knew how to make them work. I don't know, maybe that is what was necessary in that neck of the woods. But the pipeline couldn't have been built without the road there to a major extent to get the materials there. The road couldn't have been built without air support and quite a little. Do you realize how far some of that is? The trip from Calcutta to Kunming must have been the same as going across the total United States. You changed gauges several times on your railroad. When you started out of Ledo to make the road trip you had a helluva long way to go on a gravel road to get where you tied in to the old Chinese road, and that was even worse. So it was not an easy operation by any possible means, and there wasn't any way of really short-changing it. The Engineer units could have used more equipment, could have used bigger equipment, but considering what they had available, I think they did a pretty damn good job accomplishing what they were sent to do.

Q: What was the reaction in the CBI theater in the summer of '44, when debate raged about shifting away from CBI?

A: I don't know. The support we were getting didn't really drop off too much because by that time the landings in Europe had taken place, and you couldn't have put any more equipment and supplies in Europe than you had without sinking the whole continent! I'll come to that later.



Walter K. Wilson, Jr. (r.) with his father in 1945 when both held the rank of general and were the only father-and-son general officers in the Army.

They had a tremendous amount of materials. Well, mentally there was a definite change, and it was kind of hard to take for some, and others thought we didn't belong here anyhow, let's go someplace else, but nobody really got away to amount to anything. Tom Farrell left in time to go back in '45 to get with the atomic bomb deal. He was theater engineer and Al Welling moved up to his desk.

Before I left India, I was commanding general of advance section, intermediate section, and base section. So I got a little bit of their background rubbed on me too. I couldn't find too many places that people weren't working as hard as they could to make things work.

Q: When did your promotion to brigadier general come?

A: Oh, that came in February of '45, if I remember correctly.

Q: So your feeling that the promotion would not come fast, though Wedemeyer said it would, proved true?

A: Well, that's true, and it didn't for other reasons. Stilwell didn't think much of Southeast Asia Command, and he didn't want to give anything to them. I believe my name was put in two or three times by Wheeler. That had to be approved by Stilwell in the American chain. This is where you were topsy--turvy. It was turned down, and finally I think Speck Wheeler got mad and decided to bypass theater headquarters and go direct[ly] to Marshall.⁶⁸ I was on a trip to London and Washington to try and line up our supply and equipment requirements for the year '45. I was in London in January of '45, and when I landed I had this big stack of requirements that had been drawn up by the staff, and I took it by the British headquarters to the engineer in chief in London and handed it to him and said, "It's going to take your boys at least two weeks to read this. I'm going to go see the war for two weeks." And he said, "That's a good idea."

So I went over to Paris and ran into a friend who gave me a command car and a driver again and a case of rations, and I took off to see the war. I

thoroughly enjoyed that. I got to see a lot, just a little bit after the Battle of the Bulge.⁶⁹ I got up to the 35th Division in the corner of Germany, just across from Belgium, where I got to see the division commander and staff and found out a little bit more about how my brother had been killed. I got to Antwerp, where I was buzz-bombed. I saw a little bit of the war, and I saw these tremendous stacks of supplies and equipment down all the autobahns, with the grass in between, stacked so high you couldn't see over the stacks. You just never saw so much. It was amazing to me. We hadn't had that.

I got back to London and walked into General Chorpeneing's office and he said, "You're out of uniform."⁷⁰ And I said, "Why? What's the matter with me? I think I'm in uniform. Have they changed it?" He said, "No, no. Just you." He took out a pair of stars and handed them to me and said, "We've been looking for you for ten days to promote you." I think what happened--and I checked this out a little bit--Speck Wheeler went direct, and Marshall came back and said, "Don't you ever do this again, but I'll go ahead and approve this one." And that's how it happened, bypassing Stilwell.

Stilwell had a real objection. I don't think it was personal, he didn't want to put any more rank in SEAC. I couldn't quarrel with it. The thing that really shocked me was the difference it made. I was halfway around the world by then and I flew home, and, boy, when I landed on an airfield under military auspices as a b.g., I was a big shot, whereas two weeks before, the same guy had not been. It sure made a difference in the VIP treatment. I'd seen that on the British side, their Royal Air Force and the Royal Engineers. A British Engineer and I would go together on a trip and stop at a U.S. airfield, and we got pretty good treatment. But when we both stopped at a British airfield, as an American I got pretty good treatment, but the British officer was shunted off to the slums, which was hard for me to understand.

I don't know that I'm giving you any great answers to your questions. If I were running the war, I would never have set up anything quite like we had in India. I'll put it that way.

Q: What would you have done?

A: I don't know.

Q: Were there too many levels?

