

General Fred C. Weyand, 1916-2010

A person who once followed my wife in giving remarks at a funeral came up to her afterwards to lament: "You took all the best stories". I was afraid that that might happen today, but I have been nurturing the hope, successfully it would appear, that there are in quantity enough Weyandian stories to avoid duplication. At Friday's service, I did lose the one about Four-Star General Frederick Carlton Weyand telling the young Army surgeon, "After where we've just been together, you can call me Fred", but since General Weyand might regard this eulogy as equivalent to an invasive medical procedure, I can at least redeploy the anecdote to establish that I have his permission, by analogy, to refer to him throughout as "Fred".

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of his presence. Here are some short descriptions pulled from various sources.

"a tall, lanky Californian"

"a tall, angular man with a sincere countenance"

"homespun yet debonair; deceptively shrewd and when cast in the role, a superb diplomat"

"reasonably open and honest while also being deft . . . an informal and friendly man"

"one of the more erudite officers"

"hopeful and wary at the same time"

"a charming personality and the ability to gain people's confidence"

"a very bright guy behind that California country boy façade"

"an officer of honesty and intelligence"

"a wonderful sense of humor and a brilliant mind"

Well, there's no argument that he was tall. "Lanky and angular?", sure. "Charming, deft, and debonair?" Check, check, check. "Homespun, informal, California country boy?" Put him in overalls and hand him a pitchfork. "A wonderful sense of humor?" No doubt there. "Intelligent", even "brilliant?" Absolutely. "Sincere countenance?" Well, here I might quibble because to me Fred had a rascal, mischievous quality that his face sometimes struggled to mask. "Erudite?" Fred was an omnivorous consumer, tester, and organizer of information.

Fred occasionally would say that he wanted me to do a eulogy, but I always thought that he was kidding, thereby committing the classic military sin of confusing intentions with capabilities. This led me to violate Fred's First Three Rules: number one, prepare, number two, prepare, and number three, prepare. Parenthetically, my favorite personal example of his preparation occurred at a fancy fundraiser. We were both in tuxes, and I was grumbling about not being able to get my clipped bow tie situated properly. "Here," he said, "use this," pulling one out of his pocket. "I always carry a spare." My remarks should have been researched and composed at leisure and vetted by him for errors of fact, emphasis, and tone. So when Carolyn asked me to speak I was stunned and was tempted to cover my retreat with her father's classic answer: "That's a wonderful idea, but I'm not going to do it." By the way, this "Yes-but" construction was a Weyand specialty as evidenced during Vietnam when he argued against one of General Westmoreland's plans by saying, "It's a great plan, but it won't work." But, of course, I am honored, if challenged, to share some thoughts about Fred, challenged because of the fallibility of my memory, challenged because he was a complicated man, challenged because he set an impossibly high bar with his grace and wit.

He once set a high bar by literally building one, leading his divisional inspector general, who was short, to protest, as he rested his chin on it next to his drink, that Fred was against short people. Fred responded admiringly of his IG's skills: "If there's no problem out there, he goes out and makes one and then he fixes it." Fred's love of the army did not blind him to its capriciousness. "Because I was fluent in German and had intensively studied the German order of battle, the army sent me to Burma." Once at a Rotary meeting he followed a long-winded submarine admiral with the perfectly timed comment, "And to think that they used to call it the Silent Service". At a conference, he was on a panel with yet another admiral who had spoken at length about how the navy was "groping" to find a solution to some arcane problem. The next question to the admiral concerned the integration of women into the military, and Fred swiftly interjected, "You'd better not have any groping with that." And when he was removed from the board of First Hawaiian Bank following its sale, he responded to the effusive praise that was being heaped on him by commenting with bemusement, "Gee, given what you've just said, I don't see how you can continue without me".

