

Reasons behind dissent:

# The rise and stumble of Westmoreland

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(Editor's Note: General William C. Westmoreland has been out of the news limelight for over a year. This article recalls some of the vital facts of the general's career and involvement in South Vietnam. It partially explains why University students have organized dissent activities for this weekend.)

Many American men have made important decisions concerning the role of the U.S. in Vietnam.

When University of Nebraska

students protest this Friday and Saturday, they will be directing their dissent at one of these American men. His name: William C. Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff and former commander of American military forces in Vietnam.

In 1968, President Johnson awarded Gen. Westmoreland the second oak leaf for his Distinguished Service Medal. At that time, Secretary of the Army, Stanley Resor, was quoted as saying that due to the leadership of Gen. Westmoreland, the U.S. was on "the threshold of complete success."

In response to those words, Westmoreland said his forces had "denied to the enemy a battlefield victory" and "arrested the spread of Communism in South East Asia."

Long-time Pentagon critic and newspaper columnist, Drew Pearson, suggested in February of 1968 that Westmoreland owned his military survival, at least partly, to the Congressional power of two fellow South Carolinians, Republican Senator Strom Thurmond and House Armed Services Committee Chairman L. Mendel Rivers.

Gen. Westmoreland directed the build up of U.S. forces in Vietnam from 235,000 men in early 1965 to more than 550,000 men in 1968.

It was also Westmoreland who conceived the tactic of dispatching large numbers of troops into jungle wastelands on "search and destroy" missions.

But the general never faced severe criticism until the Tet offensive of February, 1968.

One war correspondent wrote: "The time that Westmoreland was purchasing with American's blood and treasure was not on his side. As the war dragged on and the toll rose to 24,364 dead, support for the war shriveled in the U.S."

Shortly after the Tet offensive, Gen. Westmoreland requested 206,000 more troops be sent to Vietnam.

But the troops didn't go to Vietnam.

Instead Gen. Westmoreland was relieved of his command in the spring of 1968, exactly one week after Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy for the Presidency.

President Lyndon Johnson had appointed Westmoreland Army Chief of Staff.

As one White House correspondent viewed it, the general was rewarded with "a kick upstairs."

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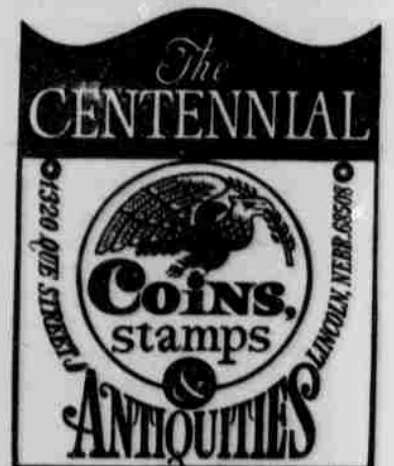
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