CHAPTER VI

The Staff College

A: You remember that I told you that I had completed the Command and General Staff Extension Course while on National Guard duty in 1934-35. This course was very condensed. However, I think the problems were hitting the right spots and it showed up best in the fact that, despite the vast increase and varied background of several hundred thousand officers during the war, we still had a system where you could transfer, lose, promote, or change men. Yet, the overall operation of a General Staff at division or higher level remained well standardized and, in most cases, was very well done. Of course, it varied according to the caliber of the commander and his staff to some degree, but I think, as Winston Churchill said, it was a remarkable performance. The Command and General Staff Course at Fort Leavenworth was really the yeast in solving the problem of pulling officers together from so many different backgrounds -- Regular, Guard, and Reserve -- from so many different branches, from so many different sources in civilian life, and developing leaders and a General Staff system that worked and worked well.

I don't think anybody could foresee what was going to happen with any clarity at all. We knew something big was going to happen but these were the men who had to be put on the starting line to be followed by those who, either through good fortune or through their own talents, ran faster and went farther than their comrades.

In June I graduated and went back to Fort Ord to get my family. My division at that time was down at the Hunter Liggett Reservaton on a maneuver. I had about ten days leave to pack up my family and move. We lived in Carmel and drove back in time to get to Fort Leavenworth in early July. I went on duty as an instructor in mid-July and I was very pleased because, while I was an Engineer instructor, I was also an instructor in land warfare that used the broader knowledge that I'd gained in the Assault Course at Fort Belvoir. I was also selected as head instructor for the new motorized division charged with preparing the doctrine. This shook some of my associates in the other Combat Arms that an Engineer should be so selected.

Later I was charged with the preparation of special problems together with Weary (Walter K., Jr.) Wilson, who became later the Chief of Engineers. We shared the same office and put together the first amphibious assault problems.

We tried to write a problem to launch ground attack in new territory and use new maps. Every problem involved fighting on the Gettysburg terrain or Fort Benning maps, so a couple of us tried to get into new areas. This didn't meet with the approval of some of the Old Guard, but we did succeed.

One we placed in Kansas. I wrote a problem which assumed the invasion of the St. Lawrence Valley, which is not an impossible one to envision even yet. Then I prepared the outline for one, with an assault on Dakar in Africa, or the area south of it, because we knew that all the gold in the Bank of France was stowed away in a place called Kayes, up one of those West African rivers. I could envision the need for an amphibious attack to get it some day since we had lost France. That was pooh-pooh'd because we were "still on speaking terms with Vichy France."

By December we were at war, and before any word of its amphibious aspects were defined we could see that the crossing of the English Channel was going to be an obvious requirement, so Wilson and I put a problem together crossing the English Channel. We wrote the problem during the winter of 1941 and early 1942 and proposed landing on what became Omaha Beach. As a matter of fact, we were so close to a large part of the operation as it was carried out in 1945 that eventually our problem was changed and restricted.

Q: Now, when you say we worked up, or we considered we were going to have to get involved in this, are you talking about Wilson and yourself, or were there people at the school who were thinking ahead. Could you feel this movement developing? I was interested in your comment about fighting the Civil War, because that's what I meant when I said, "Did you learn anything at Leavenworth?" I suspect that we were prepared to fight the last war better than the present one.

A: Well, there is something to that, but, as far as staff planning and education, it was not badly done. There was too much repetition there in the long course, in my opinion; maybe some people needed that degree of

repetition, but I don't think the majority of the better students did, and it must have been deadly when they had a two-year course there (1930s), because they were not covering anything beyond this scope, and they were taking twice as long to do it. We were doing it in three months. I don't say we were doing what they did in a year, but I bet you we were damn close to approximating it.

Q: In 1960 I went to Leavenworth and your son-in-law was there. We had a conversation one day, and I recall very vividly when he said, "I was fortunate, because I went to the associate course, and my father-in-law has remarked many times that it seems almost a waste of time to spend so much time doing something that you can do well in four months." So what you're saying now is something that you had said over ten years ago that I think is interesting.

A: Well, I still believe it, and, you know, there were graduates of classes before World War II that took with them their book of approved solutions. And cases have been known -- I don't want to generalize -- but cases have been known where the actual operations orders for units in combat were literally written from one of those old problems at Leavenworth with as few changes as possible, depending on the terrain.

