

District Engineer: Technician versus Manager

Q: General Moore, and also Lieutenant General Walter K. Wilson, who was later Chief of Engineers, in interviews with us have stressed the fact that an engineer officer who tried to concentrate on the technical aspects, who was a technician first and a manager second, would not have a successful career. They stressed that the district engineer who tried to solve the technical engineering problems and became an expert, as General Moore says, the expert engineer was bound to fail. He had to be a manager-administrator and realize that fact.

A: Yes, that's so. It's just as though, let's say, you were a commander who had been in the field artillery, and if he's commanding a division or corps and he's overly concerned with all the details of the field artillery while he has the infantry here, the engineers there, and supply and logistic problems, why, he's lost. He can't concentrate on his specialized field. It's his mission, his primary objective, to coordinate all this and get the best utilization of what resources he has and utilize them according to priorities and needs. So it's the same way in the Corps of Engineers where, in particular, you frequently get new and sudden different assignments.

All of a sudden somebody is assigned to be chief engineer of the Passamaquoddy Tidal Power Project. He knows little previously about creation of energy by tidal power, but here he's suddenly moved from here to there. He has to organize the thing, so he recruits some specialist personnel, somebody that's going to be in engineering, somebody that's going to be in operations, and they have to assemble a staff. You're going to have to set up a soils laboratory to make certain tests on foundations. You'd have to set up a hydraulic laboratory in connection with the best design of the turbines and tailrace under these varying head conditions plus further research and analysis of galvanic problems with salt water operation. In that connection, however, I did prepare and present papers on "Construction of Dams in Flowing Water" before the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses [PIANC] and a paper on cement for the Passamaquoddy project delivered to the Portland Cement Association.

However, if he concentrated solely on what he thought was the critical problem, why, the operation is going to fail. I mean, he has to get the

personnel and the forces that are going to be qualified to handle all of the phases, whether it includes finance, it includes problems with contractors, it includes personnel and administration of the facilities that you need if the personnel are going to do the job.

That's particularly so in the engineers because he doesn't stay in a specific assignment area for life. He's maybe here three years, four years, transferred, then here he has an entirely new responsibility, a new area, and he has to utilize the forces here, organize the forces there for whatever this new problem or new situation calls for.

American Forces in Germany

Q: We were talking about your trip to Europe in 1919. Who else went with you to France?

A: Well, our class—I mean, our West Point engineer class—and all of the engineers in the class following ours. I guess about 50 or 60. I can't even remember who some of the personnel were that were in charge of it. I think it was Colonel Virgil Peterson [USMA, 1908]. I was trying to think of his name before as the commandant of the Engineer School. He was a tough commander.

I think Bud Miller also went along as one of the heads of it. They took us on a tour through the battlefields and also gave us lectures and so on about what you might say was the engineers' responsibility in the Service of Supply. This covered the depots that they built, the railroads, the problems on roads and maintenance of roads in combat, which was a very difficult problem with the heavy rains they had and so on. Of course, at that time they didn't have the heavy engineer equipment that we had during World War II and you just feel, in looking back, that it took them a long time to do relatively little, you know, compared to what was accomplished during World War H, with the equipment and forces that we had.

Q: Were there any important results on your career from that tour?