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GENERAL WESTMORELAND'S HISTORY NOTES  
19-26 December 1967

Tuesday, 19 December

On arrival in the office in the afternoon of Tuesday, 19 December, I immediately called MG Vincent to express my regrets about the drowning of Prime Minister Holt of Australia, which had recently been announced. I informed General Vincent that I was sending a condolence message to Sir John Wilton, the senior military officer in Australia.

Having learned of the visit of the President to Australia and received notice that he might stop by Vietnam, I assembled a group of officers to discuss a contingency plan for a Presidential visit.

Wednesday, 20 December

Wednesday morning I called on Ambassador Bunker. The main subject of discussion was the possibility of a visit by the President. Bien Hoa and Cam Ranh Bay were under consideration; Bien Hoa was the preferred site, but Cam Ranh Bay was set up as an alternate, with each site to be a cover plan for the other.

At 0900 Wednesday morning, I attended a ceremony at which I presented an M-16 rifle to General Vien, who in turn presented it to COL Hai, who then presented it to LTC Phouc of the 5th Ranger Group. The 5th Ranger Group has been especially prepared and organized to take over the security of the Gia Dinh district on the departure of the 199th Brigade. It is hoped that the M-16 will be a morale boost to this unit and will help it to assume its responsibilities, which are of national importance. I

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stressed that, as a matter of Vietnamese prestige, the 5th Ranger Group must succeed. It would be regrettable if US troops had to return to the Capital Military District to restore security.

In my call on Minister of National Defense Vy, I discussed my efforts to accelerate the issuance of the M-16 rifle to the ARVN and the importance of doing all possible to improve the RF/PF. I inquired of him about his appearance before the National Assembly to discuss the mobilization plan, and he expressed the opinion that the proceedings had gone well.

The Director of Construction gave me a briefing on the plan for MACV to assume on behalf of the US mission, the advisory function for the national highway program. A joint committee had come up with a recommendation that this be assumed by USAID, but I deemed this impractical and asked the staff to study on alternate proposal for MACV to take over this function. It is my purpose to discuss this alternate arrangement at the next Mission Council meeting.

Thursday, 21 December

Thursday, General Johnson arrived. I excused myself from his briefings, since the Royal Thai Regiment had the night before earned its first big victory over the enemy--in fact, it had had its first major contact, and I thought it desirable to go out and show my interest and meet with the press, and this I did. The Thai's reacted admirably to an attack by a Viet Cong battalion which was later identified as part of the 274th Viet Cong Regiment. As I was about to depart, the press arrived, and I was able to give them a general discussion of the

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battle and express my pleasure with the performance of the Thai soldiers. The 1st Company of the Royal Thai Regiment (Queen's Cobras) was attacked in the middle of the night, with the enemy using mortars, antitank rockets, satchel charges, and automatic weapons. The only American on the scene was a SP4 O'Conner, who was a radio operator but who apparently distinguished himself by his actions. He accompanied the Thai company commander--a major-- and in addition to providing him communications also extended advice. O'Connor was obviously very proud of his performance, and the Thai's spoke very highly of him.

On return to MACV, I immediately dictated a message to the President who had just arrived in Australia in which I asked him to please pass on to the Thai Prime Minister a message concerning my observations of the battle. I sent a similar message to General Praphat and Marshal Dawie.

In the afternoon, we had a special Mission Council meeting to present two subjects--a study of the highway program in Vietnam, to include priority of construction and maintenance and the management of the US mission's advisory efforts to the GVN; and the Vietnamese war veterans' program and the advisory responsibility within the mission for it.

In connection with the former subject, the MACV Director of Construction made the presentation, which was an excellent one and which presented a recommendation--the product of a joint MACV/USAID study--that USAID take over the advisory effort in behalf of the mission. I countered this by an alternate proposal that MACV take over, which was presented by the briefers as addendum. Subsequently to the briefing, Mr. McDonald agreed to the alternative, and the ambassador has since decided that MACV will take over this responsibility and absorb those personnel

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working in USAID on the highway program. I'm confident that this arrangement will result in simplified coordination, a better program, and accelerated progress.

With respect to the second subject--the war veterans' program--I recommended that MACV take over the advisory responsibility, and this arrangement was approved by the Ambassador. It was stipulated that USAID would continue to fund the modest programs that they have underwritten, but it was agreed by all that we should encourage the GVN to budget for an adequate veterans' program, which is not only their responsibility but which could be a political plus for the government.

The President sent word that if practicable he would like to see Bob Hope during his visit to Vietnam, and during the next several days we had several conferences to see how this could be done. However, in the final analysis it was not practicable.