Q: Let's talk about this for just a bit. What is it that set you aside perhaps and had you surge ahead? I just wonder if we don't perhaps train some fast thinkers and a lot of slow thinkers. In other words, if we set the stage to give someone lots of time to do something, he may never learn to do it any other way except with lots of time. Would you like to talk about that?

A: Well, I think in education as a whole, that we have been very backward in evaluating capacity. A and B may be able to turn out work of the same relative quality given a week, but if A can turn that same work out in two days and it takes B a week to do, then obviously, one A man can do the work of two B men. There hasn't been much attention given to that factor and, with the trend in modern education to drop the level of the curricula to the level of the majority of those present, we may be aggravating it even more than it has been. If it gets more aggravated in the future than it has been in the past, you can see what we may be leading into. On the other hand, the present attitude at West Point, which is to give credit for

accomplishments and not force needless repetition by providing elective courses for either broadening in scope the effort of the individual or advancing him in a particular field, is certainly a major step in the right direction.

Q: Sir, on 15 December 1941, you wrote a letter to Terry Allen that you were concerned about the role of armor. You said that it was road-bound and the tactics were helter-skelter. I'm just wondering; did we make proper changes, or were our improvements finally written in blood in North Africa? Did we really learn anything? You seem to have had some perceptive comments there.

A: I was on the Carolina maneuvers in 1941. I was down there as a major observing for the Command and Staff College. My particular forte or field was to look into the tactics, techniques, and mobility of the new motorized division which was just being organized. It was one of our first efforts to recognize the critical need for increased mobility on or near the battlefield. Of course, we've come a hell of a long way since then. Terry was on this task force as the commander, and he made me the chief of staff of this fast-moving outfit. It was quite obvious from what we had available that we were not going to do much cross-country unless we had exceptional opportunities like the desert or on wide-open prairies. We've certainly come a long way since then. The new tanks, while they're heavy, have terrific maneuverability. I think the next generation probably will be better; I think they should be lighter. We've still got to get them so the ground pressure is getting less and our offensive power, our armament, greater and more accurate. I'm beginning to think that as far as the armor, or armor plate, is concerned, that we'd better change our attitude because it is now possible to develop armament that can penetrate about anything that you can build. If that's the case, then I think that we have to get away from our old idea of making it so heavy it can't be penetrated and make it light enough to stand anything except a direct hit at a critical point and give us the added gun accuracy and range, mobility, flexibility, and maneuverability to counter the threat. That has always been my attitude, but it's not the attitude of a lot of people in heavy armor. I can't speak as an expert on it, although while I have never experienced a tank battle, I certainly think that during my career I was exposed enough to combat and R & D to qualify.

Q: On 29 December 1941, you wrote a letter to Bill Russell and admonished him, "Don't let the fetish for speed lead to inadequate orders." I used to get the feeling as a youngster that we really weren't paying too much attention to detail, and sometimes it's not necessary. Obviously, this is your admonition here. Do you think that they have improved?

A: Yes, I think we've improved. I think one reason we've improved is because we've vastly improved communications. If any commander's worth his salt, he ought to be able to maintain good communications, as a rule. If he can't do that, then he's not a good commander.

Q: We might, before we go on here . . . You just mentioned that you were with Terry Allen, and the last time we talked about your rank, you mentioned that you were a captain. You became a lieutenant colonel on the 24th of December, 1941.

A: That's correct, so I must have been a major. That was September or October.

Q: But I think it's interesting that when you went to Leavenworth, you went as a major (you were promoted to major on 31 January 1941) but then you were promoted to lieutenant colonel on 24 December 1941, which was 17 days after Pearl Harbor, and later on 24 June 1942, you were promoted to a full colonel. So in a period of 18 months, you went from a captain to a full colonel.

Thinking back -- and I know we always feel that it's about time -- do you feel that you were ready for each of these grades, in your own perception of things at the time? Okay, let's talk about the other aspect. You were 17 years waiting to move out of the company-grade ranks. Do we ever want that situation again? Are there good points to it, are there bad points to it, would you like to discuss that?

