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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
SENIOR OFFICER ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM INTERVIEW OF
GENERAL (RETIRED) LOUIS C. MENETREY**

BY

**COLONEL JACK L. WEISS
United States Army**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper summarizes information provided by General (Retired) Louis C. Menetrey during interviews conducted by Colonel Jack L. Weiss in January 1996 as part of the U.S. Army War College/U.S. Army Military History Institute Senior Officer Oral History Program. The summary consists of two parts. The first is a general outline of General Menetrey's personal history covering significant activities and events of his career. The second part is an overview of selected quotes concerning contemporary military problems and strategic thinking. The transcript of the interviews is in the archives of the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5008.

Introduction:

This executive summary covers the Senior Officer Oral History interview of General (Retired) Louis C. Menetrey which was conducted at his home in Marathon, Florida during the period 17-18 January 1996. Although General Menetrey confessed during this interview that he had avoided telling "war stories" throughout his career, his answers to many of the questions, presented in the form of a series of personal vignettes, provide great insight into the events which molded his leadership skills and guided him through 36 years of military service.

This summary is divided into two parts. The first part is a general outline of General Menetrey's personal history with significant activities and events which unfolded during his career. The second part is an overview of some of the statements he made during the interview concerning contemporary military problems and strategic thinking.

Personal History:

Louis C. Menetrey was born on August 19, 1929 in Hollywood, California. His parents were Louis C. Menetrey and Bertha Seltzer Menetrey. His father was an immigrant from Switzerland and worked as a tool designer. His mother was born in America and worked as an administrative assistant in the field of commercial business. During his early youth, he was raised and attended school in the Hollywood, California area. He attended and graduated from Hollywood High School and then went on to graduate from the University of California with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science.¹

Concurrent with his college studies, he began his military career as a member, sequentially, of both the Navy and Army Reserve. Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, he was commissioned through the Reserve Officers Training Program as Second Lieutenant of Infantry in the United States Army Reserve. He entered active service at

Fort Benning, Georgia in June 1953 where he completed the basic infantry course, Airborne and Ranger schools.²

General (Retired) Menetrey's early career was filled with many varied experiences. His assignments, both in location and progression were typical of the Army of the time. He fulfilled duty as a platoon leader, company executive officer and commander, and as a battalion staff officer. In all he commanded four different companies during his time as a company grade officer. A few particular assignments during this period had a lasting impact on his later views of military operations. The first of these were, consecutively, his assignments as nuclear weapons test and evaluation officer and as an NBC operations instructor at the Infantry School. These assignments greatly influenced his views on the use of nuclear weapons. The second was his assignment as a liaison officer where he was involved in the deployment of forces for the planned but unexecuted invasion of Cuba. This assignment greatly affected his views of Army readiness overall and deployment operations specifically.³

His service as a field grade officer was very unique in terms of what is currently viewed as normal career progression. As a junior major, he attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, went on to complete graduate studies in international affairs at Georgetown University, and then attended the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia. Upon completion of his studies at Norfolk, he was selected for an early promotion to Lieutenant Colonel and received orders for duty in Vietnam. Interestingly, he never had a troop assignment as a Major.⁴

Upon his arrival in Vietnam he was assigned as the Deputy Chief of Staff for the 1st Cavalry Division and was immediately put in the cue for a battalion command. Shortly after his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, he was asked to take command of the 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry, a unit which had been badly mauled in a recent contact with the North Vietnamese. The battalion had suffered heavy casualties in two companies and the battalion commander and nearly all of the command group had been killed or badly

wounded.⁵ His experience in this situation, having to reconstitute two companies and re-establish the confidence and esprit in the battalion was another pivotal experience in his career. The leadership insights he gained and the impact of this difficult combat endeavor are factors which shaped his later development. ⁶

After leaving Vietnam, he attended the National War College and was then assigned to the Office of the Coordinator of Army Studies where he worked for the Vice Chief of the Army Staff, General William DePuy. This assignment, and his close association with General DePuy, again had great impact on his future thinking. He learned how the Army operated and was closely coached and mentored by General DePuy. He worked closely in the reorganization of the Army to an all volunteer force and in the establishment of TRADOC.⁷

