Burdette E. Bostwick, Jr.

OVERSEAS CAREER PROGRAM

Moore Hall 215

[redacted]

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
Joint Chiefs of Staff

MEMO TO: Gen Knowles

I can see why you selected him as an aide. He would make a fine CINCO.

(W)

Ed Lewis

Burdette E. Bostwick, Jr. Overseas Career Program

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96822

17 May 1971

Dear General Knowles,

I hate to think how long it has been since I've dropped you a line; I'm certainly not very good at keeping up with the times. I suspected you had moved from DCSOPS, but wasn't sure, so I called Gen. Rosson's office and discovered your 3rd star and your assignment with JCS. Belated congratulations on both. Now, if you'll let me know when you get the 4th star, I'll throw a real party wherever I happen to be.

The attached manuscript deserves a word of explanation. I am sending a copy to you, and one to Gen. Seaman, since each of you is mentioned in particular. I thought you might want a copy for information, and if Gen. Westmoreland should mention it to you, you won't be caught by surprise.

I have never equivocated about my feelings toward the Army, and people have occasionally solicited my comments since I got out in '66. Anti-militarism is now a fad on the campuses, of course (our ROTC building was burned down, recently), and only a durable sense of humor has prevented me from physically objecting to some of the tactics and rhetoric of dissident students and faculty. Counter-protest, however, does not really interest me, and I am disturbed by the recent attacks on all the services. It is seldom that one can pick up a newspaper these days without finding some pejorative comment about the military on the editorial page, or gross caricatures of soldiers by cartoonists. I decided to tell someone that I think a great deal of the Army, and since you taught me always to go to the top dog, I decided to pick on the Chief of Staff. The letter does not say all that I <u>have</u> to say, but it is longer than I meant it to be. I hope you don't find it too incoherent.

I am nearly through with the MA program in Geography; all I have to do is write the thesis. That is in progress, and I hope to wrap up the MA by the end of the summer, so that I can begin the PhD program in the fall. I hope to go to Thailand or Laos in Dec '72, for dissertation research on the Mekong Project.

Since this is exam time at the University, I am going to cut this short. I will write at greater length later on. I hope you are well and busy. Please convey my best to Mrs. Knowles and Richard.

As always,
Pete

P.S. - Sorry about the lousy typing, but it's not my chief skill!

Burdette E. Bostwick, Jr. Overseas Career Program

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General William C. Westmoreland
Chief of Staff, United States Army
Headquarters, Department of the Army
Washington, D.C. 20310

15 May 1971

Dear General Westmoreland:

Ten years ago this month, I enlisted in the United States Army at the recruiting office in Newark, New Jersey, with feelings more of resignation than expectation, and considerably more trepidation than confidence. That initial 3-year enlistment turned into a 5-year/2-month/18-day active duty stint that was, almost without exception, rewarding, informative, interesting, maturing, and eminently worthwhile. At this writing, I have been out of the Army for almost as long as I was in it, and the intervening years have often given me reason to reflect on that experience. I would like to share a few thoughts with you from this present perspective, if you will bear with my anecdotal, historical approach.

My entry into the Army was not entirely a matter of choice. The fact was that I had flunked out of college, had no goal in sight and precious little motivation to do anything except hunt, ski, and ride horses. In April 1961, I reached a crisis stage -- I had no money, no horse, hunting season was months away, and all the snow had disappeared -- I was high and dry. My parents were helpful and patient, but the real problem was mine. It seemed that military service was a necessary evil with which I would eventually have to cope, so I began to investigate the possibilities. I learned right away that for draftees, or volunteers for the draft, the prospects were bleak: no training of any note, no choice of assignments, just shut your mouth and do as you're told for 2 years. Since that was not exactly a pleasing prospect, I checked into the opportunities offered through enlistment, and discovered that by playing the game for one additional year, I could do pretty much as I pleased. The Army Security Agency recruiter offered me a crack at the Army Language School, which I accepted in the belief that a year of language training was a good tradeoff for an additional year in uniform. I was absolutely right, and I began to see that the Army offered as many opportunities as it imposed obligations.