A: Yes, 17 years is a long time. Everything is relative. Your classmates, your associates, those with the same time in grade . . . if it took five years to go up to the next grade, that didn't bother us particularly. My class thought we'd wait -- I think it was 22 years -- to get our captaincies and would retire as lieutenant colonels. People as capable, and let's say ambitious, too . . . people like Clay, Casey, or Leavy . . . I could name a

hundred in there . . . weren't discouraged, although they were lieutenants for 17 years. They might not have liked it, but it didn't cause them to give up their career; and, by the same token, neither can you buy a good Army simply by thinking you can go out and pay for it. This is what I'm trying to say. I think promotion has gotten too rapid in some grades. I don't believe that a lieutenant really learns his job, except in a superficial way . . . I mean his real job, his overall job, a real intensive knowledge of his job, in 18 months. I think that well could be three years. I'm not just trying to slow it down, but we used to laugh at a Mexican Army where everybody had to be promoted once a year, and while we're not that bad, we've gotten a little bit like it. On the other hand, I do say this; that certainly when war comes, you want to be getting your general officers from people with around 15 to 25 years of professional service. You don't want to wait until they're 55. The physical and mental demands are too great on them then, much too great; and by the same token I think your battalion commanders need to be down around 30 or 35.

Q: We've seen now promotions to a captain in two years, promotions to a first lieutenant in one year. The Army has attempted to justify this, not on the fact that it needed to be done but on the fact that it is enough time. You've made that point that we're doing it too fast. I agree with you.

What do you think . . . now you said three years, and I'm not sure whether you're talking about three years as a second lieutenant, and then another period as a first lieutenant. What do you think might be a good ballpark figure for time and grade as a first and second lieutenant? Obviously you're a separate individual when you're a captain, different responsibilities.

A: Yes. I would settle on two as a first lieutenant, five to captain and ten to major, total service. Seventeen years to a lieutenant colonel and maybe up to 25 to colonel.

Q: On 8 December 1941, you responded to a letter from a General Lee. I think he'd offered you a job and you made a comment that the outlook at the present time was that a successful G-3 has a better prospect of getting higher command. What you were talking about then was that a Division G-3 might do better than an Engineer battalion commander. Do you want to discuss that?

A: Yes. Well, an Engineer officer almost never got combat command or staff assignments. This has been dominated always by the Infantry, Armor, and Artillery branches. Since the Civil War, an Engineer officer had about as hard a time of qualifying and being accepted as a combat commander as a negro with some white blood does of passing over to the white race, if you know what I mean. That's been less true of later days, but it still remains a challenge for anyone in the technical services, as far as I know, to ever get as far as the Vice Chief of Staff, despite the importance of logistics to the Army.

You know, I found out another thing, and I'll tell you this. We haven't come to the War College yet, but I analyzed, but never published, the composition of the first classes of the War College. I'm talking about combat branches, but not entirely; the man in the bottom third of his class at the Military Academy had twice as good of a chance of getting to the Army War College as the man in the top third of his class. What does that tell you? Is academic achievement that much of a handicap?

Q: I've seen your rundown in some of your files on this, and I was wondering what you were doing, and why you had those figures. Sir, on March 30, 1942, you wrote a letter to C. L. Adcock, the Office of the Chief of Engineers, and it seems to follow on from what you've been saying. You'd like a Corps combat regiment slated to work in an Armored corps. You were quite sure that you could do the job and that your sights were set high. I mention this because I think that positive thinking is good now. Were you leaning in this direction? Were you interested in Armor?

A: I was interested in Armor. I had the Motorized Division at the time and I was in on much of the Armor instruction. I didn't get it, because this amphibious assignment came up.

Q: Was there any connection with your work on amphibious tactics and subsequent assignments? In other words, was there a connection between what you were doing at Leavenworth and the fact that your next assignment had to do with the amphibious work?

A: Probably. I really think (I don't know this and these aren't the things people tell you.), but I really think that when the Assistant Chief of Engineers inspected the 13th Engineers he was impressed with me

to the degree where I was recommended as a student and possibly an instructor at Leavenworth. I think he personally selected me as Chief of the Staff of the Engineer Amphibian Command. I had never served under General Sturdevant. Whatever impression he had of me was from reading my record, or observing me for about two days. That's what I believe.

Q: It's your career, Sir, and I'd like you to think about this in general. You mentioned that the general only observed you for two days. Is it not true that you can perhaps pick an individual who has the qualifications, the talent, in that short a period of time? Haven't you done it yourself? If you'll recall, when we talked earlier I asked you about your interests in being one of the leaders at the Academy, and the importance to you. And then I also asked you about whether you felt you were developing a knack of being able to single out leaders. I have a feeling that our senior commanders many times have to use this technique, and they're not very often wrong, so my question is, "Do you consider this a very reliable method, and do you pick this up from an accumulation of experience? Do you think it's an innate thing, that you were born with it?"

