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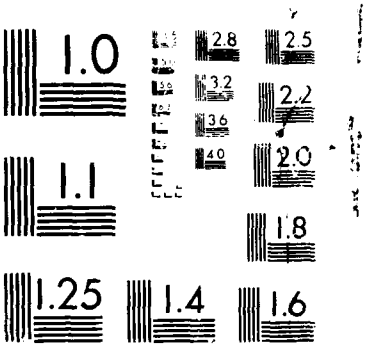

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General William C. Westmoreland: Symbol of America to War, 1964-1968, Symbol of War to America, 1982-1985 A Study of Three News Magazines

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April 18, 1988

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A thesis submitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in partial fulfillment of the tequirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Journalism.

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GENERAL WILLIAM C. WESTMORELAND:
SYMBOL OF AMERICA TO WAR, 1964-1968
SYMBOL OF WAR TO AMERICA, 1982-1985
A STUDY OF THREE NEWS MAGAZINES

by

Captain Anne P. Warren

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of The
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in the School of Journalism

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1988

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ABSTRACT

Anne Peterson Warren. General William C. Westmoreland: Symbol of America to War, 1964-1968 Symbol of War to America, 1982-1985 A Study of Three News Magazines (Under the direction of DONALD SHAW).

This study examines how three major news magazines, *Time, Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report,* characterized General William C. Westmoreland during two different decades; first when he was commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam from 1964-1968, and later, when he was a plaintiff in a libel suit against CBS from the time of a defamatory broadcast in 1982 until the suit was dropped in 1985. The three magazines were chosen because they were the only major U.S. news magazines that had full-time reporters in Vietnam during General Westmoreland's tour of duty there and were widely read by the American public.

One would expect that the characterizations of General Westmoreland would change as public opinion about the Vietnam War and the military changed since the 1960s (from negative to positive), but ~~that was not~~ the case. Instead, this study found that the 1960s characterizations of the general were positive, despite negative public opinion of the war; whereas the 1980s characterizations of him were only a shadow of what they once had been despite an American resurgence of patriotism.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER ONE - OVERVIEW	**1**
Introduction	
Civil-Military Relations	
American Support for Wars	
The Tet Offensive	
Twenty Years Later	
CHAPTER TWO	
PUBLIC OPINION, VIETNAM AND THE GENERAL	**16**
Public Opinion	
Popular versus Unpopular Wars	
The Vietnam War -- Battle of the "Mindfield"	
Public Opinion During the General's Watch	
CHAPTER THREE	
THE VIETNAM WAR: NEWS MEDIA CHARACTERIZATIONS OF GENERAL WESTMORELAND 1964-1968	**30**
The "Inevitable General"	
What Is a Combat Leader?	
Westmoreland: Symbol of America to War	

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CONTENTS - Continued

PAGE

CHAPTER FOUR
THE CBS TRIAL: NEWS MEDIA CHARACTERIZATIONS OF GENERAL WESTMORELAND 1982-1985 58

What CBS Reported
Honor at Stake
Westmoreland: Symbol of War to America

CHAPTER FIVE - LESSONS LEARNED 72

Characterizations versus Public Opinion
Service First

ENDNOTES 76

BIBLIOGRAPHY 84

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Vietnam War was viewed by the American public as the most important problem facing the United States from 1963 to 1971, according to Gallup opinion polls,[1] and the man chosen to command the most controversial war of the century was General William C. Westmoreland, "the inevitable general," as his West Point classmates called him. According to Frances Fitzgerald in Fire on the Lake: "The French commanders in Vietnam had been counts and cardinals in military dress; Westmoreland was a clean-living, upright, corporate vice-president, his professionalism tempered by decency and good manners. In all, he made a perfect representative of the United States in Vietnam. ..."[2]

Westmoreland became a symbol of the Vietnam War for two different eras and for two different reasons. First, in the 1960s, he symbolized the United States as commander of the conflict during its most crucial period, 1964-1968. Later, in the 1980s, he symbolized much of what went wrong with the war as a plaintiff fighting for

his honor in a libel case against a major broadcast network, CBS.

This study examines how the major news magazines that covered the war, *Time, Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* characterized the general during his tour of command in Vietnam (1964-1968), and how they characterized him during his confrontation in the courtroom (1984-1985), to determine if the characterizations reflected public opinion about the military and the Vietnam War over time. Its purpose will also be to provide an insight into one facet of the quality of reporting during the Vietnam War. Supplemental articles from other magazines are also examined to flesh out the scope of the study. The study will not provide a content analysis of the articles but will approach them from a historical standpoint.

This chapter briefly explains the nature of our civil-military establishment, how the United States got into the Vietnam War, and one of the major issues confronting Westmoreland during his tour of duty in Vietnam -- the Tet Offensive. It gives a brief account of how the general re-surfaced into the public arena in the 1980s. The next chapter describes the public opinion environment of the 1960s in which Westmoreland operated.

The final chapters examine characterizations of the general to address the thesis question.

Civil-Military Relations

Supremacy of civilian control of our government in war as well as in peace is fundamental to the institution of American democracy. The Armed Forces look to a civilian, the President of the United States, as their commander-in-chief. It is the president who sets the tone for the size and scope of the nation's defenses and the level of militarism supported by society.

Historically, Americans have rejected militarism except when faced with a nationally declared war. Since World War II, however, the notion of only supporting a strong national defense establishment during times of hostility has faded. The Cold War and an expanding world economy forced America to maintain defenses beyond the imperatives of isolationism. "A *national security state* has evolved since the National Security Act of 1947 created the three separate armed services, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Atomic Energy Commission."[3] Since the creation of this civil-military bureaucracy, military requirements became an important ingredient in American foreign policy.

Fear became a justification for maintaining a strong national defense because Americans felt forced to choose between peace without arms against a Communist nuclear threat or a constant state of military preparedness. The United Nations, which was established to act as a world organization for peace, brought little comfort to the leaders of the United States, who eventually concluded that a strong military was necessary for deterrence. Instead of its traditional reputation for being a peace-loving nation, the United States of the last three decades has taken on the image -- to some -- of aggressor, with its "arsenal of democracy."[4]

American Support for Wars

For both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, United States leaders relied on the sensitivity of the American people and their fear of Communism to gain support for plans to halt its spread throughout Asia. According to John Mueller, however, in his book, War, Presidents and Public Opinion, a different American public supported and opposed each war. He discussed support in terms of two factions of American society, the "intellectual Left" and the traditionally accepted concept of a conservative right. Mueller said:

> At least as important as the amount of opposition to the war was the source of this opposition. In the Korean case, what opposition there was seems to have come from the Right. It was the conservative senator from Ohio, Robert Taft, after all, who called the Korean action "an utterly useless war." By contrast, vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam seems to have come predominantly from the intellectual, nonunion Left, a group that has been called the journalistic-academic complex.[5]

Mueller's "intellectual Left" accepted the Korean War and opposed the Vietnam War because of differences in the Cold War atmosphere for each conflict. To the Left, the Korean War, although unpleasant, was necessary as a deterrent to Stalinist Russia. By the early 1960s, however, especially after the Cuban missile crisis, the Cold War threat posed by the Soviet Union diminished considerably, and the Left looked for modifications in American foreign policy when President Johnson committed American forces to Vietnam. According to Mueller:

> In 1965, the Johnson administration's position (more or less) was that, while Russia may have become less of a threat than previously, China still posed a significant challenge ... [t]hus, the standard cold war policy of containment was applicable there. Some of the cold war types within the intellectual Left may have been willing, in 1965, to grant this position. Within a year, however, this point was weakened

> by two events. The first was the abortive Communist coup attempt in Indonesia that led to Sukarno's downfall and to a sharp reversal of the country's pro-Chinese political trends. The second was the beginning of the highly diverting Red Guard movement within China. Therefore, for the cold warriors of the Left, the rationale for the Vietnam venture was no longer valid, and they could turn to opposition.[6]

Public opinion and support, therefore, became an increasingly important factor in the conduct of the Vietnam War -- perhaps more than in any other war. It was difficult for Americans to understand a war that never officially began or ended. For practical purposes, most students of the war would agree that the closest thing to an American declaration of war was President Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964, and the closest thing to an end to the war was the final withdrawal of fighting troops in 1973 under President Nixon's "peace with honor" program. It was with such fuzziness the public -- and press -- had to contend.

The Tet Offensive

No comprehensive study of the Vietnam conflict has failed to mention public opinion as a measure of its success or failure, particularly after the 1968 Tet

Offensive.[7] The Tet Offensive has been characterized as the turning point in the war for several reasons, but the main reason was that it occurred shortly after highly controversial Johnson administration public relations campaigns, which served to confuse the American public and contribute to its increasing unwillingness to continue supporting the war effort.