Basic training came first, of course. Suffice it to say that the 8 weeks I spent at Ft. Dix were most notable for their mediocrity. I will not dwell on this topic, because I am sure that the Vietnam conflict has lent

to basic training an immediacy and seriousness that were largely absent when I went through it.

In July 1961, I reported to the (then) Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey, and spent the next 12 months studying the Korean language. I am happy to recall that year as a fine one, in many ways. The instruction was, of course, excellent. In addition, the barracks were comfortable and entirely adequate, and the learning environment was superb. Today, 9 years after the course, and in spite of the fact that I never had an opportunity to use it, I can still write some Korean, and although my vocabulary has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared, I can still muster a few key phrases to astonish the Koreans I meet. I believe that, given a refresher course of the same intensity, though not necessarily of the same duration, I could regain much of the facility I had in 1962. I think this speaks highly of the caliber of the program.

My regret at never having had an opportunity to utilize the language during an in-country assignment is mitigated by the realization that other benefits accrued from that year at Monterey. First, and perhaps most important, was the sense of satisfaction and confidence gained from completing that course, especially on the heels of having failed rather miserably in my college work. Other scholastic debacles aside, graduation from the Language School carries with it a definite sense of accomplishment, and I feel strongly that my year there was a solid, educational plus. Secondly, two of the officers in my class encouraged me to apply for Officer Candidate School, which I did. Then, when the paperwork went astray in the Personnel Section at the Presidio, LTC Harry Spitz, the Presidio's Dispensing Physician, intervened on my behalf to secure my appearance before the Review Board, and thereafter provided the push needed to get my application to Sixth Army HQ prior to the deadline. I was accepted, and reported to Ft. Benning for Infantry OCS in late August 1962.

I would probably have not confessed it at the time, but I had some misgivings about my ability to make it through OCS. However, I had the good fortune to travel back across the country with LTC (then CPT) Terence Corning, who took a spontaneous, personal interest in my welfare, and contributed enormously to the formation of the attitude that carried me through the course. His candid evaluation of the Army, of OCS, of the requirements for leadership and the attendant responsibilities, to which he added much personal encouragement, gave me both insight and inspiration.

OCS was an experience. Though I'm not exactly champing at the bit to do it again, it was a terrific 6 months, and had quite an impact on the values and standards I hold today. I guess I never really minded spit-shining the floors and the desk blotters, because it seemed to me at the time --and I'm dead sure of it now-- that there was something to be learned from what, on the surface, was a fool's errand. OCS proved some very important things to me, and though I am not sure that I can articulate them properly, I would like to try and convey some feeling for what

that training meant to me.

I have selected 3 manifestations of that course for illustration. First, I learned a great deal about my own capabilities and limitations, both physical and mental. Attitude, as you know, is a critical factor. Apathy, uncertainty, a disposition to quibble, or a willingness to accept the least effort as the best available, can impair the effectiveness of any organization, but must be especially disadvantageous to the military. OCS taught me that I could do almost anything, if I tried, as long as I believed I could, and wasn't prepared to give up at the first sign of resistance, fatigue, unexpected contingencies, mosquitoes, or whatever else came along. The "can-do" attitude is an important legacy of that training, and I have found it to be invaluable.

The second attribute is closely related to the first -- leadership. This, in the final analysis, is the essence of OCS, to provide leaders with sound background for their tasks and good judgement in their execution. I don't know what latent ability is required, but I am convinced that OCS is well-designed to draw out whatever talent is there. There are few places where a man can learn decision-making and the principles for positive action as he gets them in OCS, where they are keyed to the heaviest responsibility of all -- that for the welfare, actions, and lives of other men. Above all, I think one of the precepts I remember most clearly is that not only must you seek responsibility, you must also accept it when it is offered, and then in turn accept responsibility for your actions. This last part of the requirement, unfortunately, seems to be often neglected by "leaders" in many fields, today. Maybe we should run some of the politicians through OCS....