General Menetrey's next assignment was as the G-3 of the 101st Air Assault Division and as Commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 101st. As the division G-3, he was responsible for the reorganization of the division from an airborne to an air assault division, a concept which had its roots in the Vietnam conflict, but for which there was no written doctrine. As a brigade commander, he was put in a position of implementing many of the "VOLAR" (volunteer army) concepts that he had developed while working in the Vice Chief's office, an experience which again shaped his future thinking. It was while serving as a brigade commander that he was selected for promotion to Brigadier General.⁸

His first assignment as a general officer was as the Assistant Division Commander, 2nd Infantry Division. This was the first of several assignments to Korea which developed General Menetrey's broad knowledge of the Korean people, how to fight on the peninsula, and the overall readiness of forces assigned to the country. His most notable experience during his first assignment of overseeing the famous "tree cutting" incident following the murder of an American officer at Panmunjon by the North Koreans.⁹

Upon departing Korea he was assigned as the Deputy Commander, Combined Arms Development Agency, Fort Leavenworth. In this assignment he was again put in a position to further influence doctrine development. Working closely with both General Glen Otis and his former mentor, General DePuy, he views this as one of the greatest learning experiences of his career. His greatest contribution in this assignment was the developmental work he conducted in the establishment of the National Training Center.¹⁰

General Menetrey was then selected to become the Commander of the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson. His primary focus during his command tenure was on training the division for rapid deployment in either a reinforcing mode to Europe, or, as the division was then the "heavy" reinforcing force to U.S. Readiness Command (REDCOM), any place else in the world. This was also a period of great turbulence in the Army as the volunteer force was just coming of age, the Army was completing its downsizing from Vietnam, and there was a great deal of strife in the Army from both drug abuse and racial tension. These were all factors which made senior leadership a great challenge.¹¹

From division command, he was selected to be the Director of Requirements for the Army Staff. In this intense and difficult assignment he was responsible for the modernization of the Army and the evolution of many of the systems which are currently in use today. This staff position required him to coordinate with all Army doctrine and equipment proponents, (as well as other service proponents), to determine what future Army requirements would be recommended for resourcing, development and eventual fielding. This position required his utmost ability to prioritize, build consensus, and vision as to the future needs of the Army.¹²

His next duty assignment was as the Commanding General of the Combined Field Army in Korea. In this position he was responsible for the day-to-day operation and training of both the U.S. Army in Korea and of the Army of the Republic of Korea.

Ultimately, he was the ground force commander responsible for the defense of Korea. This was a period of very close interaction with both the ROK field army and the ROK army staff. This is an experience which prepared him for further leadership in this theater. He came to know the capabilities and limitations of the ground force in Korea intimately and fully appreciate the intricacies of coalition warfare.¹³

The General's next duty assignment was as the Commander, 5th U.S. Army, headquartered at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. In this command he was responsible for reserve component training in an eight state area. This assignment led him to understand the difficulties and political realities of reserve component training as he dealt with the different chains of command controlling both army reserve and national guard units. His breadth of knowledge of state military affairs, funding for reserve component training, and the major strengths and weaknesses of our reserve system were all reinforced during this period.¹⁴

General Menetrey's final active duty assignment was as the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, Commander U.S. Forces, and Commander, Eighth United States Army, Korea. His duty in this position was the culmination of many years training and service. He interacted frequently with the U.S. Ambassador and the country team, officials of the government of Korea, other visiting officials and dignitaries from the United States, and the media. This assignment challenged all of the skills he had developed as a strategic leader and was the capstone assignment of his career. Following this assignment, he retired from active military service.¹⁵

In his retirement General Menetrey stays actively involved with former military friends, close associates in his consulting business, and his family. He spends his summers at his home in Colorado Springs and winters in Marathon, Florida. He enjoys the pace of his current life and has stated that he has no major plans to launch into any further business or writing endeavors.

Contemporary Issues and Strategic Thought: The following are "highlight" quotes from the interview which reflect General Menetrey's views on some contemporary issues and on strategic leadership skills. These are distilled from the interview so as to provide key insights on these issues.

