

INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 13, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: WALTER T. KERWIN

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: General Kerwin's residence, Alexandria, Virginia

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: General Kerwin, shall we begin by my asking, did you know General [William] Westmoreland before your assignment as chief of staff, MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam]?

K: Yes, I knew Westy. The first time I really got to know him pretty well [was] when he came to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. At that point in time, I had been an instructor in the intelligence department, and he came from Hawaii, at the time, was to be assigned to the newly-formed Army War College. The first year the Army War College was at Leavenworth, and later on went up to Carlisle. And he was to come to be an instructor at the newly-formed Army War College.

So since he was to be an instructor and I was the chief of instructor training, I was designated to go down and meet Westy and Kitsy [Westmoreland's wife, Katherine], which I did. And he and I, just for some reason or other, seemed to hit it off pretty well. And during the time that he was at Leavenworth and I remained on as chief of instructor training, I got to know Westy and Kitsy pretty well. And then we sort of didn't cross paths

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for a long time, and the next time I really got, shall we say, close to him, was when I went to Vietnam to be his chief of staff.

G: I see. Well, there was quite a hiatus in your association.

K: Yes, it was a long time between those times; although we had met each other, we had never served together. He was airborne; I wasn't airborne. He was primarily an artilleryman who for some reason or other went astray and went into the infantry. (Laughter) So me being basically an artilleryman, I never got to really know him.

So that's how I got first to be acquainted with him. But that really only had a small part to do with my going to be his chief of staff, and as a matter of fact--I don't think many people know it--but I really didn't go over there to be his chief of staff. I was in Europe from 1961, as a divarty [division artillery] commander, 3rd Armored Division, with General [Creighton] Abrams. General Abrams was the division commander, 3rd Armored Division. Then I left there, went to SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe], stayed a couple of years. Then I went back to the 3rd Armored Division to be the commanding general. At that time, General Abrams, whom I got to know very well when he was division commander and I was in divarty, talked to General [Harold] Johnson, who was then chief of staff, and he was really instrumental, when I was his chief, in having me appointed to be the CG [Commanding General] of the 3rd Armored Division.

So back I went to Germany and became the CG. I came back in November of 1966, so I'd been over there almost six years--went in the Pentagon to be the ADCSOPS [Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations]. Abe [General Abrams] was the vice. In May, oh, roughly about the fifteenth or sixteenth, maybe the seventeenth or eighteenth of

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May, when I was in the Pentagon getting an intelligence briefing down behind the Green Doors, because at that point in time I'd been given the job of taking a look at ASA [army security agency?], navy intelligence, air force intelligence, and there was a move afoot then to sort of combine much of the ASA activities with the naval activities and the air force activities. So I had quite a group. And word came down to go see the Chief of Staff. So I trundled upstairs, and got up there, sat down in front of that big desk, and he looked at me and said, "When can you be in Vietnam?" Well, that was a shock at about eight-ten in the morning, at that time. And I said, "General, I'm ADCSOPS; you've got me on all these joint programs; if you want a real transition, it would take me at least five weeks and maybe seven weeks to get all this transferred in a logical manner to the other people and be ready to go." He said, "Five weeks? I want you there in five days."

So I went out of the office in a state of shock, called up the wife, because we'd only been at Fort Myer for a short period of time, and said, "Delay all the plans. I'm leaving, because I've got to be in Vietnam in four days." Well, about an hour later I got a call from General Abe. He said, "You don't know it yet, but I'm going to Vietnam, and I want you to be my chief of staff. General Johnson has agreed. Do you accept?" I said, "Hell, yes, I accept." And so I didn't know he was going to go.

G: General Abrams in effect was telling you he was going to be COMUSMACV [Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], is that right?

K: That's what very few people realize. I went over there to be his chief of staff.

G: And when was this, sir?

K: This was in May of 1967.

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G: That's fascinating. Okay.

K: Well, Jesus, I guess it was three days [or] four days, we were running around there wildly, he and I. In the meantime, Bill Rosson--do you know Bill Rosson?

G: Yes.

K: He was the chief at the time--had just left to up and take one of the corps. So there wasn't any chief. [The] deputy, air force BG [brigadier general], was the acting chief.

Anyhow, off we went. We went down here to Andrews on the night of the twenty-fifth of May, in a KC-135, he and I and his aide, a couple of Indians, and Ambassador [Robert] Komer. We loaded aboard about nine o'clock at night and took off.