A: Too many levels. I don't think establishing the Southeast Asia Command did them any real harm. It kind of kept a bomb from exploding, but you did have a pretty tough situation because the people heading the government of India were quite experienced military people. They had been winning wars and fighting battles long before most of us had been born. And they couldn't get too excited about getting to China because they didn't think the Chinese were going to do anything anyway.

The whole problem was [that] our real mission in life was not one that you could really say, this is going to make or break the world. The further [sic] MacArthur advanced, the more obvious it became that no matter what we did, we weren't going to really tip the balance. Now, if we could occupy Japanese troops and keep them busy on the mainland, well that might have some effect. That's about the way it was getting about the time you're talking. And then Stilwell was getting in arguments. He got ousted out of there. Was it his fault or Chiang Kai-shek's?⁷¹ I don't know. I didn't see enough of that close hand. But I do know the attitude he had towards him. The Chinese were warlord oriented, and how could Joe overcome that? I think we botched things more towards the tail-end of the war and after the war as far as China goes. I don't know whether it was the fault--Stilwell wasn't around any more so I can't say it was his fault--but it's hard to work effectively in a place where everyone speaks different languages. The Chinese language is particularly hard to get along with. Now Stilwell had been trained for that though. He had been stationed in China. I'd known Stilwell, as I say, ever since Benning. I knew his daughter. It's hard to say how to do it. Second guessing is awful easy.

Q: Stilwell wasn't too happy about the creation of the Southeast Asia Command at the Quebec Conference, was he?

A: Oh yes, but I think this was a device to keep peace in the family. The British felt that Stilwell was getting too demanding.

India itself was not a certainty, you know. There was a good deal of unrest. There was fear that if the Indians broke loose themselves, it could damage the war effort no end. And this could have been some part of the reason for establishing this command in India under Mountbatten. I don't know, but I suspect that had something to do with it. Well, I think I ought to get to the reverse, the going home part of it. I haven't covered that part of my life over there, which was really more demanding and challenging to me personally than the war part, due to my shift from a staff position in a multinational organization to a series of command positions in the U.S. forces.

On my first visit to Calcutta in January of '44, they were in the middle of a famine. I stayed in the nicest hotel in Calcutta, and the dining room was on the ground floor with big plate glass windows. You'd go in to have breakfast and there would be hundreds of people lying on the sidewalk starving. And there was a black market in rice, and their religion didn't let them eat the cattle, so cattle were stepping over them as they were lying there, literally dying. They brought around the wagon or cart every morning and picked up the dead ones and hauled them off. And I suggested that I take my food out and give it to them, but the response was: "Don't do that. You'll start a riot, and they will just be in worse shape. You'll make some of them die a little quicker, that's about all you'll accomplish." The political situation was pretty much touch and go. I'll come to it later, but there was another riot when I was commanding general of base section in Calcutta. I sat on the back porch of my lovely mansion watching them shoot at each other a block or two away. It wasn't too stable. There was a great fear, particularly on the part of the British, of India pulling out in the middle of the war and leaving a vacuum.

But as I said, I went to Europe and Washington to sell our list of equipment and material requirements.

Q. Were troops involved?

A: Not so much troops. By that time we knew we weren't going to get any more troops in Southeast Asia Command. Also some of the jobs were completed and others were nearing completion, freeing some units for additional missions and reducing requirements for additional troops.

Anyway, I presented our requirements in London through the engineer in chief in the war office of the British staff. I told him that while they were reviewing our statement of requirements, which would take at least two weeks, I was going to the continent and see something of the war in Europe and visit with various staffs and commands. So in the first week of February I flew to Paris and immediately got a break. One of the first friends I saw was Roy Lord, with whom I had served in the 3d Engineers.⁷² After listening to my tale, he arranged for me to borrow a command car and driver and a case of rations and be on my way.

I visited base section in Rheims and spent the first night with friends in Verdun. Then I headed north almost to Metz, and through the rear of the Third Army. I visited several of their installations just to the rear of the "bulge" country, where rain and thaw made mud king, and saw the effects on roads and troop movements. We drove through Luxembourg, Neufchateau, and Dinant to Namur, where I spent the night at advance section with two classmates from the USMA - Viney and Stubbs.⁷³ The next day they passed me on to Colonel Itschner (a future Chief), who had an extremely interesting job controlling road and bridge work and making use of the steel mills to roll out meter beams.⁷⁴

Then I drove to Spa, where Bill Carter was First Army Engineer. He arranged for me to visit three Corps Engineers en route to Maastricht, and the headquarters of the 35th Division, where the division artillery commander and the assistant division commander told me details of the division's first day in combat in Normandy, where my brother, commanding a field artillery battalion, was killed.