Finally, I like to think that OCS taught me something about the standards that I, as an individual or as a leader of others, can apply to the evaluation of my conduct and performance. This point takes us back to the spit-shined floors of 52nd Co. (OC). If, prior to OCS, anyone had suggested that I polish a floor until some damned idiot could bend over and read his name tag in the reflection therefrom, he would have undoubtedly received a mighty short reply. It occurs to me, however, that the emphasis on extremes in practically every aspect of OCS is well-founded, for that experience, while not always agreeable, did demonstrate in no uncertain terms that it <u>is</u> possible to accomplish one helluva lot in a day, and to do it all very well. It also demonstrates that such accomplishments require organization, planning, and teamwork. I am sure that any officer who attempted to apply the rigorous OCS standards of appearance and bearing to a line unit would provoke instantaneous rebellion, and he would probably deserve it. But, there is more to that story, for the other side of the coin reflects an equal emphasis on perfection in the conduct and completion of assigned or necessary tasks, no matter how small or unimportant they seem. It is important to carry, as an integral part of one's mental baggage, the uncompromising picture of what it is <u>possible</u> to do when circumstances require it, for such an image will provide a measure

of your own performance, as well as that of those around you. I may never achieve such standards again, but I at least have a high goal to which I can aspire.

For these, and other, reasons I retain an image of OCS as an experience that provided me with a set of valuable reference points, criteria by which I could judge my own achievements as well as those of others. Today, though I am sometimes disappointed with the judgements, I continue to find the guidelines valid. I have tested these criteria over and over again, and they always stand me in good stead, for they cause me to look for that little extra bit of effort that distinguishes a quality endeavor from an ordinary one.

Following OCS, I attended the Imagery Interpretation Officer's course at Ft. Holabird, from which I derived a skill that I still use, and which serves me well as a geographer. Moreover, I had a pre-existing interest in the intelligence field, which my 6 months' tenure at Ft. Holabird intensified; I am now seriously considering an intelligence career after I obtain the PhD degree. So, the Intellingence School was also an educational and worthwhile experience.

On completion of the II course in September 1963, I was assigned to the Military Intelligence Detachment of the recently-formed 11th Air Assault Division. Having carefully arranged (so I thought) for an assignment to Germany as a sort of skiing II officer, I was somewhat chagrined to be sent back to Ft. Benning, which OCS had caused me to believe was uncomfortably close to what I would eventually probably find in Purgatory. My first 10 months with the 11th AAD did little to dispel that notion. Aside from minor involvement with some new equipment and a foray into a joint DIA/CE project, my principal recollection is of coloring maps for a staff officer whom I regarded as a nincompoop at the time, and who did nothing to alter that opinion in all the time I knew him. I did, though, manage to escape for Airborne training, as well as for the Air-Ground Operations School at Eglin AFB.

In August 1964, just as I was getting really fed up, I had the extraordinary good fortune to be offered a position which was to put me right in the thick of the action for the next 2 years. Richard T. Knowles, the about-to-be BG, the Assistant Division Commander of the 11th AAD, picked me to be his Aide-de-Camp. I occasionally thought to myself, afterwards, "poor General Knowles -- to make a mistake like that and then have to live with it..." but, live with it -- and me -- he did, for 2 years. I have not been involved in any enterprise either before or since of which I can say I am as proud, or which gave me a greater sense of association with something worthwhile. An assertion like that calls for some explanation, and for a closer look at this important part of my service. The crux of my military experience is something to which I have given considerable thought over the last 5 years, because the impressions I gained then are just as clear to me now. It is a little hard to explain this without appearing to

overstate the case, but I will try to present the key elements with a minimum of rhetoric.