General Menetrey on deconflicting guidance from the Army Chief of Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the PACOM Commander, while serving as the CINC in Korea: "Frequently [I received conflicting guidance]. Because of the functions of the different headquarters I reported to are different. Department of the Army is equipped to train and provide forces so they have a different motivation than CINCPAC which is an operational command concerned with immediate warfighting. The Chairman on the other hand is concerned with the political and military aspects of all of that as he should be. He is also concerned about warfighting but in a different sense. He is more concerned about the strategic U.S. interests in the area. I say conflicting; disjointed would be a better word than conflicting. As a result of all of that, you had great independence of action." -- "In other words, you had connections into the political process, both in the United States and in Korea particularly. You had influence within that process; you had various reporting channels. The net result of all of that was that since nobody really knew, you were left pretty much to your own devices. The guidance is don't screw up. But within that general guidance you were left pretty much on what constituted not screwing up." -- "You had great independence of action in Korea."¹⁶

General Menetrey on being his own ground component commander while retaining his CINC "hat" in Korea: "'On the ground component command, my view was and remains, that the CINC should be his own ground component commander. The reason is that it is essentially a ground war. The ground component commander is the one who has to call the tune on that war. The other components and services, not only services but components like special warfare command, et cetera, have to support the

ground scheme of maneuver because that is what is going to predominate in the war." --
"I did not want an additional layer between the CINC and his most important warfighting element which had to be the ground component. I did not want a delay or whatever you wanted to call it, I wanted to be able to influence directly what those ROK Armies, Combined Field Armies, did. I didn't want to sift it through some other headquarters."¹⁷

General Menetrey on dealing with the media: "I had some rules implemented through the Public Affairs Office that I insisted on. One was that I would never speak off the record, background or otherwise. Anything I said was on record. I think that is very important. Second was -- let me recall a story back when I was with the Combined Field Army. Sixty Minutes was doing a segment on Korea and they wanted to have an interview with me as part of the segment. I agreed to that. When they came and set up at Camp Red Cloud, I had another video camera there. They asked what that was for. I said, "That is so that I can have a true record of what I did, said, and looked because you will edit what I say. I want to have a complete record." They said, "We can't do that." I said, "Thank you very much, no interview." I was then marked as an uncooperative respondent to their request. You know how they do that; they say you won't comment. I won't comment. I was uncooperative. Come back to the CINC. Sixty Minutes again. I said, "you don't remember but the rules haven't changed." This time they said, "Fine." -- "You cannot ignore the media as much as you would like to because it is through them that you reach the audience in the United States and throughout the world on that matter - - international media these days. There is no one better equipped to explain perhaps the rationale for certain things than the guy in charge of it. He may be the only one that understands the full implications of things -- maybe he does, maybe he doesn't; but at least he is the best equipped to do that."¹⁸

General Menetrey on dealing with the U.S. Ambassador to Korea and the Korean government: "The Ambassador and I saw each other frequently, but every week, whether we needed to or not, we had breakfast together -- and a long breakfast with a subsequent

discussion in an area that I was certain was not bugged so that we could coordinate our activities with the Korean government. Primarily that was the reason; also there was a certain exchange of information that took place. We met frequently but we religiously did that."¹⁹ -- "Yes, the Koreans understandably would seek to create any advantage that they could out of disagreements between the CINC and the Ambassador. The CINC was not a member as you know, of the Country team. I had -- every time that they had a so called Country team meeting -- a representative there. He was not authorized necessarily to speak for me but he knew my thinking. He was a trusted representative. There was that coordination as well within the so called Country team. But as I indicated a little earlier, there is a slightly different motivation behind what the CINC does and what the Ambassador does. There is certainly different reporting channels."²⁰

General Menetrey on the potential for a second Korean war: "Less now than it was when I was there; and I think continuing to get less as time goes on simply because of the resources on both sides. There is great disparity between the economy of the North and the economy of the South. It is eroding the ability in the North -- or any rational person in the North -- to think that an attack would be successful. Now, that said, you must consider the leadership in the North. They may not be rational. They are a very insular and xenophobic in terms of being self contained people. They have very little experience in the outside world. What goes through their minds or what rationale or what planning they may undertake under what assumptions, is very difficult for us to know. They may think that by threatening someone they will get a concession of some kind or another, where they may be so desperate that they do this in order to just strike out and have a foreign devil to blame for their troubles instead of themselves. Under the theory that the party in power may be threatened and therefore seek to engage a foreign enemy in order to solidify its own power. All of these things have taken place in the past in the world and may indeed in this case. But any logical, rational person is going to have to conclude that over time -- time is not on the side of the North. I think it is less

now than perhaps when I was there and it will continue to be less as time goes on. That is not to say that there will not be a war. It is only that rational people sitting down who would not plan one under these circumstances."²¹

