

Gen. Westmoreland: American ideal or history's prisoner?

News Opinion by
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A butcher, with the blood of 40,000 American boys on his hands or a great military leader?

William Westmoreland was called these things and more as he won the admiration of many youth and most of their elders during his weekend in Lincoln. At the same time, he was scorned with voices and placards by a small group of war protesters.

There are undoubtedly many draft age men (and their women) who don't see Westmoreland as the shining knight on a white horse. But, they may be beating a dead horse since the general got "kicked upstairs" following the disastrous Tet Offensive that took place during his tenure as Vietnam commander.

Still, he is the Army Chief of Staff and, whether peace freak or hardhat, Nebraskans can't be too choosy about their symbolic figures of protest.

Demonstrators at the hotel thought the General looked very "uptight" and uncomfortable during the brief confrontation. He still seemed ill at ease under the floodlights during his Saturday press conference.

Westmoreland answered questions about football, censorship in the Army, troop withdrawals and the Middle East in a confident, although fairly predictable manner. He talked about a volunteer army, which he opposes because he doesn't think it can attract enough men and about ROTC, which in Westmoreland's opinion, is "good for the individual" and the nation.

On Vietnam he said that the United States doesn't "want to influence them (the Viet-

namese) into a mold of ours" but added that some Americanization is "helpful." "helpful."

After the other newspaper people left, he stopped for a informal chat with a handful of middle-aged ladies about their son's military service. As he spoke with them, a different, more relaxed man began to emerge. From spit shined shoes to a chest filled with the ribbons from three wars, the graying officer reminded me of a Steve Canyon, a paragon of the old American masculine ideal.

He mentioned universities, saying that men should go into the military where they could mature before college and then, as veterans, make better students. He talked of always being against college deferments and how he felt that some students' anti-war views were "rationalizations" of their failure to serve the country.

When he discovered that I had served under him in Asia, the general asked about my Army experiences and related some of his. He spoke of having a brother-in-law in my division, who was killed in Vietnam. I kept thinking that this man had so much of himself invested in the Army and the war that no matter how bad it became he would have to go on defending it. Because if Vietnam was wrong then Westmoreland must also be wrong.

Finally, he shook hands and strode away down the hall accompanied by his aides. As I checked my hand for any blood that might have rubbed off, one of the ladies sighed, "He looks so much better in person than on TV." Giggling like ninth graders admiring the high school football hero, the others nodded in agreement.



Gen. Westmoreland arrives at the Cornhusker Hotel amidst anti-war slogans and signs.



Welcome, Gen. Westmoreland

Signs, slogans greet Westmoreland

Some of the signs read: "Mom and Dad — Your silence is killing me;" "War is good business, Invest your son;" and "Must we see any more oppression?"

The chants were not new: "Peace now." "One, two, three, four, What in the hell are we fighting for?"

But the object of this protest was new. Never before had Nebraskans been given the opportunity to show an Army Chief of Staff what they thought of the Vietnam War.

"Gen. William C. Westmoreland is one of the authors of the war," Edgar A. Pearlstein, professor of physics, said at a Friday rally in the Nebraska Union. "We've got to show the people of this state that he can't come on our campus unnoticed."

Westmoreland, commander of allied troops in Vietnam from 1965 to 1968, flew into Lincoln late Friday for a speech at the Radisson-Cornhusker Hotel. He left town after the football game Saturday.

About 250 students, a few faculty members and some non-students marched to the front door of the hotel after the Union rally. There could be little doubt they were noticed.

Cocktail sipping businessmen attending conventions at the hotel crowded around doors and windows to observe the boisterous, predominately long-haired group of young people.

Westmoreland was behind schedule so the protesters sat, stood and reclined on the sidewalk, waiting. From time to time they chanted anti-war slogans, quipped with police officers who guarded the group and ate donuts and rolls.

Then the general, in a sleek black automobile, convoyed by Lincoln police, drove up to the front door. Students, held back by police, crowded forward so that the general and his staff had only about a four-foot-wide passage to the door. Demonstrators shouted, "Peace now" and "Stop the War."

Westmoreland strode to the hotel door, smiling slightly and

nodding to the demonstrators. He went straight to his eighth floor suite. The demonstrators returned to campus, as peacefully as they had come.

Many of the same people gathered again Saturday afternoon east of Memorial Stadium. They carried many of the same signs and shouted

many of the same slogans.

Many of the football fans who passed the protest seemed to agree with a banker at the hotel who said the day before, "It's all a waste of time. I think

they're rude."

Gov. Robert T. Tiemann, one of Westmoreland's hosts, concurred. "It's a shameful way to treat a U.S. dignitary," he said.

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