Friday, 22 December

In the afternoon of the 22d, I had all the principals in, to include the Cam Ranh Bay Air Force commander and LTG Rosson, and went over the details of the President's visit, which was set for the next day. We had been planning on his arrival at 1000 hours, based on an earlier message. Meanwhile, I sent General Momyer over to Korat to be on hand when the President arrived late Friday evening, and I asked General Momyer to meet Mr. Rostow on his arrival and to arrange to get me on a secure telephone with him. This General Momyer did around midnight. Mr. Rostow said that the President wanted to arrive at 0800 in the morning, and I told him it would be impossible for us to make the necessary arrangements by then since we had planned on 1000. I told him I

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thought we could do it by 0930, but later in the conversation agreed we could juggle the schedule by having the President visit a hospital and meet the commanders before attending the troop formation, in which case he could arrive by 0900. Mr. Rostow said he would consult with the President and call me back. Marvin Watson called me at about 0100 and firmed up the 0900 arrival time. He stated that the acceleration was brought about because of arrival times at the President's next destination, which I later learned was Rome for the purpose of calling on the Pope. After hanging up with Mr. Watson, I called MG Kerwin and he proceeded to put the wheels into motion for the movement of troops and the essential preparations for the visit.

Saturday, 23 December

Saturday morning I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay at about 0825. Ambassador Bunker, General Vien, and Vice President Ky arrived about 15 minutes later. They were no sooner on the ground then we received word that the President was in the traffic pattern, but this turned out to be a false alarm as it was actually the press plane. However, the President did arrive approximately 15 minutes early, and fortunately we were ready for him. He visited the Air Force hospital, where he pinned on approximately 20 Purple Hearts, then met the field commanders and talked to them briefly. He then proceeded to the reviewing stand, where he received honors, trooped the line, and presented Distinguished Service Crosses, Navy Crosses, and Silver Stars to a combination of Army, Air Force, and Marine officers and men.

At this time, I went to the microphone and stated: "At the request of the Commander in Chief, I ask you to break ranks and assemble in

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front of the reviewing stand and the Commander in Chief." After they had moved (approximately 2,500), I directed: "Remove your headgear," and then announced: "Gentlemen, the Commander in Chief." The President then gave an excellent speech to the troops. At the conclusion of the speech, he presented Distinguished Service Medals to myself, General Abrams, General Momyer, LTG Palmer, LTG Cushman, and RADM Veth; and civilian awards to Ambassador Bunker, Ambassador Locke in absentia, and Ambassador Komer. Following the President's speech and the presentation of awards, I went to the microphone and said: "On behalf of the men present here this morning and all troops serving in Vietnam, I extend to the President and the First Lady a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." this brought forth thunderous applause and cheers, and at this time some soldier in the middle of the mass shouted: "Three cheers for the President, hip-hip-horray!" In spontaneous fashion the President was given a rousing cheer, which obviously gave him a big thrill. After the applause had died down, I concluded the ceremony with the following comments: "Sir, we thank you for coming to see us. Goodbye, and God's speed." Following this, the President moved directly to the airplane and was successful in taking off on schedule. Quite obviously, he was pleased.

Upon departure of the President, I saw Vice President Ky off and then returned to the hospital, at which time I pinned on other Purple Hearts, explaining that the President wanted to do this but his time would not permit. Most of the Purple Hearts were to Marines who had been wounded in the DMZ area.

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I then got in an OH-43 helicopter and flew to the convalescent hospital, where I toured the facilities rapidly and talked to a number of the men.

I then visited the mess hall where the visiting troops were being fed and talked to them in small groups. Next, I went to the loading area where they were being loaded out for return to home station and again talked to them in small groups, congratulating them on their formation for the President, speaking about the performance of their respective units, and wishing them a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. One soldier expressed disappointment that the President had come instead of Bob Hope.

From the Air Base I went by helicopter to the Cam Ranh Bay Support Command, where I inspected the docks, talked to some of the stevadores, visited the stock control operation, and inspected a number of warehouses and several maintenance facilities. In the process I extended a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to as many men as I could. The log command troops were obviously doing a good job and appreciated the recognition.

My next stop was at Nha Trang, where LTG Rosson met me and I received an update briefing at his headquarters. Before leaving the Nha Trang area, I spent approximately an hour with the 5th Special Forces Group, where I received a briefing on recent developments and gave them guidance with respect to future plans.

Upon return to Tan Son Nhut, Ambassador Bunker was waiting for Mrs. Bunker to arrive from Katmandu. We briefly discussed the visit of the President, which the ambassador thought had gone extremely well.

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Sunday, 24 December

Sunday morning I had my weekly intelligence and strategy conference, at which time I gave some guidance for the preparation of a plan to be implemented approximately a year hence. The plan (Move into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail) is predicated on certain assumptions and is designed to be prepared to exercise options if political considerations permit.

In the afternoon, I learned that Bob Hope was coming in, so I met him at the helipad and took him to the office for a brief visit before sending him off to the quarters. That evening, Bob and I went to a party put on by the Australians which involved a concert and show, had dinner together at the quarters, and then spend about an hour visiting the patients at the 3d Field Hospital until midnight mass, which we attended together. We planned to attend mass at Saigon Cathedral but it was too crowded. After mass, Bob and I patiently signed autographs for about a half an hour before we departed for the quarters.