A: No, I think it's a question of maturity and judgment. There are some people I know who couldn't recommend anybody to me whom I wouldn't want to take a very hard look at myself. In other words, I don't trust their judgment very much, and they may think the same about me. I think it's a question of maturity and balanced judgment. Some people have it. A lot of people don't. I think you can pick some youngsters out with relatively little observation and, unless they stub their toe, I think you know they're going to the top.

Q: Sir, while you were at Leavenworth, you had a chance for a lot of thought and planning. Was there anything that you can perhaps put your finger on as a windup to Leavenworth that might be most significant to your tour?

A: Well, there were a lot of things that were significant. The preparation and presentation of problems was always a big challenge to me. I tried never to present one in which I didn't feel fully prepared. In every one I tried to inject something in word or action -- not to be overplayed, but sufficiently dramatic -- to help from time to time to

keep the attention of your audience, and they used to tease me about it occasionally. Somebody will still say, "I remember when you did this or that." Well, okay, I made my point, because I got their attention, and they haven't forgotten it yet, you know, so I think these things were important. It certainly gave me great training as an instructor, and that's another aspect of leadership, in speaking to people, in making presentations.

I formed a lot of warm friendships there between the people going through and the faculty that stood me well in my later career. As I mentioned earlier, perhaps that would have been one of the rewarding factors at West Point, if I'd gone there before the war as an instructor. The contacts there were extremely valuable. My friendship with Tom Watson (IBM), who was one of my proteges in a class at Leavenworth (In other words, I was one of the faculty advisors) has resulted in a lifelong friendship with him, and later with the rest of his family, when they were alive.

The articles I wrote for the Military Review still give me satisfaction, although they are outmoded to some extent by the 40 years that have gone by since I wrote "Mobility and Motors" and "Tell Them Why," which was even the forerunner of the Information and Education system in the Army. And then the Gettysburg Map problem on the use of armor that I worked up for Fortune magazine was a fascinating project; and, of course, the amphibious problems were interesting, but all was preparatory to the next opportunity that came along.

On the side of recreation, we used to have treasure hunts on Sunday mornings. It was in the days when we still had horses. We would end up down at the hunt club for breakfast around 11:00, and we usually had a little music as well as food. There were always a few officers who played instruments. I played my banjo, another chap played the piano, and another played the saxophone. On this particular morning I heard a darn good banjo player in this negro orchestra that was playing as we arrived. Lo and behold, he was playing left-handed. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had never seen anyone playing left-handed and damn if he didn't have it strung right-handed, in the normal way. This was unbelievable to me. So I went over to them as we (officers) were going to take over the orchestra and said, "We are going to give you a break. We'll take

over the piano and the banjo; I'm left-handed, too." He said, "Well, Sir, I don't think you could play this banjo." And I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, Sir, I don't think you could play this banjo because I play left-handed but it is strung right-handed." So I said to him, "Oh, what the hell difference does it make?" Well, his eyes popped out, and I guess he thought if you're that goofy why should I tell you. Believe me when I sat down to play -- not because I played so well -- but because I could take a banjo strung right-handed and play it left-handed, he just broke up. He couldn't believe it. We are the only two people I've ever seen who could do that.

Q: Sir, I consider that we've discussed Leavenworth in sufficient detail. I know that at one time you showed an interest in stereoscopic photos; the ability to come up with stereoscopic photos. You made the comment that it was an unexplored field, just another aspect of your thinking. You discussed and analyzed significant time factors involved in controlling the disposition of vehicles in columns for night movement, which I think are such diversified problems that people sometimes are amazed at the wide scope of your interest. Maybe, as a parting note here, was your comment that you were not sold on the half-track. You thought the two-and-a-half-ton truck was good, but you also thought that there should be some long-bodied trucks for bridge timbers and heavy cargo; that, I think, came out of your Motorized Division studies. But I could see a man that was very definitely concerned with not just one aspect but the whole spectrum of activity in the military. The next move that you made, which was to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, I think became almost a turning point in your life, certainly a significant milestone, and I'd like to discuss now the Engineer Amphibian Command.