President Johnson called Westmoreland home twice in the year prior to Tet to give Congress and the American public progress reports on the war. In April 1967, Westmoreland addressed a joint session of Congress. According to an article in *Time* shortly after his speech: "No other military commander had ever addressed a joint meeting of Congress in the midst of a conflict that he was still directing."[8] The same article also reviewed a speech the general made at an Associated Press luncheon just before his speech to Congress and concluded: "Westmoreland's address was a sober, thoughtful review of the war. He offered no simplistic solutions. But this message was all but obscured by press and political reaction to four sentences in the speech."[9] The four sentences referred to were Westmoreland's comments about protesters and demonstrations at home. He said he feared that loss of American resolve would lead to demoralization of American soldiers and a possible political victory for North Vietnam. According to the

Time article: "Though that observation may have been politically risky, it was a legitimate expression of concern on the part of the U.S. commander in Viet Nam. Yet, judging from the reaction, he might just as well have called for a suspension of the Bill of Rights."[10]

After describing the applause Westmoreland received for his speech to Congress, a *Newsweek* article said: "All the applause could not smother the hard fact that Lyndon Johnson's war consensus needed shoring up. Indeed the President's very introduction of Westmoreland into the home-front fight touched off anguished cries that Mr. Johnson was exploiting the war's brightest hero to do his domestic dirty work."[11]

In a recent interview Westmoreland recalled:

> In April of '67 I wasn't asked, I was ordered back then. I wasn't given an option: I was just told to come back. That's when I talked to the joint session of Congress. My speech to (Congress) is a matter of record, but it was not a pessimistic speech. It was a realistic one. I emphasized the tasks that we had, but I made this point: With the support of the American people we can make good on our commitment to the South Vietnamese people. Of course that's the bottom line; that's what we didn't do.[12]

When Westmoreland returned again to speak to the National Press Club on November 21, 1967, he faced the

problem of trying to describe an unconventional war in conventional terms. This had always been a problem for him and his public affairs officers in Vietnam, and the difference between what reporters were experiencing in the field and the official story led to what has been termed the "credibility gap."[13] Although Westmoreland discussed many topics in his address to the Press Club, including plans to bring home American troops after a successful "Vietnamization" program, his concluding statement was what came back to haunt him after Tet. According to journalist Peter Braestrup in his book, Big Story:

> He did not warn that heavy fighting was ahead. He cited no problems. He concluded: "We are making progress. We know you want an honorable and early transition to the fourth and last phase [when U.S. units can begin to phase down]. So do your sons and so do I. It lies within our grasp -- the enemy's hopes are bankrupt. With your support we will give you a success that will impact not only on South Vietnam but on every emerging nation in the world."[14]

In 1988 Westmoreland remembered:

> And then I was asked to come back that year, and I talked to the National Press Club and I emphasized that I had been trying to improve the military

> capabilities of the South Vietnamese army because I hoped that some day that they could take over battle. I was thinking in terms of two years or less that we would start that process, but it would be progressive and it would be consistent with their ability to take over certain segments of the battlefield. Well the press blew that all out of perspective ... of course that's (his plans to bring troops home) since been portrayed as being overly optimistic. A commander isn't going to espouse gloom and doom. He's going to be honest, but unless his army is about to crumble ... he's not going to take a pessimistic attitude .... They (the press) can make a statement such as ours -- which was a confidence statement -- but they played it up as really upbeat. And the American people then were given the impression we were about to end the war.[15]

But the war did not end. On January 31, 1968, at 3:00 a.m., the Viet Cong, under the direction of the North Vietnamese army, launched the Tet Offensive or the "Monkey Offensive," because it was initiated during the Tet holiday -- on the first day of the "Year of the Monkey." For two months, the commandos conducted a series of "go for broke" attacks against almost every major city and town in South Vietnam, including the American embassy in Saigon. The American news media seized the opportunity to make the offensive the "big story" of the Vietnam War, even though the scale of American losses was small.[16]

Westmoreland's optimistic progress reports were the first to be attacked by journalists who had been wary of government reports for several years. A February 19, 1968, *Newsweek* article said: "Both in Vietnam and in America all this (the events of the offensive) aroused searing doubts about U.S. strategy in the Vietnamese war and about the man entrusted with its execution -- Gen.William Westmoreland."[17]

A recent *Washington Post-Los Angeles Times* News Service report (on the twentieth anniversary of the offensive) said:

> Since then, the Tet offensive has been synonymous, at least symbolically, with American retreat and defeat, although the actual scorecard from the battlefield was quite different. In the ... campaign, communist forces lost an estimated 58,000 dead, compared with about 3,900 American and 4,900 South Vietnamese troop losses ... Two days after the offensive began, U.S and South Vietnamese troops had pushed the communists out of all places attacked except the ancient imperial citadel of Hue, which took longer to retake.[18]

The Tet Offensive did not shake Westmoreland's optimistic outlook or reports of progress.[19] His credibility was in serious question, however, as he made one of his optimistic reports to reporters

while standing in the rubble of the embassy headquarters. In his autobiography, Westmoreland said: "The fact that the enemy had decided to change his strategy 'to make a maximum effort on all fronts (political and military) in order to achieve victory in a short period of time,' did nothing to alter my estimates of progress. In the prior months of fighting, I had learned conclusively that it was when the enemy came out of hiding to make some major attack that American firepower could be brought to bear with tremendous effect...it would be the beginning, as I had told Neil Sheehan, of 'a great defeat for the enemy.'"[20]

In a recent interview, Westmoreland lamented: "I told them [the press] the day [after the offensive] that this was the beginning of a big defeat of the enemy -- and they laughed at me, they ridiculed me. Well I was right and they know it now. But when they realized I was right they never did have the integrity to admit [later] that they had misjudged it."[21]

Even though the Tet Offensive was a major setback for the enemy forces, they won -- in retrospect -- what has been termed a "psychological victory." The American people were weary and President Johnson was so worried about public opinion that he conceded that Tet was a

military failure before he knew the facts. According to Colonel Harry Summers Jr., a retired Army strategist and a syndicated columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*:

> (R)eporting of Tet 1968 did not differ materially from the initial doom-gloom-and-apocalypse headlines of earlier crises. The difference was that President Lyndon Johnson succumbed to them. Compare George Washington's reactions to the initial military reverses of the Revolutionary War, Franklin Roosevelt's to Pearl Harbor and the Battle of the Bulge and Harry Truman's to the Chinese intervention in Korea with Lyndon Johnson's reaction to Tet 1968. While the formers' will and determination -- and thereby the resolve of the American people -- were strengthened by adversity, Lyndon Johnson was psychologically defeated."[22]

But it took five more years, until 1973, before U.S. combat forces were removed and two more, until 1975, before the North Vietnamese regular forces captured all of South Vietnam.

Twenty Years Later

Just as few studies have failed to mention the effect of public opinion on the eventual outcome of the war, few studies have failed to link Westmoreland to

public opinion of the war. Also, the strained relationship between the media and the military during that time is usually brought into the discussions. Analysts of the Vietnam War have often cited public opinion and the news media as the culprits in destroying the reputations of both President Johnson and Westmoreland.[23]

Westmoreland left Vietnam to become Chief of Staff of the Army from 1968 until his retirement in 1972. Except for a failed bid to become governor of South Carolina in 1974, he faded from the public eye. The general's reputation was held up to public opinion again, however, when CBS "Special Reports" televised a ninety-minute documentary entitled "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," on January 23, 1982. The underlying theme of the documentary concerned conspiracy at the highest levels of military intelligence, and the chief conspirator, according to the script, was Westmoreland. The broadcast, which consisted largely of interviews by Mike Wallace, alleged that for each of the five months prior to the Tet Offensive Westmoreland concealed actual enemy troop strength figures and Viet Cong infiltration rates via the Ho Chi Minh Trail from members of Congress and the president. It also implied

that if these figures had not been suppressed that the Tet Offensive would not have been such a military surprise.[24] The general claimed the interviews caught him off guard.[25]

On September 13, 1982, Westmoreland filed a $120 million libel suit against CBS, Mike Wallace, George Crile, the producer, and Sam Adams, a former CIA agent who had acted as an analyst for the show. He said he wanted to clear his name and restore his honor.

On October 9, 1984, the trial commenced in the U.S. District Court in New York City. Many people viewed the CBS-Westmoreland confrontation as Vietnam -- at least the credibility of the government and the military -- being re-fought in the courtroom. Others worried about the possible "chilling effect" the trial would have on the future of journalism. The trial did bring these components of the Vietnam War back into the foreground: public opinion, military-media relations and Westmoreland. Therefore, this study asks, what kind of man did the sample press "see" in 1964-1968, and again two decades later in 1984-1985 and how did what they "saw" relate to public opinion about the Vietnam War in both decades?

CHAPTER TWO

PUBLIC OPINION, VIETNAM AND THE GENERAL

Public Opinion

Any discussion of public opinion requires a definition of what the term means. According to V.O. Key: "[T]o speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to terms with the Holy Ghost."[1] For purposes of this study, the term "public" refers to those portions of American society who have formed attitudes (opinions) about certain issues confronting the nation. In order for a significant sample of the American public to form opinions, the subjects of concern must be reasonably widespread, remain fairly stable and concern a significant portion of the population.[2] This study will look at widespread issues of public concern, such as the Vietnam War and the quality of its leaders, as measured by public opinion polls.

Popular versus Unpopular Wars

Almost every war in American history, with the

exception of World War II, has been unpopular with a sizable segment of the population. In the War of Independence, Tory Americans by the tens of thousands were hostile to the rebels and supported the redcoats by providing them with food and shelter.[3] Similarly, during the War of 1812, a large contingent of British loyalists were still active in the United States. New Englanders especially undermined President Madison's efforts to end Britain's interference with U.S. trade and invested freely in Britain.[4] During the Mexican War, many Americans opposed what they considered an unnecessary war and were incensed that President Polk had involved the United States in a war without congressional consent.[5] Many feared the spread of slavery -- rightly as it turned out.

During the Civil War, some of Abraham Lincoln's policies, such as the draft, were unpopular to the extent that they caused the ultimate public dissension -- a union divided by anti-draft mobs. During World War I, President Wilson and the Congress imposed espionage and sedition laws to curb opposition by Americans who disapproved of conscription.[6] In World War II, however, the bombing of Pearl Harbor unified the spirit of the American public, except for a few, and was the early basis for public support of the war. The Nazis did the

rest. Public opposition returned, however, during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. As discussed in chapter one, much of the public disagreement focused on the fact that neither conflict was a declared war and the presidential administrations conducting both wars had not convinced the American public that the wars were being conducted in the nation's best interest. Indeed, there is still disagreement about both wars.