General Menetrey on Jointness: I think that we are heading in the right direction. There is a danger to swing too far in that direction; that has to do with the Joint Staff in Washington superseding the Army staff because they have a slightly different perspective. I believe we are heading in the right direction. Jointness is obviously the way to go, that is the way we are going to fight."²²

General Menetrey on the two almost simultaneous major regional contingency strategy: "I think as a resource allocator it has served its purpose; the so called BUR [Bottoms Up Review] process -- bottoms up if you want any, what a great name -- has served its purpose; there is really nothing out there that you can replace it with from a resourcing standpoint. From an operational standpoint it has become readily apparent that we are going to be engaged in a number of smaller conflicts and operations other than war, to use that term "-- so we have to be flexible enough to apply our forces in that manner." -- "There is a phrase in there about nearly simultaneous; a lot turns on how nearly, nearly [simultaneous] is. If they come close together, we would not be able to respond adequately. If they were separated by a period of time -- I don't know the period of time, but I would guess if they had to be separated by three or four months -- then we probably could, by mobilization, do that." -- "A lot turns on how nearly is nearly simultaneous."²³

General Menetrey on force structure versus modernization versus OPTEMPO: "Force structure is important. Operational readiness is important which translates to dollars in terms of OPTEMPO [operating tempo] and so on. At the same time modernization is important. The task of the military advisor or planner is to balance those three. Are they out of balance? It is hard to say."²⁴ -- "My assessment is that they are probably out of balance now and we are favoring near term readiness at the expense

of modernization in the future." -- "The CINCs through this gathering of authority in the joint arena have established over the past few years -- ever since the Goldwater Nichols started to be implemented -- a lot of authority over modernization in terms of equipment that they wish and so on; at the expense of perhaps the services. There is a danger to this. The CINCs perspective, in his horizon is immediate warfighting. Naturally, there is going to be an emphasis from the CINCs on operational readiness, OPTEMPO, et cetera and on near term improvements to the force whether that be equipment, organization or whatever. Whereas the services are designed to look further out and to take risks in the near term perhaps in favor of advantages in the long term."²⁵

General Menetrey on Operations Other Than War, (OOTW): "What ever we are going to call this thing, operations other than war, the use of the Army in contingencies that don't include major conflict is going to continue I feel, so we might as well get ourselves ready for it. We have to get ourselves ready for it, not organizationally, necessarily, but mentally so that we can task organize on the fly and be effective because of well trained individuals when we arrive. I believe that we can expect these things to continue."²⁶

General Menetrey on the Weinberger Doctrine: "It is a very strict guideline in terms of the preconditions that have to be established before you commit military force. From that perspective I feel that it is probably too strict. That all of those conditions will have to be certified present before we are committing military force. Let's take Bosnia. We are there. The Weinberger doctrine would say that you do not commit military force until you have public opinion behind you. So how do you judge that? It goes back to what I said far, far earlier in this one-sided conversation which is [about the assertion that] the Army is not going to fight unless it has public opinion on its side. My answer to that is the Army is going to fight wherever it is told to fight. By constitution of national authority. I think the Weinberger doctrine served its purpose for the time but I think it is too strict. If you follow it absolutely; if you restrain your response to different situations

you may think, as maybe President Clinton does, that public opinion is not behind the deployment to Bosnia; however, over time it will swing to being supportive as it becomes a successful operation. I don't know whether that is his thought process but it is a possible one. But he violates the Weinberger doctrine but thinks that you can meet it in the long run while the troops are there. Yes, it is too strict."²⁷

General Menetrey on developing officers to be strategic leaders: "First you have to define a strategic leader. I guess the definition would be those who think strategically. Then you have to say what the hell is to think strategically? A lot of this is subject to interpretation, definition, et cetera. Does the Army train itself or do the other services train their officers to be strategic leaders? The first thing that an officer has to do is learn how to be an expert in whatever the hell he supposed to be expert in. Whether that is the finance corps or whatever. The second thing the officer has to do is figure out how to join that knowledge and that capability with other capabilities into what is a combined -- but there are two definitions to combined; one of them being combined within an organization, the other as we discussed, combined internationally -- combine that with other capabilities and how to manage that. Then he goes into a joint level where he is trying to combine capabilities and become expert in that. From that he should move to how to do that in combination with allied forces. By this time he has become a strategist. But a strategic thinker if you take the definition that is currently in effect -- the difference between operational strategic and tactical -- and you say, "OK this is strategic," there is a very blurred line between what might be operational and what might be strategic. Lots of ink has been spilled trying to define those two. To answer your question, I think in the normal course of events, through the various school systems and the assignments cycle that we put people through -- particularly since now more of them are going to joint commands -- that we are preparing our people for strategic thinking. We have to expose them to a more civil military or political military experience so that they can understand what other than military minds might consider important in a different situation. But