Fred also retained an irrepressible whimsical quality and appreciation for odd customs. As far as I know, Fred is the only general to have been "wounded", with large quotes around that word, in the Pentagon while serving as chief of staff. In accepting a challenge from the Secretary of the Army to race up a down escalator, Fred managed to stumble over him and break his ankle. Wearing a walking cast, it was decorously hinted that his injury was caused by participation in an unspecified sporting event. While stationed in Berlin in the late '50s, Fred learned that his fellow British officers had the quaint, vertiginous custom of turning their mess guests upside down to impress their shoe prints on the ceiling as mementos of their visits. If ever a moment in Fred Weyand's social life deserved perpetuation in a photograph, this was it. Sadly, none exists so one is left with only the mental image

of Fred, in the grip of our closest allies, being turned head over heels as gravity wreaks havoc on his pockets, coiffure, and internal organs while he is walked along the ceiling. Whenever he told this story, which was often, I was reminded anew of the wisdom of the American Revolution.

While humor was an important aspect of Fred's leadership, he was, of course, a serious man in a most serious profession in very serious times. Fred's leadership style gave the illusion of simplicity, but he was a complicated man: at once guileless and cunning; open and controlled; charming and sharp-edged. He planned relentlessly but had the gift of improvisation. He was anything but orthodox but knew how to disguise his questioning behind a veil of disarming cheerfulness. He was principled yet pragmatic. As one of the officers who served with him in two wars said, "He always had a reason for what he did, and that reason was for the benefit of the whole." He hated war but was good at it and became calmer the worse conditions deteriorated. I don't think that he was a "born leader"; I think that he worked at it and thought about it constantly until it became second nature. And then he thought about it some more. His professional accomplishments had been good but unspectacular until the Korean War when, in the words of one writer, "His performance . . . was the flint striking steel to light [his] career."

In January 1951 he took command of the 1st Battalion of the 7th Regiment in the 3rd Division. He was 34 years old with his first combat command. As he said in 2000, looking back across 49 years, "to be intimately associated with those soldiers in combat was the most rewarding experience of my life." He listed a series of lessons which have timeless validity: 1) "I learned that men would follow me anywhere as long as I was out in front where they could see me and hear me and know that I cared for them. 2) I learned the value of realistic training, and training, and more training. 3) I learned the value of reconnaissance and intelligence, personal knowledge of the terrain and the enemy. 4) I learned that precise, massive firepower resulted in lives saved and missions accomplished. 5) I learned to visualize and prepare for the worst that could happen and be surprised at how often it happened."

All of these lessons came into play on the morning of April 25, 1951 when Fred was ordered to conduct a daylight withdrawal while engaged with the Chinese. His battalion was covering the retreat of the regiment and ultimately the division. The last unit to be withdrawn was company A under the command of a 21-year-old first lieutenant named Harley Mooney, whom Fred referred to as "Old Moon" when I first heard him tell about that day. The essential challenge was how to extricate Mooney's company after he had covered for everyone else.

During the morning things had inevitably gone more slowly than planned and by 11:45, company A was under heavy attack as the last remaining unit in line. Mooney called for covering artillery fire. His artillery observer had been wounded, and he was dependent on Fred's knowledge of the terrain. As General Mooney said yesterday, "If Fred hadn't walked that area, my life would have ended that day." He

told Fred where he needed the artillery to fall and suggested, "Put a round out somewhere, and maybe I can hear it." But he couldn't see or hear where the first round landed through the heavy firing around him as the Chinese pressed closer. Think about the powers of calmness, concentration and visualization that Fred needed at this moment as he made an adjustment—"right 200, drop 200"--that landed on a group of attacking Chinese troops. From an account written a few months later: "Mooney yelled over the radio, 'That's beautiful! That's beautiful! Fire for effect! Throw out some more!'"

