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ADDRESS BY GENERAL W. C. WESTMORELAND
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to

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QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD:

Q: General Westmoreland, do you think the people in this country are really aware we're in a hell of a war in Vietnam?

A: Well, I must say, you gentlemen are in a better position to answer that question than I am.

Q: In view of Secretary McNamara's ill-founded optimism a couple of years ago, aren't you uncomfortable when you say we may be able to withdraw troops from Vietnam in a couple of years?

A: My statement is to the effect, that it is conceivable to me that within two years or less, it will be possible for us to phase down our level of commitment and turn more of the burden of the war over to the Vietnamese Armed Forces who are improving and who, I believe, will be prepared to assume this greater burden. Now, I made the point that at the outset this may be token, but hopefully progressive and certainly we're preparing our plans to make it progressive.

Q: General, has civilian marksmanship training any value to the American soldier in Vietnam?

A: Well, marksmanship is an important part of a soldier's training and I'm confident that if a young man has been exposed to rifle marksmanship at an early age, it will facilitate his training when he puts on a uniform.

Q: In your considered military judgment, and in light of all known intelligence, both friendly and enemy, who do you think will be the victor in the Army-Navy game?

A: Well, it is a bit awkward for me to be parochial since I have a joint command, but I say—GO ARMY!

Q: There are several questions along this line. I'll read one of them. You say the enemy has not won a major battle for more than a year. What major battle did they win and did we admit it at that time?

A: Yes, we did admit it. It was not really a major battle but it was a significant battle. It occurred in the spring of 1966. I believe that it was in March. It was the battle of A Shau, when he attacked with at least a regiment. He overran an isolated civilian irregular defense corps camp in which we had Vietnamese and US Special Forces. We had ten Americans present. There were about 350 Vietnamese irregulars, some of them Montagnards. The attack took place at night. The garrison was overwhelmed; it was overrun. The enemy since that time has had control over this valley, which is in western Thua Thien province along the Quang Nam provincial border, just north of the Quang Nam provincial boundary. I consider it a significant victory because it facilitated his infiltration and gave him control over a piece of real estate in South Vietnam which he had not been able to duplicate since that time.

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Q: General, none of the phases you outlined mentioned surrender by North Vietnam. What is the significance of this omission or was it really an omission?

Well, it's rather difficult to conceive a military, total military victory, in the classic sense. I think one would have to assume that such would be the case if the enemy were to surrender. We're fighting a limited war, with limited objectives, and with limited means. The ground war is confined to the territory of South Vietnam. You might say, in a strategic sense, we're on the defensive. Let me hasten to add, that our tactics in South Vietnam are very much offensive, but strategically speaking, we do have an offensive air campaign to the North along his lines of communications which is a very important part of our strategy. But without ground actions to the North, where the enemy's territory is invaded--and this is not in consonance with our national policy--it's difficult to conceive of a surrender, but it is not difficult to conceive that the enemy may decide that he can't win and the longer he holds out, the weaker he will get. This is in fact happening, but he does not as yet apparently realize this.

Q: General, we're bound to have a few armchair generals and we can't resist asking a few tactical questions. One of them is: What is your rationale for fighting the enemy on such unfavorable terrain to our side as Dak To? Why not concentrate our forces in more defendable areas? How many men does the enemy have near Dak To?