According to Lawrence Abbot in his book Public Opinion in War, the American people will freely support a war that directly threatens the security of the nation, such as World War II. Because the public recognizes that certain liberties must be suppressed to support the war effort, it is more likely to restrict its own freedoms temporarily. According to Abbot: "They do not shudder at reports of the loss of thousands of lives of their fellow citizens in a victorious battle, as they would at the loss of scores in an accident in a mine or a flood in time of peace. They delight to work and deny themselves in a way they would otherwise think intolerable."[7]

But, Abbot explains, in wars that do not clearly threaten the nation's security and require utmost sacrifice of the American people (such as Vietnam),

opposition may be tolerated. "If the war is not for self preservation, does not involve the vital interests of the country, but is fought to extend or maintain exterior domination, men may openly disagree about the propriety of war as they do about questions of domestic policy that excite strong feelings. In such a case there may be no attempt to suppress opposition to the war by a force (such as action against treason)."[8] Such is the challenge of winning public opinion.

The Vietnam War -- Battle of the "Mindfield"

According to an article ir *Army* magazine, "The true arena of modern war is not the battlefield, but the 'mindfield'; that is, the real ... objective is always public opinion. The thoughts and feelings of people -- civilian as well as military, neutral as well as belligerent -- are the real determinants of the outcomes of wars. War is thus a public relations process, and the management of war is a full-spectrum manipulation of public opinion."[9]

The Vietnam War, according to some critics, was a classic case of the "mindfield" in action. Westmoreland argued that the war was not lost in the battlefield, but

at home, when the American public stopped supporting it. Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media (AIM) organization devotes itself to the theory that liberal reporting on the part of the "Big Media" undermines public opinion and, in one case, destroyed the reputation of a great general. Others have blamed broadcast journalism for bringing the Vietnam War into the living rooms of Americans and demoralizing them night after night while they watched the evening news.[10] In his controversial article "How to Lose a War," Robert Elegant, who was a foreign correspondent during the Vietnam War, accused the American press of being less objective than it should have been and of reporting against the government. The most-often quoted part of Elegant's article said:

> For the first time in modern history, the outcome of a war was determined not on the battlefield but on the printed page and, above all, on the television screen. Looking back coolly, I believe it can be said ... that South Vietnamese and American forces actually won the limited military struggle. ...
>
> Nonetheless, the war was finally lost to the invaders *after* the U.S. disengagement because the political pressure built up by the media made it quite impossible for Washington to maintain even the minimal material and moral support that would have enabled the Saigon regime to continue effective resistance.[11]

The press, however, may have been reflecting what Americans were feeling about the war all along. Even though statistics concerning the public's confidence in American institutions, such as the military, have been published since the early '60s, statistics concerning public opinion about military policy specifically, are non-existent. The reason for this, according to Bernard C. Cohen, is that "polling agencies have asked relatively few questions about military policies; the only area that has been more or less regularly explored is disarmament, and that is so overlaid with emotion and mood as to be an uncertain guide to the larger arena of military policies."[12] Cohen also pointed out that this exclusion by opinion researchers reflected what pollsters saw as important and also reflected the lack of American consensus on military policy that existed since World War II.

Public Opinion During General Westmoreland's Watch

Twenty-five years ago, pollsters started gauging public support of the Vietnam War. It is interesting to note, as Louis Harris pointed out in a 1963 article, that "despite the wide attention given the attacks on Buddhists, the pronouncements of fiery Mrs. Nhu, and the

heavy American investment in lives, money and prestige in Viet-Nam, more than one in three Americans (35 per cent) confess that they simply haven't followed the situation there."[13] General Westmoreland agreed with that assessment, without even looking at the polls. When asked recently about his thoughts upon first taking command in Vietnam he said: "[When] I first arrived there in early January 1964 it was back-page news. As a matter of fact when I was ordered over to Vietnam the president didn't even want to see me -- at least didn't ask to see me."[14] Such was the earliest presidential interest. But that interest would grow.

In the early days of the war, of those people who had opinions about the Vietnam involvement, however, Harris reported that 77 percent supported the U.S. policy in Vietnam, and 69 percent would favor sending troops if the situation worsened. By September 1963, however, support in both areas had dropped slightly to 72 percent and 64 percent, respectively.

A Harris survey conducted in March 1964, just before the Gulf of Tonkin crisis, indicated that in less than one year, American support for U.S. policy in Vietnam had dropped to 56 percent.[15] This indicated, according to Harris, that "administration policies in Vietnam are

treading a cautious tightrope, fraught with much doubt, but also with no clear alternative."[16]

In August 1964, when the North Vietnamese were accused of attacking U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin -- an attack we today are not sure actually took place[17] -- the American people rallied to support President Johnson in the moment of crisis. According to George Gallup, in his report "Public Opinion and the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," a "substantial majority of the public backed the Johnson administration that first fall and winter, but few were hopeful even at that early point about a satisfactory solution to the war."[18]

When the Johnson administration started widespread bombing of North Vietnam in retaliation to Communist raids in South Vietnam, 59 percent of the American public Harris polled approved of the bombing (in another "rally round the flag" phenomenon), and 61 percent of the public said it would support sending more troops to the war.[19] According to a Gallup poll conducted at the same time, the public stood behind the president because it believed he was doing everything he could to stop the fighting.[20] This attitude prevailed, Gallup reported, even though student anti-war demonstrations had increased considerably by that time.

In January 1966, according to Gallup opinion data, 56 percent of the American people still supported the U.S. policies in Vietnam, even though they could not "fix" when the war would end.[21] From 1966 until 1967, both Harris and Gallup opinion data agreed that while a majority of Americans backed U.S. policy in Vietnam, less than a majority (only 37 percent by May 1967) approved of the way President Johnson was handling the war. This -- in retrospect -- was the beginning of a downward trend for the president's popularity with the American people. Both pollsters also agreed that the public was disenchanted with the president's promises for a quick end to fighting each year, just to have its hopes dashed the next year.

It is interesting to note that prior to Tet, while Johnson's popularity declined, and the popularity of his administration officials declined proportionally, Westmoreland's popularity did not suffer. According to special December 1967 Harris survey about the role of civilians and the military in running the war, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara had a 42 percent negative rating from the American public on the way he was handling his post, while Westmoreland earned a 68 percent positive rating on the way he carried out his assignment as commanding general in Vietnam.[22] In the newspaper article describing the survey, Harris said:

> It is clear from the results that the American people are not particularly concerned at this juncture over keeping a strong civilian authority over the Pentagon. ...
>
> By 52 to 34 per cent the public feels that in wartime "civilian government leaders should let the military take over running the war." ...
>
> By a heavy 65 to 10 per cent the people feel that "in Vietnam the military has been handicapped by civilians who won't let them go all out." ...
>
> The ratings accorded McNamara and Westmoreland suggest a public inclination to take out policy disagreements on the civilians vested with defense responsibilities and to give immunity to military leaders in the field. ...
>
> In the case of Westmoreland, a majority accord him a favorable rating regardless of their position on the war. However, the general received his highest marks from hawks and his lowest from doves.[23]

Harris did not mention the possible effect Westmoreland's April and November 1967 visits and addresses to Congress and the National Press Club might have had on the outcome of the public's opinion of him.

The January-February 1968 Tet Offensive represented a major turning point for public opinion about the war. For a brief time after the offensive Americans supported the war, as they had for the Tonkin and bombing incidents in the past. In fact, a Harris poll conducted just after the offensive indicated that 74 percent of the American public supported the war, up 13 percentage points from a December 1967 survey.[24] But within one month after the

offensive, according to another Harris survey, support for the war had dropped to 54 percent -- still a majority, but a drop of 20 percentage points in one month.[25] According to the Harris report: "Immediately on the heels of the Tet offensive came a rallying of the people behind the war effort. The sober, second assessment of the public about that engagement has now led a majority of 60 percent to believe the Tet offensive was at best a stand-off, or even a defeat for the American cause."[26]

Perhaps even more interesting is the second assessment by the American public of the job Westmoreland was doing. In the same one-month-post-Tet survey, the polls indicated that Westmoreland's popularity had dropped from a 68 percent positive response to a 52 percent positive response. This indicated, if Harris' earlier observations were true, that after Tet, the American public started to view military leadership as linked to the presidential administration.

Gallup opinion data from the same period reflected similar results (with the exception of a Westmoreland question), but Gallup went one step further with his observations, He noticed that after Tet the proportion of "hawks" to "doves" in the country had changed. Gallup

reported: "Up until the time of the offensive, 'hawks' in this country had outnumbered 'doves' by 2-to-1. The Tet offensive, which initially increased the number of 'hawks' who wanted to 'strike back,' later contributed to a massive swing to the 'dove' side."[27] In specific figures, in Gallup's October 1968 survey, 44 percent of the respondents considered themselves "hawks" and 42 percent "doves." By November 1969, however, only 31 percent considered themselves "hawks" and 55 percent "doves."[28] This shifting of loyalties may have accounted for the shift of public opinion away from Westmoreland. By way of explanation, according to John Mueller, a "hawk" is someone who approves of the use of force to solve international problems, while a "dove" is someone who advocates peaceful resistance instead.[29] Westmoreland, by profession, was a "hawk," however loose such terms are.

Another important public opinion-related event took place shortly after the Tet Offensive. President Johnson's popularity reached an all-time low, and he decided not to run for re-election in that year's presidential race.