other than that I think we are doing just fine. The progression is as I just described moving up through joint; by the time you get to joint you are starting to be strategic."²⁸

General Menetrey on the issue of strategic vision: "I am not sure I know what it is. Yes to look out beyond the events of the day to what may happen in the future certainly is a necessary attribute for a strategic thinker as it is in the foreign relations standpoint or international relations standpoint of looking at long term trends and seeking to have a goal out in the future versus one just in the immediate time to take advantage of long term trends. To tie strategic thinking to a timeline is fair because strategic thinkers are thought of a futuristic people beyond the immediate needs of the day. But on the other hand it is also considered in a space context of a strategic thinker is thinking over a large area or a large number of factors versus operational guys thinking about a limited number of factors or a limited area. It has a variety of meaning. Strategic vision(ary) is someone who interprets future events in the light of current affairs and historic examples or historic trends so I guess you can use that term strategic vision. In terms of ten or fifteen years, I don't know. It is a little difficult sometimes to look beyond the next budget."²⁹

General Menetrey on current threats to U.S. security: "There are no serious security threats in my view to the United States, to the continent, to the integrity of the United States, or to the government of the United States if you discount anything that might happen with the nuclear stockpile present in several areas of the world." -- "When you say vital interests your definition has to include what is vital. That will shift it seems to me as the situation in Bosnia; is it in the vital interest of the United States? That question is much debated today. You get answers on both sides of that. The definition of vital is undergoing change. Vital is being downgraded to being in the U.S. economic interests, the interests of its allies or friends, however defined." -- "I think there is a gradual shifting of what constitutes vital downward into less threatening situations. I think that trend will continue until or unless at some time the country turns to being more

isolationist, which may happen and to not caring about what happens beyond its shores. No I don't think there are any threats to the United States as a nation currently in the world."³⁰

General Menetrey on the qualities that strategic leaders need to possess: "Great leadership in general I guess. He has to have the mental ability and agility in order to accept different facts and circumstances and sort them out in his own view or with the help of others into a cohesive and coherent policy and direction. That is not an easy task. It is far easier to say I need more information or I need to know the unknowable and the ability to decide in the course of information flow when there is sufficient information to establish a strategic vision in Max Thurman's sense." -- "That is one aspect of it, the ability to articulate a strategic concept or vision from a given set of facts. When you can stop, when you can continue and as you modify as things go on; obviously there is a flexibility of mind in the ability to ascertain different points of view and to assimilate that into a coherent vision or concept is necessary."³¹

Footnotes:

- ¹USAWC Senior Officer Oral History Program, Interview of General (Retired) Louis C. Menetrey, Interviewed by COL Jack L. Weiss, (Draft), 17-18 January 1996, United States Army War College Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA. pp 1-18.
- ²Ibid., 20-27.
- ³Ibid., 28-62.
- ⁴Ibid., 69-75.
- ⁵Ibid., 77-86.
- ⁶Ibid., 88-90.
- ⁷Ibid., 109-115.
- ⁸Ibid., 116-130.
- ⁹Ibid., 131-145.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 149-151.
- ¹¹Ibid., 153-173.
- ¹²Ibid., 176-184.
- ¹³Ibid., 186-200.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 201-222.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 223-243.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 238-239.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 241-242.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 246-247.
- ¹⁹Ibid., 251.
- ²⁰Ibid., 252.
- ²¹Ibid., 253-254.
- ²²Ibid., 255.
- ²³Ibid., 257.
- ²⁴Ibid., 258.
- ²⁵Ibid., 260.
- ²⁶Ibid., 262.
- ²⁷Ibid., 263.
- ²⁸Ibid., 264-265.
- ²⁹Ibid., 267.
- ³⁰Ibid., 268.
- ³¹Ibid., 268-269.