At the time I was selected to be General Knowles' Aide in 1964, I had behind me more than 3 years of active duty, and I felt that I had something to offer the Army -- not just acquired skills, but an interest in "doing" something, and a flexibility of outlook. If anyone had made a conscious effort to place me in a slot where I would feel challenged and feel that I had that opportunity to "do" something, he could not have picked a better position for me, or one as rewarding. Gen. Knowles bent every effort to make me a part of the Division's management team; he offered me responsibility, and if I accepted it, he offered me more. Heaven only knows how many mistakes I made, but I involved in a continuous learning process, and he never leaned on me too hard unless I repeated the same mistakes. As I think back on that, I realize how difficult it is to put such a tolerant concept into practice. At any rate, the upshot was that I wound up with a real sense of involvement, and felt that I was an integral part of the operation.

In August 1965, as the newly-designated 1st Air Cavalry Division was preparing to move to Vietnam, I was within about 24 hours of separation from active duty when, after much soul-searching and some consultation with General Knowles (who, characteristically, placed no pressure on me, but simply gave me the facts and possibilities on which to base my own decision), I reversed my decision and elected to extend and go overseas with the Cav. General Knowles had to make a phone call to keep me in, and then, in a move that I had not fully anticipated, he asked me to go as his Aide. In short order, I was on my way with the advance party. I will never be able to adequately convey the breadth of experience I gained by that year, nor can I adequately express my appreciation for all I was able to see at first hand. First with the Air Cav in the Highlands, and then with III FFORCEV at Long Binh, I felt that I was not only watching, but was part of, the Army's best.

Almost every key figure of my 11th AAD/1st Cav experience is still clear in my mind, and I count myself fortunate indeed to have been able to form good working relationships with so many of these outstanding men. I note, with the pride that stems from association, that many of these same men have risen, deservedly, in my view, to much higher positions. And, I note as well the very human qualities that complement their professional abilities. Apart from Gen. Knowles, there are a few other individuals who stand out in my memory both because they did their jobs so well and because, in spite of the pressures placed on them, they either had or took the time to answer my endless questions, to fill me in, to give me advice, to give me a kick in the pants when I needed it, or simply to include me in some current deliberation. LTG Jonathan O. Seaman was particularly conscientious in this regard, and I recall with considerable satisfaction the time spent with Generals Seaman and Knowles at Long Binh and Bien Hoa.

These may sound to you like small things, and taken individually, any one of them would be. Yet, the weight of experience in other areas and with other people draws me inevitably to the conclusion that they are not small at all, that they represent, in fact, some of the traits exhibited by men of very high caliber, men who lead from knowledge and by example, as opposed to those who lead from ignorance and by authority derived from position alone. I gained a great deal from my association with the men of the Air Assault and Air Cav divisions, and the list of those whom I will long remember is extensive -- Generals Kinnard, Becker, Wright, Lynch, Brown, Moore, Burdett, Hennessey; Tully, Ray Kampe, McClelland, Nicholson, the irrepressible John Stockton... the list goes on, of men characterized by imagination, drive, a dedication to get the job done, and good humor.

My decision to leave the Army and return to college, therefore, was not an easy one. The only light touch was that, where Gen. Knowles had had to make a phone call a year before to keep me in, this time he had to make a phone call to get me out. Seriously, the choice was not an easy one; 5 years is a long time, and I think I had a good start on a career. The reasons for that decision are complex, and it may be that even now I do not know exactly why I took that path. I am, of course, glad for the opportunity to pursue my education and my interest in Southeast Asian studies, but I readily admit that I often [illegible] the Army -- especially when a Huey goes overhead!

I have handed out a few kudos, not because I felt obligated to do so, but because they indicate my frame of reference for this letter. There are many more plaudits that the Army deserves, but they are tangential to my story. In counterpoint, it would be less than honest of me to foster an impression that I think everything is coming up roses. I have some complaints, too. Everyone gripes, naturally, but no one dislikes mindless bitching more than I, for I get a superabundance of it from the academics. I think the passage of time has precipitated out the petty and irrelevant items, so, for whatever it's worth, I will pass on the residue that lurks behind.