According to the authors of The Dynamics of Public Opinion, the Tet Offensive served as a catalyst for a

downward trend in American public opinion of the war. The authors did not blame the Tet Offensive but rather added it to a growing list of other factors which caused dissent. As the American public received more information about problems with the conflict and as reports of anti-war protest grew, the negative attitudes were also a reflection of beliefs about domestic instability and the international and economic ramifications of the war. According to the book: "Thus, central beliefs involving patriotism and support for United States war efforts began to be offset by other salient core beliefs. The result was a weakening of commitment to the Vietnam War effort."[30]

Although the change of presidents in 1969 served to bolster American hopes temporarily, by the end of that year, 60 percent of those polled said they thought the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a mistake -- as compared to only about 23 percent in 1965. Although a minority (36 percent) favored complete withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Vietnam, President Nixon's popularity rose when he started bringing "the boys" home in 1969. By 1970 and 1971, media attention and attention of the pollsters turned to other subjects -- an indication of the

war-weariness of the American public. It was in this public-opinion setting that the all-American general, William C. Westmoreland, was in command in Vietnam from 1964 until 1968.

Although public opinion of the war and the presidential administration declined steadily in the years of Westmoreland's tour of command in Vietnam, the public's opinion of him remained fairly stable. Even though his popularity dipped after the Tet Offensive, a majority of the public polled still gave him high marks. This may be attributed to news magazine coverage of the general in the '60s, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VIETNAM WAR: NEWS MEDIA CHARACTERIZATIONS OF GENERAL WESTMORELAND 1964-1968

The "Inevitable General"

Almost every characterization of Westmoreland makes the observation that he was the kind of person who was "born to be a general." Westmoreland was born on March 26, 1914, in Saxon, South Carolina, to an upper-middle-class family. His father was businessman and a banker, and his mother had come from a well-known Columbia family.[1]

While growing up in Spartanburg, Westmoreland was always athletic and well-liked. As a teenager, he was an Eagle Scout and was Spartanburg's representative to the Boy Scout World Jamboree in Europe. It was while traveling in Europe that Westmoreland decided the military might be a good way for him to see the world. After graduating from Spartanburg High, where he was class president, Westmoreland went to the Citadel, his

father's alma mater. He was successful there, both in leadership and academics, ranking 33rd in a freshman class of 169.[2]

He realized that attendance at one of *the* service academies -- West Point or Annapolis (Air Force came later) -- would be better for a career in the military, so after one year at the Citadel, he asked a senator who was a family friend for an appointment to Annapolis.

The senator convinced Westmoreland that the Army would offer a better life and instead appointed him to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Once again, Westmoreland excelled, but not so much in academics as leadership. Despite the fact that he finished academically with an average class ranking, he ranked eighth in his class in tactics. He also achieved the rank of "First Captain" of his class, marking him the senior-ranking cadet in the Class of '36. Upon graduation, Westmoreland chose field artillery as his specialty. Although he did not advance rapidly for his first four years in the Army, World War II changed that.

By the time he was 28, he was a lieutenant colonel and commanded an artillery battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He volunteered his unit for attachment to the elite 82d Airborne Division, and it accompanied the

division for the D-Day invasion at Normandy. When he returned from the war, he became a full colonel, branch-transferred to the infantry and became chief of staff of the 9th Division. Later, Major General Jim Gavin, who had led the D-Day jump into Normandy, offered Westmoreland command of one of the regiments in the 82d Airborne Division. He seized the opportunity.[3]

Westmoreland had purposely avoided serious romantic involvements while his career was on the rise. Ironically, however, while he was commanding the regiment of infantrymen (with an average age of about 20), he was courting a 19-year-old college student and Army "brat" named Kitsy Van Dusen. Her father was also a West Pointer. His biographer, Ernest Furgurson, pointed out how comical it must have looked to see a combat hero in a dormitory lobby at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, waiting for his girl to come down.[4] He married Kitsy in 1947, when he was chief of staff of the 82d Airborne Division.

In 1952, Westmoreland was hand-picked for another challenging job. He was to command the only airborne unit participating in the Korean War. After his return, he earned his first star, which made him a brigadier general at 38. From there he went on to other important

positions, to include secretary of the general staff for the chief of staff of the Army. At 42, he became the youngest-ever major general, and he commanded both the 101st and 82d Airborne Divisions. After promotion to lieutenant general in 1960, he was superintendant of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and then commanding general of the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg. It was from this position that Westmoreland was pulled to take on his post in Vietnam in 1964. His new command was to be his most challenging.[5]

According to David Halberstam, in his book, The Best and the Brightest, President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara were both impressed with Westmoreland. Johnson liked the fact that Westmoreland had come from the West Point assignment. He felt it would help him in his training mission with the South Vietnamese. Maxwell Taylor, former Army chief of staff and the current ambassador to Vietnam, recommended Westmoreland for the job because of his airborne background. Halberstam said: "So it was Westmoreland who was chosen, a good, hard-working man, supremely conventional, supremely confident, classically managerial in style, not a man of subtlety. Rather the corporate general, chosen for the

most complex war this country had ever fought. It would be a summation of the letter-perfect career."6 Or it perhaps could have been.

What is a Combat Leader?

Before one can analyze characterizations of a general in a combat leadership role, one should define the role of the officer in the civil-military state and the classical Army definitions of leadership. According to Samuel P. Huntington in his book The Soldier and the State, "The officer corps is the active directing element of the military structure and is responsible for the military security of society. ... The social and economic relations between the military and the rest of society normally reflect the political relations between the officer corps and the state."[7] Huntington would probably argue that Johnson's selection of Westmoreland as Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was a logical reflection of what society of the 1960s demanded. Officership as a profession is to ultimately take responsibility for the safety of society by successfully managing violence. Successful management of violence requires a certain kind of combat leader.

In 1984, the Military Personnel Center in Washington, D.C., asked the Military History Division of the Department of History at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to conduct a study of combat leadership. The purpose of the study was to define the characteristics of a successful combat leader, so that those qualities could be taught Army-wide in officer professional development classses. The study team collected more than two hundred examples of combat leadership, which included incidents in warfare throughout recorded history, from all areas of the world. Examples were also gathered from all wars involving the United States from the American Revolution through Vietnam. The team identified several salient characteristics of successful combat leadership. In almost every case study, the successful leaders possessed certain common qualities. According to the study:

> Successful leaders were firmly in control of their units and were recognized as such by all concerned. They were almost always physically fit, in the sense of being conditioned for strenuous exertion. This fitness enhanced their image of being "the man in charge." The successful leader somehow had the ability always to be at the decisive point on the ground he was most needed to influence the action. ...
>
> The successful leader had a particular facility for planning in detail,

> assessing a changing situation, and continually assimilating large quantities of often conflicting data. ... Successful leaders required aggressiveness, audacity, and vigorous execution from their subordinates, and both they and their soldiers refused to accept defeat. ... The units commanded by successful leaders keyed on the leader and took on the leader's confidence and spirit.[8]

These characteristics should be kept in mind when considering the characterizations of Westmoreland throughout the rest of this study. Where important, words and phrases used in articles about the general will be italicized when it is apparent that their use was to highlight the tone of the characterization.

Westmoreland: Symbol of America to War

When Westmoreland went to Vietnam on June 20, 1964, he was a lieutenant general and served as assistant to incumbent General Paul D Harkins. Even after Harkins' retirement later that year, Westmoreland served as an "understudy" to Ambassador Taylor. The news magazines gave him only a brief look. A *U.S. News & World Report* article called him "the new man in charge of America's role in the war in South Vietnam,"[9] as if both the man

and the conflict were unheard of to its readers. The article only took one-half of a page. It briefly discussed possible strategic changes that might take place under Westmoreland and then briefly characterized Westmoreland. It said: "He is known to place high importance on the need for co-ordinated civilian-military action in the jungle war. The General is known as an *aggresive* and *practical* professional."[10] The remainder of the article described Westmoreland's biographical history, such as his class standing at West Point and fast rise to the highest levels of the Army, and it speculated that all indicators pointed to future successes.

Westmoreland was no longer "back-page news" after he was selected as *Time's* "Man of the Year" for 1966. In the January 7, 1966, article commemorating the selection, *Time* spent seven pages describing the battles, living conditions and people Westmoreland commanded or influenced. It very eloquently recognized ways that Americans had helped the South Vietnamese people, including one officer's effort to raise funds from his home state to get an orphanage started. The article devoted only a few paragraphs to describing Westmoreland *the man*, but it was the longest in terms of describing Westmoreland that *Time* produced during the general's tour of duty. It said:

As commander of all U.S. forces in South Viet Nam, General William Childs Westmoreland, 51, directed the historic buildup, drew up the battle plans, and infused the 190,000 men under him with his own idealistic view of U.S. aims and responsibilities. He was the *sinewy personification* of the American fighting man of 1965 who, through the monsoon mud of nameless hamlets, amidst the swirling sand of seagirt enclaves, atop the jungled mountains of the Annamese Cordillera, served as the instrument of U.S. policy, quietly enduring the terror and discomfort of a conflict that was not yet a war, on a battlefield that was all no man's land. ...

There is an almost *machinelike singlemindedness* about him. His most vehement cuss words are "darn" and "dad-gum." A *jut-jawed six footer*, he never smokes, drinks little, swims and plays tennis to remain at a *flat-bellied 180 lbs* -- only 10 lbs over his cadet weight. ...

In the command he inherited, Westmoreland wears more hats than Hedda Hopper. He has the politically sensitive job of top U.S. adviser to South Viet Nam's armed forces and boss of the 6,000-odd U.S. advisers attached to Vietnamese units. As commander ... he has under him all U.S. servicemen (of all branches of the military) ... in the country. ...

To keep this vast establishment running, Westmoreland heeds -- and invariably exceeds -- the advice he gives newcomers to Viet Nam: "Work like the very devil. A seven-day, 60-hour week is the very minimum for this course."

Rising at 6:30 ... Westmoreland does 25 push-ups and a few isometric exercises, usually breakfasts alone. ... At his desk by 7:30, he rarely leaves it before nightfall, even then lugs home a fat briefcase. ...