The next day I drove to Antwerp, where I was shown around the port and depots--and dodged several V-1s and a V-2--and returned to Brussels.⁷⁵ The next day I went to Maas to visit some British units and spent the night in a farmhouse across the river from fairly active fighting just out of machine-gun range.

I had the chance to see nearly every type of military bridge, from floating to fixed, many still under construction by both British and U.S. Engineer units. Finally, on February 17th I returned to Brussels, sent my command car back to Paris, and waited my turn for a flight to London. When I reported back to the U.S. headquarters, I saw General Chorpeneing and told him of my visit on the Continent.

In a few days I had answered the questions raised by the British staff, had been authorized to carry their recommendations for approval to Washington, and headed for Prestwick, Scotland, for a flight home. I succeeded in borrowing a staff car to make the trip from London to Liverpool, which enabled me to visit Oxford, Stratford, and the Shakespeare country, and spend the night in an old Elizabethan inn. I finished the trip from Liverpool to Prestwick by night train.

Once again in Washington, I presented my statement of requirements to a military staff, this time the Joint Chiefs. Most people I contacted said, "That's pretty modest. We're proud of you for not coming with a request for more." But I couldn't find anybody that would put his name on it to approve it. The system in the Pentagon was you found somebody in the appropriate section to sign the list of requirements, and then you went around and got concurring initials from everybody involved, and then you had it done. So I was there about a month. My family came up from Birmingham, and I met my new daughter for the first time. I went every day to the Pentagon, walking around trying to get somebody who would sign it.

One day I was feeling pretty low, and as I passed by a friend's office-[Marshall S.] Pat Carter, a lieutenant general later also-he said, 'What are

you looking so low about?"⁷⁶ I said, "I'm just killing time here. I have this requirement list for our theater, I haven't found a single soul who says that it shouldn't be accomplished, it's logical, it's about the right scope. But until I get somebody to sign this damn letter I can't make any progress." He said, "Well that's a fair deal. You know I have nothing to do with this." I said, "I know, you're responsible for a different theater." He said, "Well, let me try something. Let me sign it." So he signed it, and in one day I had all the initials necessary for approval.

I then started trying to return to my theater. I suggested that as long as I was halfway around the world, I should return the other way. Everybody said, "Go through MacArthur's theater?" I said, "Yeah, one person isn't going to overload them." "Well," they said, "the Surgeon General just got run out of there two or three weeks ago, and MacArthur said no more staff visits." I said, "Would you mind at least sending a wire saying that Brigadier General Walter K. Wilson, Jr., returning to Ceylon, asks authority to travel through MacArthur's theater?" And they said, "You'll just get a 'no.'" I said, "Then you shouldn't mind sending it." So they sent it, and to their amazement the next day the answer came back, "Yes, I'd like to see him. I want him to stop and see me."

I knew that MacArthur and my father were friends, that Dad had commanded Corregidor until December 1940, so I felt the request would receive more consideration than a cursory turndown. I also felt the fact that the message mentioned that I'd traveled through Europe and seen some of the things there and was now in Washington and was returning to Ceylon might interest General MacArthur. At any rate, I received permission to fly that way, and I stopped in Hawaii and talked with General Richardson, who'd been commandant of cadets when I was a cadet.⁷⁷ He was the senior Army officer in the Navy theater, and I found out a little more about how things were being done in that area.

Then I flew on to Leyte, and reported to the chief of staff, General Sutherland, because MacArthur and the key staff people had just moved to Manila.⁷⁸

He said, 'Well, I'm glad to see you here; you can look around if you want to. you won't be able to see MacArthur because he's in Manila with a very limited staff and does not want visitors at this stage.' I said, "Would you mind sending him a notice just saying that I have reported and am available if he wants me, otherwise I'll just go on my way." Next morning they were looking for me all over. "Hey, he wants you now," they said. 'Get going!'"

The story on Leyte was that there weren't any places to bed people down and so on, because they were getting ready for the main headquarters to move to Manila. But when I landed at the airport I was met by a Colonel Whatley, who had been a fellow CCC camp officer with me up in north Mississippi in 1933.⁷⁹ He was the headquarters commandant. He said, "Glad to have you." I said, "I'm going to leave right away." He said, "What do you want to hurry for? We have lots of room." I said, "I don't want to interfere." He said, "I'm already making rooms available for the staff when they come, and you can stay as long as you want." so I had a very lovely room with some shell holes through it, but it was very nice.

