

## Part III: The Manhattan Engineer District

### Initial Problems

Summer 1942—during which the American island-hopping campaign in the Pacific began at Guadalcanal—proved to be a troublesome one for the fledgling bomb project. Colonel James C. Marshall received the assignment of directing the Laboratory for the Development of Substitute Metals, or DSM. Marshall immediately moved from Syracuse to New York City, where he set up the Manhattan Engineer District, established by general order on August 13. Marshall, like most other Army officers, knew nothing of nuclear physics. Furthermore, Marshall and his Army superiors were disposed to move cautiously. In one case, for instance, Marshall delayed purchase of an excellent production site in Tennessee pending further study, while the scientists who had been involved in the project from the start were pressing for immediate purchase. While Bush had carefully managed the transition to Army control, there was not yet a mechanism to arbitrate disagreements between S-1 and the military. The resulting lack of coordination complicated attempts to gain a higher priority for scarce materials and boded ill for the future of the entire bomb project.

### Reorganization of the Manhattan Engineer District: Groves and the Military Policy Committee

Decisions made in September provided administrative clarity and renewed the project's sense of urgency. Bush and the Army agreed that an officer other than Marshall should be given the assignment of overseeing the entire atomic project, which by now was referred to as the Manhattan Project. On September 17, the Army appointed Colonel Leslie R. Groves (promoted to Brigadier General six days later) to head the effort. Groves was an engineer with impressive credentials, including building of the Pentagon, and, most importantly, had strong administrative abilities. Within two days Groves acted to obtain the Tennessee site and secured a higher priority rating for project materials. In addition, Groves moved the Manhattan Engineer District headquarters from New York to Washington. He quickly recognized the talents of



General Leslie R. Groves. Reprinted from Vincent C. Jones, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985).