General Westmoreland tries valiantly to meet as many of his men as he possibly can.[11]

A 1966 Newsweek article written eleven months later provided similar descriptions of the Vietnam conflict and the man in charge. In fact, it actually characterized him as a redeemer who brought South Vietnam out of a chaotic state following the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem -- an assassination which officials in the Kennedy administration may have "allowed."[12] The article said:

> The man who succeeded in transforming this impending tragedy into a now-conceivable triumph is Gen. William Childs Westmoreland. ...
>
> A *courtly Carolinian* whose *ruggedly handsome features* belie his 52 years, Westmoreland now leads a bigger expeditionary force than the U.S. had in Korea: 360,000 men. And though he operates at the end of a long chain of command that extends all the way back to the White House, "Westy" Westmoreland is unquestionably the *major architect of American strategy* in South Vietnam. Indeed, he was chosen for his post precisely because he was widely acclaimed by his colleagues to be one of the four or five outstanding officers in the U.S. Army. ...
>
> For Westmoreland stands squarely in the greatest and most enduring U.S. military tradition. Like Winfield Scott, Ulysses Grant and Dwight Eisenhower before him, he eschews the romantic, hell-for-leather approach to war and, instead sees it essentially a problem of

> engineering, a task of patiently massing overwhelmingly superior resources against a stated objective.
>
> (In a description of a specific military operation): During all this time, General Westmoreland seemed to be everywhere at once. Dressed in smartly starched jungle fatigues and a peaked baseball cap emblazoned with four stars, he has made it a point to inspect his troops in the field at least three times a week. On these trips, he arrives in a swirl of drama as soldiers from privates to majors push aside whatever they may be doing and throw out their chests to receive their commanding general. And *commanding he is*. Before making his pep talk, *he plants himself firmly in front of his men, cocks his hands on his hips, arches his neck so that his firm jaw seems even firmer -- and looks for all the world like the personification of the belligerent American eagle.*[13]

For comparison purposes, *Look* and *Life* magazines ran very similar articles in 1966. It was a very good year for Westmoreland in the popular magazines. The *Look* article said:

> He commuted to the action, some 125,000 miles a year inside Vietnam alone. He spends four days a week in the field with his troops, making a circuit of all his major units every two weeks. Even privates are used to seeing him bound in almost anywhere.
>
> As United States commander and senior military adviser in South

> Vietnam, he directs more than 300,000 Americans and influences virtually everybody else there. *Such responsibility would erode someone who was softer, fatter or weaker.* He tackles it by working all day, every day. ...
>
> He is *too dignified for a real nickname*. His men call him "Westy," but not often. *Like Caeser in a far corner of Gaul, he has bound their isolation into a spirit of elite brotherhood*. Any compliments he gets he accepts absently as really meant for those who serve under him. ...
>
> Privates have a knack for cutting through the glitter and ribbons of rank to see if anybody's really there. "Most generals are just generals," a youngster in the 101st once noted. "But General Westmoreland, he's a *commanding* general."[14]

The *Life* article even characterized Westmoreland in its title: "Westmoreland: The Four-Star Eagle Scout." And author Don Moser said:

> Before seeing him at work, one's first impression of General William Childs Westmoreland, code name Antelope, commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam and chief architect of our strategy there, is that he somehow got immersed in the wrong war. In this modern and political conflict, *Westmoreland is so strikingly uncontemporary that meeting him is a little like stumbling across a live dinosaur*. His manners are *courtly*. He speaks in a Carolinian drawl and often with an archaic formality of phrasing. *He is methodical rather than clever, organized rather than*

intellectual, and outside of military affairs no one has ever called him sophisticated.

In a notably dirty conflict he is clean cut as Tom Mix: he drinks sparingly, smokes not at all, gets plenty of exercise and is no more inclined to profanity than, say, Tarzan. ...

All of his *characteristics* would have seemed *appropriate for,* say *Robert E. Lee or the Knights of the Round Table,* but scarcely for the man who will determine whether we will win, lose or draw in Vietnam. ...

Westmoreland *generates an aura of command* so tangible one can almost feel it. ... He is *square-jawed, with a lean but powerful physique* and the kind of *dark steady eyes* which are always called "piercing" when possessed by detective-novel heroes. The *deep-set eyes and the heavy brows and the clean profile give him the appearance of a goshawk on the lookout for prey, and he is invariably so immaculate that he makes other people feel a little grubby. ...*

For all his personal conservatism and go-by-the-book appearance, Westmoreland despises military doctrine, and *as a combat commander he has the instincts of a riverboat card shark. ...*

Always Westmoreland *drives himself and quietly but firmly prods everyone around him.* Taking over in Vietnam, he quickly inaugurated for the whole command what weary subordinates call the *Westmoreland Week* -- they're on the job seven days and put in a minimum of sixty hours. ...

(In a description of the general's jaunts around the Vietnam countryside): At another camp he gets involved in an abstruse discussion with a baker over the composition of his dough, talking about it so knowledgeably that one would think he'd spent the

> best years of his life up to his elbows in bread mix. *He has the capacity for remembering every trivial bit of information that might come in handy,* and one suspects that if challenged to dredge up skills from his Boy Scout days, he could still toss off a bowline on a bight or stir up a pitcher of pink lemonade from a mess of staghorn sumac.[15]

It is interesting to note that while Moser and the others were praising the general for his tidiness of mind, body and spirit, Halberstam noticed that Westmoreland's presence in Vietnam meant something more. In The Best and the Brightest he said: "The face was strong and sharp and finally clean, Westy was something clean. It was not surprising that as the war dragged on and became messier and messier, the Administration and the prowar media turned more and more to Westmoreland as a symbol of the U.S. presence, something clean in a very messy war."[16]

Until Westmoreland returned to the United States to give his "progress report" in April 1967, the news magazines covered the conflict, not the commander. Within a three-day period in May, however, all three magazines covered his speech to Congress. *Time* and *Newsweek* used their articles not only to discuss the speech, but also to describe the speaker. The three-page *U.S. News & World Report* article was simply a transcript of important parts of the speech. The *Time* article said:

This was no MacArthur, moving Congress to tears at the end of a distinguished career with his threnody, "Old soldiers never die. ..." Nor was this an Eisenhower, home from his triumphant crusade in Europe to accept the lustrous tributes of the nation's lawmakers. This was a commander whose battle is far from finished, on leave from his post to report on a divisive, hotly debated and unpopular war.

He will never be treated as a demigod, as was the charismatic MacArthur, *and he is not yet a hero,* as was Ike when he returned from Europe in 1945. Yet (from the moment he was introduced), *the tall, tanned soldier* held Congress in thrall. *He was the paradigm of the professional military man -- dark hair fringed with grey, jaw square and trim, brown eyes alert under thick brown brows. His tunic was ablaze with the trophies of three wars --six tiers of campaign ribbons and medals from battles in North Africa and Sicily, France and Germany, Korea and Viet Nam, as well as the silver emblem of the master parachutist and the combat infantryman's badge.* His very presence in the House was unprecedented. ...

As straightforward as he is straight-backed, he delivered a speech that was strong but not strident, emphatic without being emotional. ...

(When he was finished speaking), [H]e turned to Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Speaker John McCormack on the dias behind him and saluted. Turning back toward the semicircular rows of seats, he saluted three times more -- to those on his left, to those in front of him, and tothose on his right.

It was a gesture that came instinctively to him after 31 years as an officer, but as a symbol of deference by a military man to the civilian representatives, it was also politically astute. ...

> Westmoreland's tribute to the Negro G.I. before an audience of Deep South legislators was very characteristic of him -- and of the traits that have won him Lyndon Johnson's respect. ...
>
> Johnson considers Westmoreland "the very best man" for the job in Viet Nam and believes he will *one day be rated as a truly great general.*[17]

The *Newsweek* article followed the same tone the *Time* article set. In addition to running several pictures of Westmoreland, which included one of him as a teen-age Eagle Scout and one in front of his soldiers in Vietnam. The article said:

> Never before had an American military commander been summoned from the battle-front in the midst of the war to make a personal report for the people. ...
>
> And so, with Lyndon Johnson stage-managing from the wings, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, *resplendent in an immaculately pressed uniform, his chest ablaze with six decks of combat ribbons and citations,* stood at the speaker's rostrum ... to address a joint session of Congress.
>
> There was no ambiguity and little eloquence in Westmoreland's report on the war. In marked contrast to the theatrics of Douglas MacArthur in the same chamber sixteen years before, *he spoke with the unpolished simplicity of a battlefield leader who had come not to challenge his Commander in Chief's policy, but to drum up backing for it.* (This is the article quoted in chapter one that said critics thought Johnson was exploiting his war hero for public relations purposes). ...