And I reported to MacArthur for what I expected to be a courtesy call. Shoot! He sat me down and pumped me for everything I was worth. I'd come up through Italy; I'd come through Cairo, England; I'd been over in Paris; I'd been up into Belgium; I'd been into Holland and the corner of Germany; I'd seen all these things; and he just pumped me. He asked me the same questions you have to some extent, but he wanted to know what about the supply situation, and I gave him the same answer that if they had any more it would sink the damn continent. He said, "That's exactly what I expected, that's what I wanted to find out, because that will give me a stronger attack." He kept going like that, and after about an hour I said, "General, I had better leave or your staff will want to scalp me." He said, "No, no, you've given me what I want, now you haven't had a chance to ask me any questions." So I started asking him questions. He explained what they were up to, how they were getting along, and what their plan was for invading Japan. It was a glorious opportunity

for me. And I finally said, "General, I think I'd better go." He said, "That's fine, I'll let you go now. Where do you want to go?" "Well," I said, "my old 3d Engineer Company is just a little bit north in the mountains. I'd appreciate the chance to go see them." He said, "It's all arranged; just tell my staff where you're going.'

So I was flown to Sixth Army headquarters, where I visited General Sam Sturgis, Sixth Army Engineer (and a future Chief of Engineers).⁸⁰ I briefly saw several classmates and lots of friends in that headquarters before driving up into the mountains to visit my old C Company, 3d Engineers, although there was hardly anybody left in it that I had known. I stood there in the mountains looking across the valley and asked, "The Japs are in those caves?" And finally somebody said, "Would you mind leaving now? You've stood here long enough. You will attract some fire. And we don't want to get hit." So I left, and sure enough some artillery shells came in there just about two or three minutes after we moved down the trail. En route to Manila by air we overflew Corregidor, where my father had commanded just prior to World War II, and I could see where my parents had lived, and the results of the war. Then I continued my journey by way of Australia into Ceylon. So I made it all around the world on this occasion.

After I returned to SEAC in Ceylon they said, "There's no need for you to return to the rear echelon, you can stay down here in Ceylon now," which was a nice change. I had about three or four months there. It was kind of a pleasant backwater, if you know what I mean. Suddenly the war ended.

In the meantime, Lew Pick during the summer had left advance section for R and R at home, and Paul Yount had been moved in there to take command. And when Lew Pick returned to the theater there were some problems. Apparently the theater commander had decided he'd keep Yount in command and send Lew Pick home. It was a pretty rough situation. Paul Yount had had a real tough time. Paul had been overseas longer than anybody. He'd started on the rail support line to Russia, and then moved over to India. So now, with the war ended, he was being sent home. And I was told I was the replacement as

commanding general, advance section, India-Burma theater. I was the newest BG in the theater: hadn't had too tough a time, so I could foresee that I was going to be the guy that closed out the theater before we finished with it. I went up to Ledo immediately.

I was told one night to leave the next afternoon, and by the next morning I received an invitation to a luncheon in my honor by Mountbatten, which he didn't have to do, but I thought it was very nice. And I asked Lord Louis if I could go to the surrender ceremony. I said, "I've been with you now for a couple of years, and I'd sure like to see the finish." He said, "If you can escape from the U.S. forces up there, you get back down here and I'll let you ride in our seaplane down there to see it." And General Wheeler was going and some others. So I went to Ledo and took command, got things fairly well lined up as far as I was concerned, and then flew back down to Ceylon, and went over and watched the surrender at Singapore. Extremely interesting. And I felt I had earned that much by staying in SEAC that long. But that flying boat ride was something: I came back to Ceylon the same way and then returned to Ledo.

Advance section in Ledo is the place where the U.S. effort had been largely centered until you got into China, and the advance section folks thought they'd won the war, which was pretty accurate as far as our area was concerned. Then here comes this fly-by-night--they were all Pick admirers, and Pick had left--and Yount had moved in and out, and here I am! I had learned to know quite a few of them in my travels, though, and hadn't made any of them particularly mad. I'd given them some help. so I sized it up that from now on the biggest effort was going to be closing out and going home, and that those who had really done the greatest towards winning and making the prior progress would look on this as child's play.

It looked to me like my best solution was to send home all the big shots and find some little shots who could be challenged by this operation. so I called in the top staff, who were already individually seeking appointments to ask me when they could leave, and told them all at one time,

"You go and bring back a recommendation with the name of a man who can do the job as well as you've been doing it and who hasn't been here as long as you have, and I'll appoint him immediately and you can go home." By the next morning I'd lost nearly everyone but my chief of staff, who was a regular officer, and he was staying. The other key people were practically all gone. And to this day I meet with them once a year, most of them, the Ledo Road crowd-well, they meet once a year and I join them. They are some of our best friends.