A: The enemy has near Dak To, to address the last part of this question first, approximately 8000 men. Four regiments: the North Vietnamese 32nd Regiment, the North Vietnamese 6th Regiment, the North Vietnamese 174th Regiment, and the North Vietnamese 24th Regiment. These regiments are not, in all cases, up to strength. The enemy had planned to win a large victory and to seize a piece of real estate in South Vietnam in the province of Kontum. He had planned to launch this attack on the 26th of October, but he could not get his logistics posted for the attack in time, and therefore, he was unable to jump off in the attack at all. But he wasn't in a position to do so until after the first of the year. Now this was one of three places where he had planned to attack in order to capture the world headlines on the occasion of the inauguration of the new president on the 31st of October, the Vietnamese National Day on 1 ~~October~~, during which time there were in Saigon many, many dignitaries who had come to Saigon to attend the inauguration. Such a victory would have served his psychological and propaganda purposes. Now he did not jump off in this attack because we preempted it. We attacked him before he was able to get set. Now this is not particularly unfavorable terrain for us to fight in. As a matter of fact, comparatively it is far more favorable to us than it is to him because we have the helicopter. We can land on the top of hills; we can cut down the trees; we can make landing zones on the top of hills and mountains where we can move in artillery by helicopter. But the enemy, he has no such mobility. He has to walk or use pack animals. In the main, he uses garbled labor, human bearers, to move his supplies. He has very great difficulty in getting the porters to do the job so he has to take combat troops and this is one reason why he could not get himself in position to attack toward the end of October. So it is not unfavorable terrain for us. The enemy is at a disadvantage because of this mobility. We have killed many, many North Vietnamese troops. Far more than we know about during this engagement. We don't know how many our B-52 strikes have killed. We know they've killed many because we've seen secondary explosions--our tac air. I know we killed many which we don't know about because we've bombed in the jungle and the mountains at his large piece of territory and difficult to cover with troops. So this body count figure which we've reported is, in my opinion, very, very conservative. Probably represents, I would say, 50% or even less, of the enemy that has been killed. Now, why do we fight him along the Cambodian and Laos border? Well, if we didn't fight him there we would have to fight him further inland by virtue of his movement. He would cut the roads. He would overrun hamlets and villages. We would have a major refugee problem on our hands. We would find that the provincial

and district seats would be isolated and we would be able to communicate with them only by air and shortly, we'd find ourselves in an enclave posture, which would be completely unacceptable to me because we would have surrendered the initiative.

Q: General have you all you need to fight the war? Planes, helicopters, pilots, men?

A: As you know, I will be receiving a total of 525,000 troops. This will give me a well-balanced, hard-hitting military force that our country is capable of sustaining as long as required. It will be backed by appropriate logistic elements since we have built the ports, and the airfields, and the POL tanks farms that did not exist when we started deploying troops in the summer of 1965. At that time, we had one deep water port, three small jet-capable airfields, one civilian-run POL tank farm. We started from scratch. I had no logistic troops; no engineers. We had to build this physical infrastructure so that large troops could be deployed and supported. My major concentration during that first year was to build in an undeveloped country this physical infrastructure, the facilities to support ground troops in sustained combat. As a matter of passing interest, this is the first time in our history where we've had to deploy large ground forces and fight them in sustained combat in an undeveloped country. In North Africa, we inherited this physical infrastructure--such fine ports as Casablanca, Oran, Algiers, Bizerte. In Western Europe, of course, we inherited a modern, sophisticated physical infrastructure and even in Korea we have the fine port of Pusan and later Inchon. And from the single port of Inchon, we were able to support our troops deployed across the narrow neck of the Korean peninsula, but not so in Vietnam. We had to build because of the geography of the country, the long coastline, the nature of the terrain, the location of the enemy, multiple force airfields, warehouse complexes, POL tank farms, et cetera. Compared with one in the summer of '65--one deep water port--we now have 6. Compared with three small jet-capable airfields in the summer of '66, we now have 8. We have multiple POL tank farms. We now have the wherewithal to support any strategy we wish to pursue and to support in sustained combat, the forces that I will receive. The first year of the war, for every two men I got in, I had to put one building this base and manning it and only one to go into combat. My troops were few. I had to use fire brigade tactics to keep this enemy off balance. I wasn't hurting him, I was just confusing him. It's only been in the last year where I've had the strength and the logistic support to put any real pressure on the enemy. And during that second year, for every three men I got in, I had to devote one to building this logistic base and manning it. This year, out of 5 men I get in, 4 will go into a combat role and only 1 will have to augment the logistic base and by next summer, I will have 61% of my troops in a combat role. This compares very favorably with 57% according to the reports I received for Korea and World War II. The point I want to make is this: that we have had the wherewithal to put real pressure on the enemy for a little over one year. This applies to the enemy in the South and it also applies to our air pressure campaign in the North, because the target restrictions did not permit putting pressure on the enemy along his lines of communications and his support areas during the first year of the war. But now we have the wherewithal to continue to put pressure on the enemy and to accelerate that pressure. And I feel the force that I will receive is going to be a well-balanced, hard-hitting military organization that can sustain the pressure indefinitely. The young men that man this force--most of them are young men, I'm an exception--are there for one year, unless they volunteer to extend. So it's not a question of the boys being brought home. The boys are coming home after one year unless they volunteer to extend and we're having a great number who do, in fact, volunteer to extend. I find in this environment that the young men develop somewhat of a missionary zeal, and I would like more of you to come over and see this missionary zeal at first hand.