> To the President's way of thinking, William Childs Westmoreland was just the man to help buttress the home-front war that Walter Lippmann last week flatly termed "the most unpopular war" in American history.
>
> *Westmoreland's rugged good looks and courtly military manner, it was felt, would dramatize the quality of the American fighting men in Vietnam; his very appearance would evoke a sense of loyalty and patriotism, and his position would give added authority to the reasons why the White House believes this war is being won.*
>
> Uncomfortable as he was in the limelight, Westmoreland did all he could to accomplish his mission. ...
>
> General Westmoreland carries in his pocket a card listing seven reasons why the U.S. will eventually lose the war -- as set forth by North Vietnam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap. The American commander feels he has coped with all but two of these: U.S. opinion and world opinion. *The field commander has come home to convert the doubters and firm up the convictions of the Administration's supporters.*[18]

Westmoreland's second trip home in November 1967 to speak to the Press Club did not receive any immediate coverage by the news magazines, but the optimism he displayed was mentioned in the magazines' assessments of his role in the Tet Offensive. Once again, a significant event produced a series of similar articles. This time, the articles characterized and criticized the general. For the newest series of articles, *U.S. News & World Report* ran two short pieces and *Time* and *Newsweek* each ran one long article. The first *U.S. News & World Report* (February 12, 1968) article said:

> If the course of the war in Vietnam is grinding to a climax -- as the signs indicate -- *it is the career of Gen. William C. Westmoreland that, more and more, is seen as hanging in the balance. Up to now, General Westmoreland has been almost untouchable as a target of criticism.*
>
> *As the hero of Vietnam, he has been marked as a future Chief of Staff of the Army.* In the tradition of an Eisenhower or a MacArthur, he has played the role of "field marshal" on a major battleground. ...
>
> *Now, with the war getting rough... (questions are being raised by government officials)...They are being raised, too by more Americans who wonder if what they read in news reports and see on their television screens really show that the war is going as well as General Westmoreland has said it is. ...*
>
> There are officers in the U.S. high command ... who also are unhappy about Westmoreland's basic strategy. They see a *possibility of a significant change in that strategy if General Westmoreland* is replaced in Vietnam. Such a change could come in the natural course of military events, without reflecting Administration displeasure with the General.
>
> Boiled down, *the controversy is not over a personality. Rather it is between two opposing strategies to win the limited objectives of the U.S. in Vietnam. But it is the strategy of the commander on the spot -- General Westmoreland -- that is the more likely to have the acid test of success or failure on the field of battle.*[19]

The second U.S. News & World Report article (February 26, 1968) said:

> General William C. Westmoreland, directing the war front in Vietnam, has had a "second front" opened against him -- in Washington. *Criticism of the way General Westmoreland is running the war is coming more and more into the open. Suggestions are voiced that he be recalled....*
>
> *Defenders of the General outnumber his attackers -- and occupy higher positions of power.*
>
> President Johnson, at a news conference February 16, gave the General unqualified backing.[20]

The article went on to outline the specific strategy criticism charges against Westmoreland and provided some pro-Westmoreland and anti-Westmoreland quotes from members of Congress.

The *Time* article said:

> Inevitably, *a new wave of criticism washed over the Capital -- and for the first time a good deal of it spilled onto General William C. Westmoreland, the handsome U.S. commander in Viet Nam for nearly four years.* Some of the criticism was aimed at his consistently sanguine estimates of a struggle that has grown increasingly sanguinary. But more was directed at the overall strategy and conduct of the war. ...
>
> Despite the *undercurrent of criticism directed at Westmoreland, Johnson retains a strong faith in his abilities. ... Westmoreland's peers, too, give him high marks for certain aspects of his performance in Viet Nam.* (Here the article

> discussed positive aspects of his strategies and praised him for his logistical genius).
>
> *Westmoreland is most often faulted on two counts: 1) over-optimistic statements, and 2) faulty intelligence about the enemy.* (The article discussed the optimism Westoreland displayed just after the offensive) ... But the White House found his optimism in the midst of carnage a trifle embarrassing. Privately, Johnson last week ordered the general to tone it down. ...
>
> *To some experts, Westmoreland's prime weakness as a commander ... is the opposite of the late Douglas MacArthur's. He is too willing to accept orders from Washington without fighting for his own views. ...*
>
> "This emphatically is not 'Westmoreland's War,' observes *Time* Washington Bureau Chief John Steele. "In years past it has been quite properly referred to as 'McNamara's War,' and currently it can be referred to as 'Johnson's War.' "*From no source is there real criticism yet of Westy's military activities." ... Undoubtedly, history's judgment of Westmoreland's generalship will depend in large measure on the outcome of the expected Khe Sanh battle.*[21]

Contrary to what one might suspect, from the articles studied so far, Westmoreland was not being blamed for the Tet Offensive. Rather, his reputation, according to the last article, was to be judged against his success or failure at Khe Sanh, where the Marines held a static defense post from January 27 to April 7, 1968.[22] Westmoreland's future was probably linked by some to Khe Sanh because "(n)o event during the Tet period was to stimulate more sustained journalistic output,

particularly in terms of TV film, still photographs, and 'news analysis,' than the NVA's [North Vietnamese Army] 77-day seige of the U.S. Marine Combat Base at Khe Sanh, in the mountainous northwest corner of South Vietnam. Khe Sanh was the most important continuing story during Tet."[23] The NVA did stage a series of small attacks against the outpost, but not nearly to the extent expected. Finally the NVA forces quietly withdrew.

The "story" of Khe Sanh, however, was how much it resembled the disaster suffered by the French garrison of Dienbienphu in 1954.[24] The facts were that although the Marines did suffer losses, they were only a small fraction of those suffered by other U.S. units during the Tet period. Also, no disaster occurred -- as had happened at Dienbienphu -- and the Marines pulled out.[25] To heighten the drama, President Johnson has been reported as having been obsessed with the connection being drawn between Khe Sanh and Dienbienphu, and according to Westmoreland in a 1988 interview, pressured the general to focus on the action there. Perhaps it was fortunate for Westmoreland's reputation that nothing disastrous happened at Khe Sanh.

The *Newsweek* article after the Tet Offensive said:

As they contemplated this savage combat in cities that they had been told were impregnably defended, many *Americans had a sense of having been hoodwinked.* And in an upsurge of national self-doubt, they asked themselves how the U.S. had ever stumbled into such a reverse. *Inevitably, some sought a scapegoat on whom to pin the blame. And just as inevitably, the figure most conveniently at hand was the commander on the spot, General William Childs Westmoreland. ...*

Westmoreland's initial decision (to bring large numbers of American troops into Vietnam) was no doubt forced on him by events, and probably averted imminent defeat. But it also had some unfortunate consequences. ...

What's more, *while Westmoreland's style of leadership goes down extremely well with U.S. troops, he never seemed really at home with the introspective Vietnamese character. ...*

For all his background as an airborne commander, in fact, Westmoreland's conception of warfare in Vietnam has proved relatively unconventional. ... This, critics say, has often led to an excessive reliance on technology rather than military ingenuity. ...

Westmoreland appears, at least for now, to have been placed in a major predicament. ... As a result, he has come under increasing criticism for pursuing a strategy that attempts too many things at once. ...

Even Westmoreland's severist critics, however, admit that responsibility for the shape of U.S. military policy in Vietnam is by no means his alone. ... Moreover, every influential U.S. official has only the highest praise for Westmoreland himself -- even off the record.

Says one Washington insider: "There is an absolutely universal feeling among the President, Rusk, McNamara and General Wheeler that Westmoreland is the best military leader this country could put out there."

> Indeed, when he returns home (probably this summer) it will almost surely be to a promotion to Army Chief of Staff -- or even to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. ... *But whatever the close-knit fraternity of officials in Washington and Saigon may say, it seems clear that ordinary Americans are likely to grow increasingly skeptical of both Westmoreland and of U.S. strategy in Vietnam.*[26]

The primary strategy the articles were commenting on was Westmoreland's "search-and-destroy" strategy that he employed early in the war. The idea behind the strategy was to seek out and destroy enemy forces at their base camps and destroy supply areas in the jungles and mountains, away from populated areas. This strategy would "keep the enemy off balance, as well as to preempt his attack plans and prevent him from returning to the populated areas. Behind this screen the South Vietnamese forces would operate in the more populated areas."[27] This strategy was selected over two other possible strategies, which would have involved a joint-service effort.

Successful employment of search-and-destroy missions would require use of American ground forces, thereby giving the primary resonsibility of the war to the U.S. Army and effectively denying Republic of Vietnam forces participation until the Viet Cong had been seriously crippled. The criticisms of this strategy centered on

its futility and the conventional wisdom behind it -- the enemy forces were able to quickly rebuild their losses and turn to alternate means of supply.[28] But Westmoreland was a conventional officer chosen for an unconventional war.

The final articles about Westmoreland during his tour in command concerned his departure in June 1968 to become the Army chief of staff. Some of the newspaper reports and other magazines of the day characterized his move as one consistent with Laurence J. Peter's "Peter Principle" which says: "In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence."[29] But, according to Furgurson's biography, President Johnson had selected Westmoreland for the position in December 1967, two months prior to Tet. All three of the news magazines under study covered Westmoreland's departure, but only Newsweek gave it more than one page. The *Time* article was very brief and made no characterizations worth mentioning. The *U.S. News & World Report* article said:

> *Gen. William C. Westmoreland is to be relieved as U.S. commander in Vietnam and given a new job that critics of his war strategy are interpreting as "a kick upstairs." ...*
>
> The Westmoreland shift is part of a top-level reassessment of the war now going on in Washington. ...
>
> Sources in the Pentagon also insist that the President has become increasingly sensitive to mounting criticism of the

> Westmoreland strategy in Vietnam -- and the lack of results. ... (but) As recently as February 16, Mr. Johnson told newsmen: "If I had to select a man to lead me in battle in Vietnam, I would want General Westmoreland. I have no plan for him to leave."[30]

Although the *Newsweek* article was more comprehensive concerning what Westmoreland had done in Vietnam, it did not have much to say about his character. It said:

> Throughout the final week, Westmoreland assured his men that they were winning the war, that "our side is getting stronger while the enemy is getting weaker." ...
> *But when he had to face his old nemesis, the Saigon press corps, for one last time, Westy was led to modify his rosy appraisal.*[31]

Analysis of these articles indicates that Westmoreland was able to conduct the war in Vietnam under fairly favorable coverage by the major news magazines -- certainly in the early years. It was only after the confusing Tet Offensive -- battles seemed to be everywhere -- the magazines frequently started to report criticisms of Westmoreland. Still, the reporters stayed away from printing their own criticisms of the general. This is quite remarkable, considering the fact that in a content analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* in the month of the offensive and in the two months following, Peter