But they hadn't been gone more than several days before I realized that I had been somewhat suckered. They had recommended their number two guys, and these men had been over there within a few months as long as the originals, and they were just as impressed with what they had accomplished. So I called them in and said, "Okay, now I want you to go out in the boonies and you pick out some people who haven't been here more than a year, people who can do the job you're doing, and bring them in, let me meet them. If you've got a good one. I'll let you go. If you don't have a good one you're going to stay here until hell freezes over." They got good ones!

And within another three or four days I had a complete new staff. So in the month of September, advance section was served by three different staffs in turn. But it was the best thing I could have done, because they were young, enthusiastic: they weren't impressed too much by what they had accomplished before, but they were impressed with the problems facing them. And there were problems:

At that stage in life I commanded about 50,000 Army troops and quite a bit of civilian labor, and Gurkhas; altogether about 70,000 or 80,000 people.⁸¹ And my main job was to get most of those American ones home in the next three or four or five months. So we worked on it pretty hard. I came to the conclusion that I would spread the word that people were going to go home in the order that they should go, irrespective of job, and we weren't going to let a lot of them sneak out with an outfit just because the outfit had been there a long time. But if they were replacements they were going to get pulled out, and vice versa; the

old-timers in other outfits that were staying would get pulled out and sent home.

So I cranked up a flight to Kunming, and we got a jeep and a panel truck and drove back the 1,076 miles stopping at every outfit and telling them about when they'd be able to go home in general terms, the sequence and the order so that they could see we weren't cheating. And we stopped at every little pumping station on the pipeline. It was something. Those little pumping stations would have about three people there, and they'd taken the washbasins and other conveniences from downed aircraft, and they had themselves fixed up very nicely.

But it took about a week to ride back from Kunming. The party consisted of me, my chief of staff, Colonel [Richard] Dick Selee; my aide, Captain [James E.] Jim McNamara; Major Gerand; and two drivers. And we made it! Dick Selee didn't think he should go because he was chief of staff of advance section and both of us should not be away from the headquarters at the same time. I said, "You'd better go now, or you'll never make it." On the way home he received a message from our headquarters saying he was being transferred to Panama, which is where he wanted his next assignment since his wife was from Panama. So he was glad he had gone on the trip. And the trip was a success. We saw a lot, we explained a lot, and we really never had **any** incipient riots or disciplinary problems in the closing out of advance section, I think to a large extent as a result of our trip and telling the facts.

We were bringing about 5,000 men a week into the staging area and getting them cleaned up and serviced up a little bit, and loading them and sending them off. About that time I got back to Ledo and received a phone call from Al Welling. He said, "Do you know who the new theater commander is now that Speck Wheeler is gone?" I didn't know so he told me it was Tom Terry and asked if I remembered him from cadet days.⁸² I did, and I wondered if this was his first trip overseas. Welling said, "This is the first time he's gotten in the war, and yours is the first outfit he's going to visit." I asked why he was telling me

this, and he said, "I want you to know that I have done my best for you. Yours is the first one. Now he thinks the war can be run by people who have spit and polish like we did as cadets when he was a tactical officer. That's what you are facing."

I thought I knew what he'd think and what he'd look for when he came. How in the world could I correct it? Those guys hadn't had a shirt on in a couple of years. It was a pretty hardworking but unmilitary-looking crowd. I called in my aide and told him to take a jeep and get it painted shiny, put oversize tires on it, paint the tires white, get a big star and put it on the front, and just make the whole jeep look obnoxious. I wanted it the next morning. So he showed up with it. It was really obnoxious. I got in alone and started riding around. Every time I'd see a soldier walking down the side of a road with his shirt tail flapping or with no shirt on, I'd pull up alongside him and say, "I'm General Wilson, the new commander here. I thought I'd give you a little friendly advice. We're sending a lot of people home, but we have made a new rule. If you want to dress and act like the Indians, you can stay here with the Indians." He would start putting his shirt tail in, and I would say, "That's right. I just thought you might appreciate knowing." He said, "I do." I said, "You do what?" He said, "Appreciate knowing." "Knowing what?" "Oh," he said, "sir, I appreciate knowing." And I said, "Fine." I said, "Will you just spread the word?" He said, "Oh, yes, sir." He started off and I said, "Wait a minute, didn't you forget something?" "No, sir," he said, and then, "oh, yeah," and he gave me the first salute he had put out in some time. Well, I did that all around the Ledo area for three days. I'm sure it started a lot of rumors about the screwball they had up at headquarters, but I thought that was better than trying to get on the radio and pleading with them to buck up.

I drove to the boundary of advance and intermediate sections and met General Terry and put him in the car, and we started back up the road. And I'm a son of a gun, we hadn't gone more than about four or five miles when off on a side road, way off in the distance, suddenly some men jumped to their feet and saluted. And I saluted back, and Terry

looked kind of surprised, and we went on. He was there for three days, and when he left he said, "Wilson, I want you to know that you have the most military organization I've ever seen!" It worked.