Monday, 25 December

Christmas morning, I arrived at the office at about 0800, had one briefing, met Bob Hope and proceeded with him to Long Binh. Subsequently, I met Vice President and Madame Ky and we attended Bob's Christmas show.

After the show was over, Bob introduced me, and I thanked him and his talented troupe for a wonderful show. I then explained that this was the fourth Christmas Bob had given to us; that the first year I had presented him a certificate and was now aware that he had several

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filing cabinets full of these; the next year I had given him a plaque and he had a roomful of these; the next year I had given him a medal and had since learned that he has his own mint; so this year I had nothing material to give him but wanted to express grateful appreciation of his abiding interest, support, and encouragement. I then stated that there was a very important gentleman in the audience who had been present at the shows in previous years and whom I wanted to introduce--Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky.

Vice President Ky then came to the microphone and gave an excellent talk, thanking Bob for his support and the American troops for their contribution to his country. He then presented to Bob Hope a Vietnamese Mandarin hat and coat, which are symbols of prestige. Several weeks before, I had written Vice President Ky a letter and later called him on the phone and asked him to be present at the show since he had seen the shows during the three previous years. I also requested that he take the opportunity to thank Bob for his support and suggested that we may wish to present him a Vietnamese costume. Vice President Ky thought this was an excellent idea and asked me to get Mr. Hope's measurements. The sight of Bob wearing a Vietnamese costume presented at the hands of The Vice President should be very colorful and go over very well in the TV program that will be made of the Bob Hope Christmas tour.

Ambassador and Mrs. Bunker were present and Bob, while introducing them, joked about two ambassadors kissing.

After the show, I went to Bien Hoa, picked up at T-39, and flew to Hue-Phu Bai, where a helicopter met me and took me to Con Thien where I visited with the Marine battalion, thence to Cua Viet, where I

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visited sailors and Marines, and finally to the hospital ship Sanctuary, where I visited several wards and talked to the crew, medical staff, and patients on closed-circuit TV. I congratulated the medical staff on their performance during the previous year, congratulated the Marines on their combat showing, and extended to all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

From there I went by helicopter to Hue-Phu Bai, boarded a T-39 ; and flew to Tan Son Nhut. Joe Fried of the New York Daily News and Mutual Broadcasting System accompanied me on the trip and recorded a number of my comments to the troops. Upon return to my office, I gave him an interview on tape. <sup>the</sup> By time I returned to Tan Son Nhut, Mrs. Westmoreland had arrived from Clark, and I met her at the quarters before the arrival of guests for a buffet supper in honor of Bob Hope and his troupe.

Tuesday, 26 December

The next morning Bob Hope stopped by the office for a moment on his way to his next show. Before the Mission Council, I had a meeting on the distribution on M-16 rifles and the DYE MARKER program. I'm still concerned as to the lay-out of the defenses south of the DMZ, which are not conforming in all cases to the best military practice. I gave instructions on the preparation of a directive which would clarify the philosophy behind the defense line and the concept of construction.

After lunch, I discussed the proposal by Dr. McMillan on reorganizing the scientific advisory effort and gave some instructions as to an alternate proposal that would meet Dr. McMillan's objectives but with less disruption and controversy. I directed that my action on

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this matter be transmitted to Dr. McMillan, who is now on leave back in the United States.

I saw General Vien at 1600 and discussed with him the distribution of M-16 rifles. We agreed on the following priority of issuance:

I Corps, IV Corps, then equal and third priority to II and III Corps.

I discussed my visit to Con Thien the day before and proposed that we set up a joint inspection team to survey the fortified areas to insure that they are in conformance with sound tactical practice, to which General Vien agreed. During my visit to the DMZ on Christmas Day, General Cushman had told me that the ARVN had not accepted their suggestions on the lay-out of the fortifications. This joint inspection should give me enough information so that I can advise General Vien to take appropriate action.

One of the things that I noted during my visits to Con Thien was that the Marines were providing fortifications for a 900-man US Marine battalion, despite the fact that an ARVN battalion is scheduled to take over the Con Thien fortifications in the spring. I emphasized to the Marines at the time and have since instructed the staff to issue a directive in writing that the fortifications will be designed for manning by a Vietnamese battalion. My fear is that some of the fortifications being manned by the Marines may require two Vietnamese battalions, which we can ill afford. I've had no end of problems with the strong-point obstacle system. The reason seems to be that the Marines have had little experience in construction of fortifications and therefore lack the know-how to establish them in the way I had visualized. I thus have been remiss in taking for granted that they had the background; hopefully it is not too late to get this project on a solid track.

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At 1740 hours, Mrs. Westmoreland and I departed for Clark Air Base, arriving at Clark shortly after 2000 hours.

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