Braestrup found that both of the magazines had turned to negative reporting about the conflict itself.[32] According to Braestrup: "In sum, both magazines, as did other media, devoted much attention to the negative events of February, adding a heavy dose of speculation and analysis. Then editors in both magazines began to focus on other, more dramatic matters [such as rioting in American cities and the assassination of Martin Luther King], cutting Vietnam coverage after the first week of March. *Time*, after its March 15 issue, began to strike a rough balance in negative and positive statements; *Newsweek* remained heavily negative throughout the two-month Tet period."[33]

Another factor about the coverage that probably merits exploration is the quality of the reports -- assuming that the length of the stories in each magazine reflected quality. The *Time* articles were the most detailed and ran from three to five pages, with *Newsweek's* running a close second, with two to three-page articles. The *U.S. News & World Report* articles only averaged about one page per article. This disparity in coverage may be somewhat related to the number of reporters each magazine had in the field in Vietnam. *Time* had six full-time reporters; *Newsweek* had two

full-time reporters and two stringers; whereas *U.S. News & World Report* only had one full-time reporter in Vietnam.[34]

Westmoreland was neither a hero nor a villain following his tour of command in Vietnam, which was probably a mixed blessing for him. He was surely disappointed, however, that he could not achieve the fame afforded other field commanders, but it was, after all, an unpopular war. David Halberstam might have said it best:

> Westmoreland had trained and studied and prepared for an entire career for this command, but he would, like so many others, be a victim of his own war; in another time, a simpler war, he would have been the ideal general, decent, intelligent but not brilliant, hard-working, courageous, respectful of civilian authority, liked by the men who served under him, ideally trained to fight a great, well-organized war on the plains of Germany. Perhaps his name would have ranked with that of Eisenhower, Bradley, Ridgway, the best of our professional soldiers.
>
> But this war would stain him as it stained everything else. ... If going by the book could have done it, he would have been a success too, for he was a stickler for the book; it had brought him far. Instead he came home to a country torn apart by the war, and he himself was one more symbol of that division, a painful and bitter reward for a lifetime of service.[35]

Although the public opinion environment of the 60s was becoming increasingly hostile to the Vietnam War, characterizations of Westmoreland remained fairly constant for his entire tour of duty there. In fact, the characterizations followed the West Point formula for successful leaders (outlined earlier in this chapter) to the letter in their glowing descriptions of the man in command.

Even after the Tet Offensive, when one would expect the coverage of Westmoreland's character to change, the news magazines were reporting, not generating criticism of the general. He was able to leave his command in Vietnam relatively unscathed by the media represented by *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

And, after his retirement in 1972, Westmoreland disappeared from the front pages -- except where he gave speeches -- until CBS thrust him there again in 1982, with its program "The Uncounted Enemy."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CBS TRIAL: NEWS MEDIA CHARACTERIZATIONS OF GENERAL WESTMORELAND 1982-1985

What CBS Reported

Some of the most harmful words in the CBS documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," occurred in the introductory paragraphs of the report. After a visual introduction that included gunfire, explosions and battle scenes in Vietnam, narrator Mike Wallace said:

> The only war America has ever lost. The war in Vietnam reached a dramatic turning point 14 years ago this month. (Referring to the Tet Offensive) ... As the fighting continued, it became clear that the ragged enemy forces we thought were being ground down had greater numbers and greater military strength than we had been led to believe. ...
>
> The fact is we Americans were misinformed about the nature and the size of the enemy we were facing and tonight we're ging to present evidence of what we have come to believe was a conscious effort -- indeed, a conspiracy at the highest levels of military intelligence -- to suppress and alter critical intelligence on the enemy in the year leading up to the Tet Offensive.[1]

The documentary relied heavily upon interviews with former generals, a CIA analyst (Sam Adams), and other bureaucrats from the Vietnam War era, who claimed they were ordered -- in some cases by Westmoreland -- not to exceed a pre-set ceiling when reporting enemy troop strength figures and infiltration rates. The portions of the interview when Westmoreland was on camera were extremely unflattering to the man who had always been characterized as handsome and immaculate. In the documentary, he looked confused and nervous, and was constantly licking his lips. This combination of unfavorable verbal and visual portrayals of the general made the broadcast devastatingly believable.

To some it had the same kind of prisoner-in-the-dock quality we saw at the Nazi trials in Nuremberg -- the high brought low. But, if so, the question was: Did General Westmoreland "deserve" this treatment or had CBS ambushed him?[2]

Honor at Stake

Perhaps Westmoreland wanted to put an end to what he perceived as unfavorable opinions the American public had concerning his role and the actions of his soldiers in Vietnam, or perhaps he was fed up with the media, or a

little of both, but when he sued CBS for its broadcast and its allegations, he was a man with a mission: He wanted to restore his reputation. After the broadcast he had received letters from mothers of boys who were killed in Vietnam accusing him of allowing their sons to die needlessly because he had concealed the enemy statistics. It was, after all, the tone of the broadcast that implied that if he had not suppressed the information, the Tet Offensive may have never happened.[3]

These accusations probably hurt Westmoreland more than any others after his departure. Westmoreland indicated his concern for his soldiers in a recent interview:

> When I retired I was sick ... sick and disgusted -- disgusted probably a better term -- of the way the Vietnam veteran had been treated. I decided that was going to be my number one priority. I vowed to myself that I was going to accept every speech by any group to talk about Vietnam. ... I talked on the most emotionally charged campuses in the country. ... I've been spat upon, I've been booed, I've been hissed. And I didn't let it bother me. ... It was not pleasant. On the other hand, I think it was a duty. I was a lightning rod at that time and I realized it ... and I wanted to be the lightning rod. I didn't want that little soldier -- who did a heck of a job over there -- to be the lightning rod. And I vowed to do everything I can to square the record,

> to make known the facts that had been so distorted and to make known that that soldier had done a good job. He had been poorly treated. And of course, I'm not saying I was responsible. I was a factor, probably a relatively small factor, in turning around public opinion.[4]

The actual legal or military intelligence-related questions brought out by the trial are not discussed here, unless they are mentioned in an article. This chapter analyzes the characterizations that *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* made of Westmoreland during the trial period.

Westmoreland: Symbol of War to America

The general's confrontation with CBS was ripe for Vietnam-War metaphors. Even before the trial started, newspaper columnists were giving their own accounts of what was about to happen in the courtroom and reasons Westmoreland would consider taking such a corporate giant to court. A *Los Angeles Times* article said:

> Viewed at first as a genuine military hero -- he was *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1966 -- Westmoreland came to be reviled, spat upon and burned in effigy as the personification of a war many believed immoral. It was an experience not easily accommodated by West Point's "duty, honor, country"

> sensibility, with its notions of triumph in the field and gratitude at home.
>
> Now 70 and living in retirement ... the old general again stirs to the call of a campaign -- one that will, his supporters hope, win vindication at last for Westmoreland. ...
>
> In a sense, Westmoreland's battle with CBS is an extension, a corollary to, the war that Westmoreland never stopped fighting.[5]

Another *Los Angeles Times* article said, "Each side agrees that the trial will prove a bruising, damaging battle, a courtroom version of the search-and-destroy missions the general's troops once conducted in the rice paddies and jungles of Vietnam."[6] This type of comment was typical of even the news magazine opinions. Just after the CBS documentary was aired and Westmoreland called a press conference to rebut the broadcast, Newsweek ran an article called "Replaying an Old War Game," which said:

> It looked like the "5 o'clock follies" all over again: As he had done so often a decade ago, *Gen. William C. Westmoreland was sparring with the press over the conduct of the Vietnam War.*
>
> (The article then described the context of the documentary) If any fault can be found with the CBS program, it is for leaving the impression that it was the suppression of accurate troop statistics alone that unnecessarily prolonged the war.[7]

The other two news magazines ran short articles about the rebuttal in similar tones, but left out characterizations of Westmoreland. It is interesting how one magazine (albeit a "conservative" magazine) came to Westmoreland's defense after his rebuttal. John P. Roche, an editor with *National Review* said:

> Readers ask why I have not commented on Mike Wallace's ninety-minute (broadcast on Westmoreland). ...
>
> First, I did not watch the program deliberately. I consider Wallace to be the top mugger in a tough field of TV gonzos and knew he would do a number on Westy. General William Westmoreland is an officer who would conduct himself nobly on a battlefield, but he is no match for a bushwhacker like Wallace. ...
>
> I obtained a transcript of the show and read it with minute care. ... Going over the transcript was a sorrowful task. Poor Westy came out sounding like the village idiot who was unaware his staff was cooking statistics. Or worse, an accomplice, as was suggested by several characters who once lurked in the bowels of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) and claimed to have doctored the numbers on order.[8]

In October 1984, when the trial began, all three news magazines ran stories about the issues at hand. In a four-page article that ran one week before the trial, *U.S. News & World Report* provided a fair and balanced summary of the history of intelligence reports and other

incidents leading up to Tet that were behind the CBS report. It made no mention of Westmoreland's character but did make this observation: "Although the lawyers for Westmoreland and CBS might disagree, the lingering bitterness transcends the legal question of libel. The mutual recriminations of press, media, military, bureaucrats and politicians are part of the legacy of the only war this nation has ever lost."[9] A *Time* article within one week of the commencement of the trial also objectively reported the facts. It also made a conclusion about the implications of the trial: "The trial, which may last as long as four months, is nevertheless expected to reopen old debates about the Viet Nam War. It will also tackle an even more irreconcilable conflict: the need to protect a free and vigorous press vs. the individual's right to protect his reputation."[10]

Another *U.S. News & World Report* article that ran at the same time as the *Time* article above did characterize Westmoreland, with much of the same rhetoric of the 1960s characterizations:

> At *age 70 he remains hawk-eyed and ramrod straight -- the very essence of a military commander and a living symbol of a war that still troubles America. ...*

> *William Childs Westmoreland,* a dozen years after he left active duty, *is marching out to fight one last battle of the Vietnam War. The battlefield this time is a federal courtroom in New York, and the retired general's enemy is the powerful CBS television network.* ... Westmoreland says he does reluctant battle with CBS because "there is no way left for me to clear my name, my honor." ... (The article describes his retirement in South Carolina and how he had been dogged by hecklers at college campuses.)
>
> In 1982, he proudly led an informal parade that Vietnam veterans staged in the nation's capital. Time and again, he has urged Americans to recognize the valor and sacrifices of those who fought under his command. (The article then briefly recounts the General's career accomplishments, the size and scope of his command in Vietnam and his strategies.)
>
> During the buildup, the general pioneered "search and destroy" tactics that made the number of enemy dead more important than territory won or lost. Now at issue is whether the number of living enemy was miscounted -- and deliberately so.[11]

Newsweek waited a full two weeks after the trial began before it ran a series of articles describing the Vietnam events that were the crux of the confrontation. One of the articles gave a fair appraisal of all the factors involved, but paid specific attention to Tet and how the tide of public opinion turned after the offensive.[12] Another article within the series briefly characterized Westmoreland as follows: "But what a

lawsuit: At one table sits Westmoreland, the former commander of 500,000 American combat troops in Vietnam, as erect at 70 as a West Point cadet, his jaw still jutting upward like the chassis of an armored halftrack. ... For all his relaxed demeanor, the stakes could hardly be higher: Westmoreland wants $120 million in damages and the CBS corporate eye on his sword."[13]

Any other articles that appeared during the next three months of the trial reflected objective reporting of the events that were taking place, but no characterizations of Westmoreland. It was not until February 1985, when Westmoreland withdrew his libel suit that a small flurry of articles about him reappeared. A *Newsweek* article said:

> You could almost hear the air hissing out of room 318 of federal district court in Manhatten last week. After 2 1/2 years of litigation, nearly half a million pages of documents, reams of press coverage and 65 grinding days in court, the libel case brought by retired Gen. William C. Westmoreland against CBS deflated like the shot-out tires of an Army jeep. ...
>
> In exchange for a CBS statement saying he had fulfilled his patriotic duties as he saw them, *Westmoreland, his jutting jaw set at a semitragic angle, withdrew from the battle, unconvincingly claiming victory where most of his supporters saw retreat.* ...
>
> Instead, the general chose to follow the same advice the late Sen. George Aiken once offered the U.S. government about the war in Vietnam -- declare victory or go home.

> Westmoreland continues to insist that the settlement was in fact a "victory" for him, although he came out of it with no money and no retraction. What Westmoreland won was an eight-sentence "joint statement" conceding that CBS "does not believe that General Westmoreland was unpatriotic or disloyal in performing his duties as he saw them."
>
> Westmoreland said repeatedly last week that if this language had been offered at any earlier point, he would have withdrawn the suit. Still, it is difficult to imagine a former four-star general spending $3.3 million to obtain a validation of his patriotism. ... Westmoreland intends to return home to South Carolina and "try to fade away," as he puts it.
>
> *That may well be his fate; the general who bears much of the burden of America's defeat in Vietnam emerged from this last battle as a majestically pitiable man, out of his depth, victimized by bad advice and the exigencies of a situation he never understood.*[14]

The *U.S. News & World Report* and *Time* articles about the dropped lawsuit focused not on Westmoreland, but on the impact of libel trials on the media. All three magazines under study, at some time during the trial, used the opportunity to comment on some of the shortcomings of journalism. For instance, *Newsweek* ran an article called "The Media in the Dock."[15] *U.S. News & World Report* ran an article about the relationship between press, public opinion and several libel suits,

in its article "The Press: In Deeper Trouble With Public."[16] *Time* ran a seventeen-page article called "Journalism Under Fire."[17] Not all took the CBS "side." Similarly, several articles in other contemporary magazines criticized CBS for its lack of ethics in preparing the documentary and faulted the basic logic of the broadcast, which implied that Westmoreland had been successful at withholding information from the president. Many journalists, liberal and conservative, found this allegation that Westmoreland could be guilty of deceit preposterous.[18] The charge did not seem to fit the man.

But what did the general think of the trial's sudden conclusion? In a February 22, 1988, interview on "American Focus," a nationally syndicated radio program, Westmoreland was asked: "After withdrawing your libel suit against CBS in 1985, both you and CBS issued a statement which said that you would let the court of public opinion decide its own verdict. Since the public depends on the press for most of its information, can you really hope this way to get an accurate verdict?" Westmoreland responded:

> Basically, public opinion was very strongly in my support -- before, during and after the trial. It was kind of a David and Goliath syndrome. I mean here I was a man -- not poverty-stricken -- but not an exceptionally wealthy person. I did take on one of the wealthiest, most influential institutions in America. And the American people, I gather, discerned this. And based on my mail -- it was absolutely amazing the letters I got -- telephone calls, telegrams. I think American people are more sophisticated than many people give them credit for. I think they are inclined to support the little man so to speak as oppposed to the wealthy giants. This helps balance the slate.[19]

In an interview with the author, Westmoreland said he felt vindicated: "I don't have to tell you, CBS, they've gone downhill ever since I attacked them. They were humiliated, in effect. They got badly hurt by this and they still are hurt."

It is interesting to point out, however, that in a Business Week/Harris poll conducted on March 5, 1985, just two weeks after Westmoreland dropped his case, Americans were asked this question: "General Westmoreland sued CBS for claiming in one of its shows that he deliberately misled America about the number of enemy troops in Vietnam. Do you think CBS treated General Westmoreland fairly, or not?" Surprisingly, after all the introspective articles by journalists about the ethics of journalists and the publicity of the trial, a majority -- 57 percent thought that he was treated fairly, while 17 percent thought he was treated unfairly and 26 percent were unsure.[20] Perhaps Westmoreland is not aware of the results of this true -- if transitory -- "court of public opinion." To him it probably would be a moot point.

Perhaps the lack of specific and favorable media characterizations about the general can be attributed to the larger issues brought out by the trial. Nevertheless, from the limited examples provided, Westmoreland's square jaw retained its 1960s characterization, but Westmoreland emerged as a tragic figure. This time, he symbolized the Vietnam War to an American public that had

a renewed interest in the war's veterans and had experienced a resurgence of patriotism, but probably did not want to be reminded of the war's problems.

CHAPTER FIVE

LESSONS LEARNED

Characterizations versus Public Opinion

The question this study sought to answer was did the characterizations of General William C. Westmoreland in three major news magazines, *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* reflect public opinion of the military and the Vietnam War over time. After reviewing the 1960s and 1980s portrayals of the general, the answer would have to be no, the reporting did not reflect trends in public opinion. In the 1960s, when public opinion was steadily declining concerning the Vietnam War, the news magazines provided positive characterizations of Westmoreland. Conversely, in the 1980s, when the American public was experiencing a renewed interest in the military and was again supporting a "hawkish" presidential administration, the news magazines provided skimpy characterizations of the general.

The news magazines instead reflected what was portrayed by Westmoreland himself. In Vietnam he was the

consumate professional -- the ultimate soldier. As a commander, he displayed all the attributes of a model combat leader.

He was a symbol of the United States presence in Vietnam, both in his stature and in his outlook. The big man was there to help the "little people." As is the habit of the United States government when it intervenes in the affairs of third-world nations, it tried to Americanize the Vietnamese. Westmoreland, the all-American "boy," even at 50, was a good candidate for that task, and a good subject for symbolic representations in the media.

The 1980s characterizations of the general again reflected what Westmoreland projected. He admitted subjecting himself to scorn and criticism when he toured college campuses to present his views on the war. He may have appeared to be on a mission of vindication for himself and his "mistakes" in Vietnam. If so, the purpose of his talks was misread, he wanted to defend the Vietnam veterans, he said in a 1988 interview. In a book just published about the trial, Vietnam on Trial: Westmoreland vs. CBS, the authors said: "The general later admitted, somewhat ruefully, that it was probably his willingness to speak out on Vietnam that encouraged

George Crile [the producer of the CBS broadcast] to pursue his documentary, which would have taken a much different shape without Westmoreland's participation."[1] Had Westmoreland contributed to his own doom -- or had he been shot in the back -- or something in the middle? At any rate, the view of Westmoreland in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* was only a shadow of the square-jawed general it had been in 1964-1968. These articles indicated that to some reporters he was the symbol of defeat and that to others he was the helmsman of a doomed ship.

Service First

Despite the controversy surrounding him, Westmoreland in 1988 remained the "old soldier" presented in many early characterizations. When asked what advice he would give to a newly commissioned second lieutenant, he said: "He's going into an institution that has been characterized by duty, honor, country -- one does not put on the uniform of one's country and go into the military to make money and get rich -- your satisfaction is service to your country. My advice is to keep in mind duty, honor, country -- where duty is all-important --

and to recognize that you, as a member of the armed services are performing an essential service that our democracy -- our country demands. ... You go into the service to serve your country to the best of your ability -- that should be your motivation."[2]

In 1964-1968 and again in 1982-1985, the three major U.S. news magazines generally gave Westmoreland credit for that.

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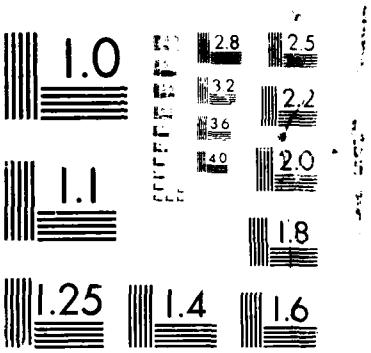

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