My principal comment concerns the individual soldier and the Vietnam war. I do not propose to address the issues of the Army's role in Vietnam, or its role in American society; either of those would be a book-length undertaking. With respect to our Indochina involvement, however, I think we have failed in an area that impedes our effectiveness in country, and abets vast misunderstandings here at home. I am referring to the general level of ignorance regarding Southeast Asia and the region's people. In the case of the average citizen, I take a high level of ignorance for granted, because people are for the most part either too lazy or too uncaring to exert themselves to learn. In the instance of our armed forces, though, I find the equivalent situation appalling. Our troops are ill-equipped to cope with the complexity, diversity, or alien nature of the environment in which they are called upon to serve. They are poorly informed about the nature of their mission and their enemy, and they know little or nothing

of the culture, history or customs of the Vietnamese, Lao, or Cambodians. I base this contention not only upon my own service in Vietnam, but upon the observed reactions of other returned veterans, as well.

I freely admit that the magnitude of the educational problem I pose is immense, and while aware that some efforts have been made in this area, I think the results indicate a distinct lack of success. Neglect of this issue is going to leave us with a bitter legacy of misunderstandings and warped attitudes about Asians in general, and Southeast Asians in particular. "Culture shock" needs some attention, and I think we stand to gain considerably, in any future commitments abroad, from more persistent and sophisticated approaches to troop education.

The comment is not idle; the spin-off from this neglect is in daily evidence. I have watched, over the last few years, the evolution of a vast body of misinformed opinion and propaganda which has drawn no effective response from the nation's leaders. The rhetoric has occasionally been aided by veterans whose motives are unclear to me (and perhaps to themselves as well), and has been inflamed by distorted or contextually irrelevant information. Many veterans are confused and uncertain about their role in a conflict that is the subject of much dispute. The men who return to campuses, in particular, are faced with attitudes derived from the "ivory tower" syndrome of idealism and moral rectitude. The anti-war factions are vocal to a pitch only a few decibels below the threshold of pain, and are armed with tons of material generated by sources whose commitment to reasoned analysis is very greatly exceeded by a desire to make their own point at any cost. The flow of garbage is difficult to counter at an abstract level, but if our returnees were equipped with a little better background material, the situation would be improved. The guy who can stand up and say, "I was there, and..." carries a lot of weight. I am not suggesting that we should field debating teams, but our men could be better informed.

The politically convoluted nature of the war makes the task of education triply difficult, of course, but apart from a few aberrant (and hopefully isolated) abuses of power in the field, I don't think the Army has anything to apologize for in Indochina. As men return to civilian life in increasing numbers and face the difficulty of re-establishing a useful identity, the mounting indecision about their military experience may require more attention. Counseling about residual effects of combat exposure, more placement assistance from the Veterans Administration, and an attempt to convey to these men some sense of their part in the "Big Picture" of the Vietnam war, might assist their transition, and protect the Army's image in the bargain. I will refrain from laboring the point ad nauseam, since it probably confronts you every day; I just want you to know that I, too, care.

There is one related point on which I would like to touch, briefly. Most of the men who return from combat experience are reluctant to expound

on the subject at any length. I am disturbed, however, by the soldiers who return with endless, incredible, hair-raising tales of close combat, old-west style shootouts, heroic acts, "first-hand" accounts of publicized actions, and even tales of atrocities. My experience to date indicates that a good many of these willing talkers are men who were in support units or base camp areas, and who, in some cases, never heard anything but the sound of friendly artillery and who couldn't chamber a round in an M-16 if they had to. I haven't any solution to offer for this one, but I certainly wish there were a way to discourage armchair bravado among troops released from active duty who return to civilian life feeling it necessary to carve a false niche for themselves.

