

Memoirs of a Military Meteor

"Wedemeyer Reports!" by General Albert C. Wedemeyer (Holt, 497 pp. \$6), roundly denounces VIPs and their policies during the past twenty years. S. L. A. Marshall, author of the recently released *"Sinai Victory."* appraises the memoir.

By S. L. A. Marshall

OF THAT handsome soldier, General Al Wedemeyer, and of his glittering reputation as a mastermind of global warfare, it is so easy to speak positively that comment on his memoir had best come later.

The man made a high score: the book will but make its readers wonder how and why.

Wedemeyer was one of the main planners of U.S. Army operations in World War II. Toward the close he served briefly with Admiral Mountbatten in the C-B-I Theatre, then supplanted General Joe Stilwell in the China command. In 1948 he was the Army's chief of operations. Last, he commanded the Sixth Army on the Pacific Coast.

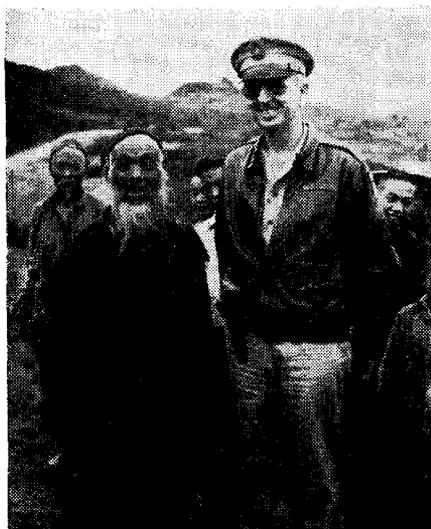
His greater postwar renown, however, arose from his political and missionary efforts. He wrote the suppressed "Wedemeyer Report," which, smothered in its cradle, never had a chance to save China. There are those who feel the Red eclipse might have happened regardless.

For one decade the Wedemeyer military career flashed like a meteor and trailed off as many hot sparks into open space. A major on the General Staff at World War II's beginning, Wedemeyer got his fourth star, when a few years back, of his own choice, he quit the Army.

No American soldier ever rose so high so quickly without ever commanding Americans in battle or being a staff member guiding fighting operations.

On the personal side, Wedemeyer is humanly warm, un-Olympian, and down-to-earth—a quite likable guy. One can't imagine him bulldozing his way to high place: he is too much the gentleman. His book reveals him as a professional almost incapable of making a move without reflecting on how it influences his chance for promotion. There's nothing unique in that.

Considering this background, Wede-



—U.S. Army.

General Albert C. Wedemeyer shown on inspection trip in southeastern China, 1945.

meyer's phenomenal ascent might be taken as positive proof of his superior quality as strategist, logistician, and negotiator. The great reputation must be deserved. Reflecting rare opportunity and experience, there should come forth, if not a classic memoir, at least a clear and balanced report.

It is inordinately difficult to write polished prose about such a subject. High-level planning, for all its complexity, is dull stuff, and strategic reasoning, despite its glamour, is less exciting than a retired ladies' tea. To make good copy of it, the master planner must also be a genius at organizing and expressing his best thoughts, a wizard at making language flow, and a magician in blending the important and ponderous with the sidelight which is trivial but entertaining.

Wedemeyer the soldier must have been able to write a superior staff paper with its exacting requirements as to clear statement, compaction, complete information, and justified conclusions, or he could scarcely have held a job. Wedemeyer the author violates every writing rule he once knew, and the results are deplorable.

The book is a jumble. Little or nothing in it is related to the art of positive thinking. Its arbitrary, dissenting views are indifferently maintained. Its criticisms and exorcisms are made to ring hollow through tiresome repetition and the author's persistent tendency to knock down his

own arguments. There is no continuity of thought. Cutbacks and projections forward are so often interpolated as to daze the reader. The memoir is a weird potpourri of statements half-profound and irrelevencies wholly naïve.

"In Egypt I had my first glimpse of the sphinx and the pyramids and was fascinated."

"We saw many camels, Arabs, donkeys, Jews, in the undulating country." This is Wedemeyer lifting his eyes unto the same Judean hills which once inspired David.

The only justification for lifting such wooden lines as these from the writing, as if they were fair samples, is that many of the longer passages are not less awkward, and some are in questionable taste. In that category is a windy discussion of a security leak out of Wedemeyer's shop during the early stage of the war and the resultant investigation. That has happened to many an officer and, while the experience is invariably painful, it is usually beneath dignity to regard it as an instance of personal persecution which must be publicly exposed.

The memoir is sensational in its ringing condemnation of high personages and high policy. According to Wedemeyer, nearly everything done by the United States during the past twenty years has been wrong. It was criminal stupidity that the nation let itself be dragged into World War II, that thereafter its strategy makers let the British lead them by the nose, that Winston Churchill was permitted to influence military operations, that Western Europe was not invaded in the early war years, that unconditional surrender was demanded of Germany, that no way was found to body-check Russia, that the United States did not bulwark Chiang Kai-shek's position on the mainland, etc., etc.

THESE are thunderous broadsides throwing forth bird shot, due to the memoir's general lack of pointed, balanced argument and penetrating proof.

Wedemeyer was a passionate soldier, independent thinker, the man and strategist almost eternally in opposition. Yet like all other sound professionals, he loyally hewed to the line once decision was made.