Well, it was quite a job bringing them in and so on. We were also trying to consolidate all the supplies and equipment in various places in order to dispose of them properly. We had one unit known as "Little Peoria." It was an Engineer maintenance outfit that had been recruited in Peoria, Illinois, where the Caterpillar tractor factory is, and they were a good outfit. They knew how to do the maintenance work. If people could get their equipment to them, they were real happy. But it was time for them to go home, and so they had come in and they were in the staging camp, and my IG [inspector general] came to see me. He said, "Sir, I'm sorry to tell you, but I've heard a rumor that 'Little Peoria' dumped a lot of parts out there in the jungle where they were." I asked if he had looked and he said, "No, I haven't looked yet because I don't want to have to skin them. But I'll go down there if you'd like." I told him I'd talk to the commander, so I brought him in and said, "I'm sorry to tell you this. You've had the finest outfit over here as far as maintenance goes, but I understand that in order to make it easier and get out of Burma on time and get away from here, you may have done some things that you're not particularly proud of." He looked kind of startled, and I said, "Yes, I'm hearing a lot of things. I've got several choices. I can send the whole company back down there to clean the area up and bring everything in, which will delay your return to the States by several months. Or I can send on the bulk of the enlisted personnel and just keep some of you officers, let you do it and take many more months. Or if you want to handpick a crew to go down there, your outfit's due to get on the train next week. We'll put them on the train and we'll fly you over to Bombay to join them if you've really done the job right." "Oh, yes, sir," he said, "let's try that one." So we did, and they brought in one helluva lot of parts and things. But that kind of thing was going on all the time. We had to keep watching it.

The Foreign Liquidation Commission [FLC] had the mission of selling surpluses, except in India where surpluses were to be turned over to the government of India under reverse lend-lease. We had certain things we assembled in Myitkyina and certain things we brought back in to Ledo, and we were getting word that they were having a lot of thievery going on in Myitkyina. So I asked who had been providing security in the past, and they said, "We used to have a pretty strong Gurkha outfit as guards down there." So I said, "Let's get them." So we recruited the Gurkhas, and I went back to Myitkyina, and we installed them. I went back a week later and said, "How are we coming?" They said fine. They weren't having anything stolen. I said, "Nobody's even tried to steal?" "Oh, yes, sir, they have tried to steal." When I asked where they were, they said, "They're in the river." They had cut their throats and put them in the river! It discouraged the thievery no end: The culprits were largely Chinese deserters roaming north Burma.

We collected a mass of materials and equipment. We also had a great big Engineer depot in Ledo that was being filled up. One day a man came in and said, "Your explosives area, your TNT area, is in trouble. It's been stacked out there for several years, and nobody has enforced a first-in/first-out rule, so you have some piles of stuff that have been there for two or three years, and nitroglycerin is dripping out of them. Trucks have backed into a corner of stacks, so you have boxes hanging over. Any minute something can go. They're trying to clear the stuff now, but a truck driven by a Wog hit a bump and he and the truck, and the load and all, went up and almost took out a village up on the side of the hill.'

I went out there to see, and it was pretty sad looking. It was all he had said, and you could see the stain of the nitroglycerin. I was scared to walk around it. We asked for help through I-B theater, and we were sent some experts from Australia who worked pretty hard to devise means of disposing of the stuff. The Wogs who were loading it were carrying it on their heads to put it on the truck, and the nitroglycerin was seeping down and giving them terrific headaches. We had theater support, we had everybody helping. We finally very

carefully transferred it to a certain place where we figured that when a blast went off, it would jump over a village in the valley.. We evacuated the village, though, just to be safe, and got it there and finally exploded it. It worked just exactly like a charm. We had built a little dike to keep it from going down into the valley, and the dike disappeared but it stopped the explosion. It did jump over the village so the people went back and found no damage.

The Foreign Liquidation Commission wasn't making much progress, and I could see us sitting there forever, just guarding the surplus. So I asked permission of the FLC to let me sell the surplus in Burma, at Myitkyina. They said all right; if I thought I could, I should go ahead. So we put out the news, and the first thing you know a great big tall, six foot-one-or-two-inch Pakistani showed up--it was Indian then, but he was from the Karachi area--and said he wanted to buy everything we had in Myitkyina. I asked if he knew how much we had there, and he said he did; he had seen it. I asked how much he was going to pay us for it, and he told me a number in the millions of dollars. I asked if he had the money in the bank, and he said he did. He told me the name of a bank in New Delhi. I told him I was going to check it. He said, "Yes, sir, by tomorrow morning the money will be there."