Now here I have to pause to weigh the memories of these two men, these great friends. When Fred told the story, he had Mooney saying "That's beautiful! Walk it around!" which was usually followed by a feigned grumble, "What was he doing, saying 'walk it around'?" When I was talking with General Mooney yesterday, he preemptively said, "I told him 'Fire for effect' not 'Walk it around'." In any event, Fred always said, "Mooney thought that I had saved his life, and I knew that he had saved mine." Fred continued covering artillery fire and smoke and directed an air strike to forestall the Chinese from following. As the account written not long afterwards summarized, "The 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry enjoyed outstanding leadership in this action. . . . Leaders at every echelon 'thought on their feet'."

They did so in large measure because Fred had trained them that way. An essential part of his leadership was his ability as a teacher. In General Mooney's words, "He was always teaching people something." Fred had a flair for narrative, for story telling, for teaching. And his teaching could be directed up the chain of command as well as down.

So it was in Vietnam in January 1968 when Fred, in what has been described as "perhaps the finest display of generalmanship in the entire war" convinced General Westmoreland to let him hold his II Field Force battalions close to Saigon rather than disperse them out to the Cambodian border. Fred had developed and more importantly believed that he had sufficient intelligence to warrant being cautious. The result was that on the night of January 30th, Fred retained the capability to defend Saigon at the start of the Tet Offensive.

In the words of Neil Sheehan, "Throughout the night and into the morning, as Weyand sent thousands of U.S. fighting men in motion, he was a fire chief afraid he was going to run out of engine companies. He never did. He had prepared better than he could have known for a battle he could never have anticipated. He kept the air and land lines to Saigon open, and he delivered or readied enough counterblows to deprive the Communists of the momentum they needed to win the city." Sheehan continues, "Although Weyand was not given to boasting, he was convinced afterward . . . that Saigon would have fallen had he not objected to sending his troops up to the Cambodian frontier. 'It would have been absolute disaster, because there's no doubt in my mind Saigon would have been taken,' Weyand said."

Yes, Fred was a great teacher, a great persuader, a great consensus leader. But there was one example of his success as a teacher that he came to regret and it involved a man very close to him, his brother Bob. "I taught him to play golf," he grumbled, "And now he beats me."

Some years ago when we were traveling together in Holland looking at tulips, I asked Carolyn if Fred had ever gardened, had he ever grown anything. She replied instantaneously and knowingly, "The only thing that my father ever grew was restless." I think that that restlessness in combination with his piercing, clarifying intelligence kept him from becoming stale, complacent, conventional, or bureaucratized, to use an uneuphonious word.

But that restlessness was tethered to a deep and abiding faith in God that grew over the years to become the quiet center of his life. He spoke formally about his faith in this chapel nearly four years ago, and I commend that sermon, which is on his web site, to your attention. But he also spoke about it more obliquely by way of an analogy in his remarks at his 90th birthday party. He described himself at the age of 5 or 6 being awakened by his father and carried into the early morning blackness across dark waters into a duck blind. It was a simple, affectionate story, ostensibly about the passing of skills--in this case those of duck hunting--between generations, but the way he told it and the way he conveyed the sense of strength and calm that he felt while in his father's arms was, I think, a powerful metaphor for how he felt about his relationship with God. His story reminded me of lines from Psalm 139: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

Fred and I talked, joked, and argued for many years. Although I used to tease him that he needed to be kept on a low-adulation diet, I made sure that he knew how much I respected and just plain liked him. My wife, Juliet, adored him, and knowing of my regard for him, she was not and will not be above encouraging me to better behavior and action by saying, for example, "Fred would want you to cook." The second to the last time that I saw Fred I told him in the bantering way through which we communicated, "If I were ever to tell another man that I loved him, you would be at the top of the list."

Yesterday I asked General Mooney, who is too ill to be here, if he would like me to say anything on his behalf. He said, with a clarity burnished across the decades since 1951, "He was my hero when I was 21, and he remained so as I watched him grow over the years. Fred was a great human being, a great soldier, and one hell of a great friend. If Fred Weyand was in your corner, you didn't need anything else."

Read by David Lee at General Fred C. Weyand's memorial service at the Fort DeRussy Chapel on 28 February 2010.