His German blood and his staff tour in Hitler's Germany predisposed his sympathies. This he acknowledge while avowing his detestation of Nazism. He saw eye-to-eye with the America First camp and though Colonel Lindbergh talked gospel. He stays persuaded that Mr. Roosevelt deliberately contrived American entry into the war.

What should have been done, ac

ording to Wedemeyer, was to permit the two great despots, Russia and Germany, to hammer each other into insensibility, with the U.S. thereby winning dominance by default. This is hardly an original thesis. But when a strategist advances it seriously, he would first be able to say by what strategy available to a neutral it is possible to insure that a war between great powers will be fought to a mutually paralyzing deadlock. Provided that either emerged as victor, Europe was certain to be gripped by the most powerful and aggressive despotism in history, with unfathomable consequence to a sideline-sitting USA. To assert that we did not have to enter the war is possibly a defensible proposition. But to insist that we should have used our influence in such way as to restore a power balance in Europe mistakes strategy for magic.

In the Wedemeyer memoir, as in others written by principals from the Allied side, there is lengthy and deeply personal argument about the divergent views, British and American, on how the war should be won. Few strategists seem able to discuss this sensitive issue dispassionately.

This one, too, leaves unstated two main propositions essential to fair treatment of the subject. Britain and the United States, being on opposite sides of the ocean with quite different worldwide interests, could not possibly see eye-to-eye on strategy. The second thought is that going operations exert an almost irresistible tug upon projected movement which is often above and beyond narrow national interest. That is so because of inertia, the grip of logistics, and the human fact that no general in his right mind wants to be downgraded to a secondary role.

Wedemeyer treats these disagreements virtually as if they were proof of conspiratorial low cunning on the part of the British. "We wuz robbed" by people who were less bright at seeing the main road to decision but more clever at making things go their way around the top-level conference table.

It's a familiar lament. But while here are reasons of record for believing the British were loath to stage the Great Invasion even in 1944, no body of proof warrants the charge that their resistance withheld Allied forces from a successful effort against Western Europe during the two preceding years.

Wedemeyer seemingly marches through life classifying men as heroes, dukes, dullards, or knaves, according to the measure of their disagreement with him. This bull-in-the-China-top approach is appropriate to the last third of his book, where he strides over Asia.

Father of Artillery

"Henry Knox: General Washington's General," by North Callahan (Rinehart. 404 pp. \$6), is about a Boston bookseller who became an artillery commander without benefit of formal instruction. Columbia University History Professor Richard B. Morris, co-author of "The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six," reports on the biography for us.

By Richard B. Morris

IF ANYONE wants a classic illustration of the difference between the Prussian military system and the American it is sufficient to point to the career of Henry Knox, Boston bookseller and civilian, who, without formal military training but by self-instruction from the manuals, picked up enough technical knowledge to command with competence the artillery of the American Revolution. He came of no military or aristocratic lineage and ended his days as a civilian. A great Bacchanalian figure of a man, Knox was a portly symbol of what high caloric intake plus alcohol did to the waistline of a genial Patriot. Yet despite his huge bulk he has managed hitherto to elude military historians. A few earlier biographers have sought without signal success to establish his claim to distinction, and now North Callahan has combed the Knox Papers in the Massachusetts Historical Society and has added many additional details.

Knox is remembered for his three great moments. He happened by chance to be right alongside Captain Preston when a British redcoat pulled the trigger and the Boston Massacre exploded. His most heroic feat was the transporting of many tons of desperately needed cannon from Ticon-

deroga across the frozen Hudson and over the snow-clad Berkshires in time for his artillery to be posted atop Dorchester Heights. This proved to be the turning point in the Battle for Boston. Lastly, it was Knox whom Washington first embraced in a memorable farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern. But between Ticonderoga and the British evacuation of New York Knox fought dependably through eight long years of war, even dodging enemy cannon balls alongside Alexander Hamilton, who tried to use his big companion as a shield during the siege of Yorktown.

The trouble is that while Knox's services as the father of the artillery may have been indispensable they were generally not conspicuous, and Mr. Callahan, like previous biographers, has had difficulty in keeping the focus on his own subject. What he has given us is run-of-the-mill military history in which Knox is lost in the complexity and confusion of battle. Granted that Knox was a good organizer of artillery, it is less clear that he was a good tactician. The attack on the Chew House was done at his insistence. He argued that "it was unmilitary to leave a castle in our rear." This unimaginative decision may well have lost the Battle of Germantown, and revealed that Knox would stick by the book and lacked the talents of improvisation which great military figures must have.

If, then, Mr. Callahan fails to make out as strong a case as one might expect for Knox as a soldier, he does less than justice to his subject's role in organizing and administering the War Department. During Shays's Rebellion Knox was feverishly energetic and was prepared to use federal troops to put it down, an eventuality that proved unnecessary. He was the only member of Washington's Cabinet to have carried his department headship over from the Confederation. Jay held over in foreign affairs, but only until Jefferson took the helm. The author has signally failed to exploit the rich War Department records in the National Archives for the later years of the Confederation, when Knox made perhaps his most important contribution to civilian administration. As a department head he was less successful once he entered Washington's Cabinet. Private financial problems kept him from his post during the Whisky Rebellion. In turning over the responsibilities of the War Department temporarily to Hamilton, Knox was to find out that the Secretary of the Treasury was too audacious and adventurous a person to play the role of a passive substitute.

All in all, Knox seems a genial personality of the second rank.



—Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Henry Knox—one of Washington's favorites.