Well, I checked that afternoon but there wasn't any money there. The next morning they called up to say the money was there. So we continued our negotiations with him. One of the things he demanded, though, was that he get my car, which was in India. We couldn't sell anything in India, so I said, "That's one you can't have." He said, "I've got to have it -or I'm not going to carry through this deal." So I told him I'd let him go down through the cars, and he could pick any three of them, except mine, and the ones he picked we would overhaul and put in fine shape and drive to the Burma border, which is about 45 miles out of Ledo, on the day in question. When he finally signed the contract we would deliver him the cars and keys right there. He said that was satisfactory, so that was the basis on which we sold one helluva lot of stuff. It was getting pretty dangerous in Burma. There were lots of Chinese deserters and

just roving people. How he got it all out of there and converted it to cash, I don't know, but I understand he made a go of it. And the railroad wasn't working in Burma, which must have added to his problem.

The pipeline east of Myitkyina would obviously be a problem to dispose of since it was built of lightweight invasion-type pipe which probably wouldn't hold up for over four or five years and hence was probably uneconomical to salvage. Realizing that the China theater was planning to cut away from India-Burma theater in November and instead open up their line of communications to the east-and realizing that advance section would be stuck with the security of the lines until they were disposed of-I requested that the theater and the FLC initiate action to abandon the pipelines east of Myitkyina. But I was turned down.

About a week before China theater was to evacuate Kunming and cut off the telephone to Ledo, I received a call from Colonel Bill Creasy, who had served in Schofield Barracks when I did and was the umpire for the officiating team that I headed as referee in the soldier football league.⁸³ He asked if I knew they were moving out in a week and, when I said yes, asked what I was going to do with the men at the pipeline stations since with their departure these men would be in danger from bandits and Chinese deserters. We discussed the problem, and I asked if he would call me the day before the telephone line was to be cut and tell me he had just been shot at and that I was risking people's lives by leaving them guarding the line. He said he would, and a week later, true to his word, he called mad and said, "Weary, I've just been shot at. And I don't mean maybe, I really was shot at." I thanked him and called New Delhi, reported this conversation, and asked permission to call these men in before we lost any lives. I asked that the theater commander be informed of the situation, the call from Creasy, and my repeated recommendation to bring in the men. If I didn't have specific orders in writing by the next morning to leave the men in place in spite of their danger, I would order them in to Ledo. I reminded them that tomorrow morning would be the last time the telephone line would be in service beyond Myitkyina.

Not having had any response by 4 PM, I directed the pipeline command to telephone each pumping station immediately and direct them to leave for Ledo. The operation was a success. No one was hurt, but it is of interest to note that no message, reference the problem, was ever received from higher authority.

Next I began thinking that Joe Cranston, commanding general of intermediate section, would probably want to go home pretty soon from Chabua, which was just a little bit down the road, about 80 or 90 miles, and probably I would end up consolidating advance and intermediate sections. Sure enough, the word came. Joe Cranston had to go home for health reasons, and I would consolidate the two. So I did in early November. I learned a lot from this consolidation. For one thing, I had carefully avoided taking any favorites with me to put in the consolidated staff; but I went to Chabua and told them to show me where they were going to have requirements after they had sent home those present staff members who were due to go. I would bring with me from Ledo just those necessary to fill those slots. And we did that, and it worked just fine. We didn't have any real friction consolidating. And on the 15th of January, I used the same principles in consolidating all three sections into one with headquarters in Calcutta, making me commanding general of base section, India-Burma theater, or in essence, the commander of all ground force units remaining in India and Burma.

In Calcutta I found out that my predecessor, Bob Neyland, had contracted for a beautiful home, complete with many servants, as his quarters, and the contract could not be terminated until May. So my aide and I, together with five or six of my staff, moved into this house which had housed Bob Neyland and his aide. The house and servants belonged to the estate of a steamship line president; was two-story with about six bedrooms, a grass tennis court, and orchids growing in the garden.

By this time in my progression through India, I had concluded that we would do ourselves, the Army, and the U.S. taxpayers a major favor if we could clean up our records, inventory all our depots, turn over

our surpluses and clear India by June 1946, hopefully before investigators finished their more lucrative targets in the Philippines and Japan and reached our little backwater. Clinching this analysis were calculations I had made which showed roughly that--based on the average U.S. population expected in India between January and June, together with costs of local labor, rentals, etc.--it would cost several hundred thousand dollars to the U.S. taxpayers for each day we stayed in India. Using these rough figures, I directed that our various negotiators use this several hundred thousand dollars as a unit of measure in reaching prompt decisions on those activities which would ultimately determine when we could close the theater. This discouraged days of quibbling over minor sums that risked adding several days to the date we would close the theater.