Q: Premier Phan Van Dong is considering inviting US Congressmen and Senators to visit North Vietnam. Which US Senator would you like most to see sent and do you think such visits would help or hurt the war effort?

A: I think it would be highly inappropriate as a military man for me to address that question.

Q: What is the status of the construction of the McNamara wall and when will it be finished? And a related question: Has any thought been given to an atomic-irradiated barrier to prevent infiltration?

A: On the second question, many, many ideas have been explored and I would suspect these ideas have included the one you have mentioned but with respect to the first question, Secretary McNamara has addressed this matter and I don't believe I can add anything to what he has said.

Q: General, what is your comment on the problems encountered with the M-16 rifle or its ammunition and what is being done about it? Is the matter cleared up?

A: There are some modifications being made to the M-16 rifle that I'm sure will make it a more reliable weapon, but the M-16 is an excellent weapon. It's the best infantry firearm that our troops have ever taken into battle, but it does require care. The men who man it must be trained in its care and its operation. It becomes not only a function of training but a function of discipline. There have been a few complaints which are well-known to you. There are a few, so-called, bugs in the weapon which don't render it ineffective, but if these bugs are corrected, and they are being corrected, it will entail less maintenance. With respect to the ammunition, frankly, this is a technical matter, and I don't know enough about it to discuss it, but I do know there is some experimentation as to the composition of the powder that will result in less residue. But the present powder is adequate, but I say again, the man has to know how to maintain his weapon.

Q: Who are the cynics in the press corps in Vietnam that you refer to on Meet the Press? Hasn't the Five O'clock Follies given them reason for cynicism?

A: Well, I can't be specific. My statement, I think, during the Meet the Press performance on Sunday was: There were in Saigon a number of individuals that I would categorize as cynical. There was a group of cynics in Saigon...garbled... Saigon was a city of rumor. From time to time there were stories based on isolated instances--the stories portraying the situation as a generality. I received my information, of course, from many visits to the field and from reports that cover the entire map of South Vietnam and I feel I have a pretty good idea of what's going on and there have been a number of stories which I think have been somewhat misleading. Perhaps not intentionally so, in fact, I'm confident not intentionally so, but based on isolated events which, of course, are newsworthy, but which do not necessarily portray the perspective. But I cannot be more specific as to identifying any cynics, and as a general statement, the reporters covering the war in South Vietnam are doing a good job. It's a very complex task. The war differs from any we have experienced in history. It's difficult to make an appraisal of how the war is going because you cannot follow it on a battle map. We've had to resort to certain statistical data and although we've tried our best to make this statistical data accurate, I'm sure there have been cases where there has been some inaccuracies. But, I think, the inaccuracies have been on the conservative side as much as on the exaggerated side. I think, on balance, the statistical information that we've put out is as precise as a human's machine can produce. I know that the press has had the feeling that a lot of these reports are subjective and they are. We have attempted to introduce into our system certain checks and balances to make these reports objective.

This is a matter we're continuing to work on. We're doing our best. We are honest in our reporting, but we are certainly not infallible within the system.

Q: General, here's a real straight-out, just plain question. Shouldn't the running of the war be left to the military?

A: Well, of course, this war involves the political, psychological and diplomatic factors as well as military operations. I think it was Clemenceau who said that war is too important to be left exclusively to the generals, and, I think, at this time in history, in view of the complexity of this confrontation, that Clemenceau is still right.

Q: Do you favor declaring the Port of Haiphong off-limits to shipping, including British?

A: Well, I would like to stop the introduction of arms and ammunition into North Vietnam that will be eventually used against our aircraft or against our troops in the South. It's a difficult problem to accomplish this with respect to the introduction of equipment by sea in consideration of international law and other factors. So this is one of those matters that goes beyond the military. But from a military viewpoint, without passing judgment on how we should stop the introduction of these supplies and the material that will be used against us, I would like to see it stopped.

Q: Final question, General. Old generals fade away, what do the young general /sic/ do?

A: He says good-bye and thank you very much for your kind attention.

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