A native of Florida and son of an artillery officer, Walter K. “Weary” Wilson came to Alabama as a young second lieutenant assigned as assistant to the District Engineer in Mobile. He had received his commission upon graduation from West Point Military Academy in 1929. His illustrious career spanned the next 36 years and Alabama became his home until his death in 1985. He furthered his education with a degree in civil engineering from the University of California in Berkeley in 1933.

General Wilson was involved in troop command, staff assignments and a teaching appointment at West Point. He also served in the newly formed Southeast Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Following the war, he took command of the St. Paul Engineer District in 1946 and returned to Mobile as District Engineer in 1949. During his tenure in this position, he was responsible for projects involving navigation and power dams on Alabama river systems, recognizing the development potential of these systems and the value of user groups to support their further development. Dr. Werner von Braun was impressed with the work Wilson had done, resulting in the Corps of Engineers performing about half of the space program facilities construction. Wilson left Mobile for a brief term as South Atlantic Division Engineer and then spent two years in Morocco as Mediterranean Division Engineer, responsible for the SAC bases being built in Africa and the Middle East. Under his guidance, the Corps of Engineers in Saudi Arabia eventually accomplished a $20 billion program of construction in that country.

He was named the 40th Chief of Engineers by President Kennedy in 1961, leading the world’s largest design and construction agency. He traveled extensively, bringing his expertise and managerial style to those who needed it, fulfilling his belief that “the head man should see and be seen.”

General Wilson has been honored with citations, decorations and public service awards. Perhaps the text of the NASA Medal for Outstanding Leadership award sums up his career best. “...in directing the effective application and utilization of the Corps of Engineers in the design and construction of facilities... for the benefit of mankind.”

Following his retirement from the Corps, he worked in private industry with Southern Industries Corporation and became chairman of Mobile’s Task Force 200, resulting in significant industrial development in Mobile. In 1971 he was awarded the coveted Golden Beaver Award for Engineering in recognition of his contributions to the water resources development of the nation. The I-65 bridge over the Mobile River is named in his honor.

Throughout his life he encouraged young engineers to develop their potential and served as an excellent example.