Calcutta was not all pleasant. Again there were hunger and political riots. We had a good provo [provost] marshal in Calcutta, and he had a system where his patrols would go out the first thing in the morning and decide where the safe and unsafe areas were. They would come back and get on the radio and direct our troops how to get to their jobs. We didn't have any losses although we almost lost a couple of his MPs in jeeps when they got a little too close to the rioters. We had a lot of troops being loaded on ships from a staging camp out in the boonies, not too far, but I directed them to put their bows and canvases on the trucks because they went under several underpasses. I told them somebody would drop some paving blocks down on them. One guy knew better than I did, and he sent one convoy off without the covering, and sure enough somebody dropped a big rock down and cut open one of my men's heads. But we patched him up and got him on the same ship. Thereafter they put the darn things on. That was another problem.

A third one, we were getting ready to turn over the supplies in Ledo to the British Army in India. Ex-advance section was now down to a corporal's guard really. I got a call from Colonel John A. Morris, who was left up there as the last king of the Ledo area and he said he had some bad news for me. I said, "What's that?" **"Well,"** he said, "you know we're supposed to be turning these surpluses

over to the British; and we have made inventories, and they don't believe them. so they came over today prepared to start. They brought one subaltern and about ten other ranks. They are each equipped with a footrule, and they are starting on the reenforcing steel, and with a footrule they are going to check out the inventory of reenforcing rods you couldn't see the end of! Now that's just a sample. From there they are going to other things in the same style."

So I flew up there and got with them, and they got their bosses there and said, "Well, we can't trust this inventory. It's not good enough." So I asked what would they trust, and they said, "We're going to do it ourselves." I said, "Now wait a minute now. Suppose I send experts up here, and we make a combined team. You have somebody with every team, and if we can make an inventory that way, will that be satisfactory to you?" And he said, "Well, I'll have to ask my general." So he went off and got word back from his general that that would be all right.

So that's what we had to do. I had to scour the theater for anybody that knew supply procedures, nomenclatures and the like. There weren't many Engineer ones, but there were enough of them that knew something. As a matter of fact, at the time I was up there checking the inventory, we went to an item marked "Sets, Instruments, Drawing, Incomplete." There were supposed to be about one hundred of them, and I said, "What do you mean by 'sets, instruments, drawing, incomplete?'" I was told that was easy; there were probably one or two things missing in the set. So I said, "Okay, let's go look." And we opened up a hundred of them, and there wasn't a single one that had a single instrument inside the box! And that's when I realized that we had to redo the inventory. So, in a month of high-powered effort, sending back about two or three hundred people, and working like dogs, we produced an inventory that the British were willing to take. And about the middle of April we closed out Ledo. Then we did the same thing in Chabua.

Incidentally, I had been continuously getting letters from the Secretary of War's office in the

War Department saying, "your rank will be returned to colonel on such and such a date. You're entitled to be home two weeks before that.' And each time one of these would come I'd call the theater commander and say that I was due to leave now, the first of February or whatever. And he'd say I couldn't do that. "Well," I said, "here's what's happened." "Okay, you just keep on staying and I'll get that changed." So he kept getting it changed. But finally, with a revised deadline of 15 May, and we were within 30 days of closing the theater, I said, "I don't want to stay any longer. I'm not going to push it, but I do want to be home for two weeks with this exalted rank, I'll never see it again." So on the first of May in 1946 I flew home and was returned to colonel on the 15th or something like that, and then I went up to the st. Paul District as colonel, District Engineer.

One more thing before we move on. I thought coming back now with Speck Wheeler as Chief of Engineers, boy I had it made! I could get myself a nice job. so I reported in to General Wheeler, and he welcomed me home. I asked where I was going, and he said, 'I've got some ideas for you. Can you come in tomorrow morning with what you'd like, and we'll see." That was fine with me, so I showed up the next morning, and he had his personnel chief there; they had big books. He said, "All right, now to start with I'm going to tell you what I really want you to do. I've got a very key job that we've just established in the Pentagon that you're ideal to fill, and it would be a real help if you can take that job." And he gave me a buildup for about 15 minutes. And I finally asked if I could say what I really thought, and he told me to go ahead. "Well," I said, "sir, I haven't been in a District for 16 years. It looks to me like if I don't get a District Engineer job now I'll never get one, and I feel like I'm getting short changed, because I think it's part of my career, and I ought to have a chance at it.' He said, 'I was afraid you'd say that. All right, I'll see what we can do for you now. What District would you like to have?"

Well of course I'd called home that night before and talked with my bride and asked where we wanted to go. She said Mobile; and I said fine.