The other matters that stick in my mind are administrative. First, as I think back to the days of the testing and evaluation of the airmobile concept, I doubt we'd have ever made it into the air if we had had to abide by the myriad AR's governing the accomplishment of this and the modification of that. I am talking, I guess, about flexibility, and the feeling that at present over-regulation is the norm. The cumbersome procedural requirements that dominate the Army militate against satisfactory innovation and against receptivity to ideas. People who lack imagination take refuge in the AR's, and what ought to be guidelines become straitjackets instead. The spirit of experimentation that so characterized the development of the airmobile division, the translation of the concept into reality, ought to be the rule rather than the exception.

Next, a comment on the rating system: I think the Officer Efficiency Report system is basically sound, but it seems to me that it might be tightened by requiring written justification of ratings above and below certain levels. There is some latitude for inflating reports to insure that an officer receives consideration; in the case of a good officer, no harm may be done, but there must also be cases in which the officer is not worth one-half his benefactor's rating. Or, conversely, a potentially good man can be penalized unduly by personality conflicts with his rating officer, or by misunderstandings. I think that a mandate to provide something other than robust platitudes to justify exceptional ratings would result in more thoughtful reports and better criteria for judging officers. I would also like to suggest the possibility of soliciting ratings from key people who serve under the officer in addition to his superiors. I believe that junior officers and senior NCO's would rise to that responsibility well, and would gain a greater sense of participation in the system. Such input would give an added dimension to the evaluation process, and should yield insight not available from those higher up.

Finally, a comment with respect to senior officers who have accumulated a considerable amount of time in grade, and for whom the prospects for promotion are dubious or nonexistent: such officers <u>may</u> become rigid in outlook, bitter in attitude, and bastards to work for. I am not going to suggest that they be taken out and shot; they have made, and can continue to make, important contributions. But, a man who has dedicated a major

portion of his life to a military career and comes suddenly to the realization that he is not likely to climb any farther up the ladder, is capable of becoming a serious drag on the system. I wonder if the Army might not be able to utilize a sort of counseling approach by senior officers to ward off the possibility of stagnation, and to encourage such officers to continue to put forth their best efforts.

I don't believe I have any more momentous comments to offer, and in amy case I had not intended this to be a vehicle for airing my gripes. With gratitude for your patience thus far, I will now try to wrap this up.

You are probably wondering why on earth I bothered to put all this on paper. The simplest explanation I can think of is that the Army had a lasting effect on me -- on my attitudes, values, expectations, and development as an individual -- and has been subjected to evaluation over time. Having given the experience some thought, I felt that, rather than simply fade away, I should tell someone that I found it worthwhile. At a time when the Army is getting brickbats from many quarters, and is regarded as suffering a decline in prestige, I would like to offer some encouragement.

I have had the good fortune to see the workings of the machine from basic training to the Pentagon, from a start at E-1 to a finish at O-3, and I have no reservations at all about the quality of my experience. As I see it, the Army is akin to any other endeavor in the sense that a person gets out of it whatever he puts into it; if he puts nothing in, he will certainly get nothing out. For my part, I feel that my expenditures of time and effort were well rewarded. My training was first class, my assignments were good, and the final 2 years of my service provided a level of challenge and responsibility that will be hard to match any time soon. In fact, I sometimes think I got more out of the Army than the Army got out of me! In any event, it is with the utmost pride and pleasure that I recall my years on active duty; I shall always remember those with whom it was my good fortune to serve, and I will be happy to recommend the Army to any man as an excellent and truly rewarding career option.

This urge to "share a few thoughts with you" turned into more of an epic than I had anticipated, and I apologize for its length and for all the erasures. As I look back over it, I have decided to take the liberty of sending a copy each to Generals Knowles and Seaman. Finally, with appreciation for your demonstrated leadership in difficult times, I would like to close with an expression of my continued support for the United States Army. Keep up the good work.

Very truly yours,

Burdette B. Bostwick, Jr.