G: Was that Komer's maiden voyage, when he went over to take over CORDS [Civil Operations Revolution, Development Support], I guess it came to be?

K: Yes. So off we went. By the time we got to Hawaii, it was quite evident that Abrams and Komer were not going to be friends.

G: Can you give me some particulars about that?

K: And that's a massive understatement. I don't know whether you know Komer. Have you ever talked to Komer? He's one of the most egotistical, self-centered individuals that you'll ever run across. Brilliant man, tremendous ideas. His only problem is twofold: he can't implement the ideas; he can't sift the ones that are not good [from] the ones that are good, and he just antagonizes the hell out of everybody, openly, to the point that he denigrates the tremendous intellect that he has.

But anyhow, he kept blowing his horn all the way over, and that's something you don't do with Abrams, but he was ex-CIA, and he was also a speaker for the White House,

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and all that sort of thing. By the time we got to Hawaii, the friction had already started, and that continued for the whole time in Vietnam.

We stayed overnight and part of the next day in Hawaii, getting briefed by CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific] and other people, and then flew on into Saigon, got there on May 27. At that time, MACV was in downtown Saigon, that little old, enclosed courtyard. God-awful place. No real air conditioning, no nothing. And it was firmly expected at that time that at some unspecified time, but fairly briefly, Abe would take over. But he didn't.

Now, I became chief of staff, and Westy had no problems [with that]. As a matter of fact, he sent a cable back, since I was going to be his chief of staff, at least initially, "Fine. Come ahead. Great to have you," and all that sort of thing. But primarily I was chosen by Abe to be his chief of staff. It didn't happen. Anyhow, I remained Westy's chief of staff until he left in June of 1968, a year, a little bit over a year. And that's the way I got chosen to be chief of staff.

G: Can I ask you a couple of questions that kind of suggest themselves here?

K: Yes.

G: If General Abrams was going in order to become COMUSMACV in some relatively short, I suppose, period of time, how did they solve the problem of what to do with General Abrams when they decided not to make the move?

K: Well, the job was getting bigger and bigger over there, and they needed a deputy COMUSMACV. So he went over to be the deputy COMUSMACV, but it was everybody's mutual understanding that he was the next COMUSMACV, but not at that

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time. What came along, of course, was--if you'll just look at the scenario, things seemed to be going pretty well--there up through October. Remember the "light at the end of the tunnel" speech, and Westy coming back and all that sort of thing. So things seemed to be going pretty well.

And then, of course, we got hit with Tet, and that's when things--at least from a psychological viewpoint and all that--fell apart. You just don't leave under those circumstances. So it was just the whole scenario that kept him on and on and on.

G: Do you think that General Westmoreland was not brought back in the summer of 1967 because they didn't want to change a winner?

K: Well, frankly, I don't know. I would assume that would be one aspect of it. Things were going well.

G: Because you know there was speculation in the press--

K: Oh, yes.

G: --that he was going to be coming back.

K: Oh, yes. And there was speculation in the press, of course, that he was going to be the next chief of staff, and Johnny Johnson [?] was going to leave, and all that sort of thing. But those things didn't come about.

And I think it's just a spectrum of events that occurred. [In the] summer of 1967, things were looking good, as we got up to the light at the end of the tunnel, and his appearance back here before Congress, all those sorts of things. Things were really opening up. And then, bingo: Tet. And as I said before, you don't come home when you're having all those problems. He wouldn't want to come home under those

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circumstances.

So, it's just the way things came out. We got things back in hand again after Tet, after Hue fell. Then at that time Johnny Johnson was at the end of his four-year tour, and so Westy was brought back to be chief of staff, and he took over at that time.

G: What were some of the challenging aspects of being chief of staff to COMUSMACV?

K: That job was a rough job, in the sense that you had MACV, and you had CINCPAC, and you had the country team. And in the country team you had Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker, who was a fantastic individual, and his deputy, Ambassador [Samuel] Berger, and then in the MACV part you had General Westmoreland who was COMUS, and General Abrams, who was deputy COMUS, and Ambassador Komer. And in many respects, they all looked to me to be their chief of staff.

So in that sense, it was a difficult job, and it was a particularly difficult job with Komer in the headquarters. Komer didn't believe in chiefs of staff. Komer didn't believe in staffs; Komer only believed in Komer. And he felt that the CORDS [Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support] staff, who, at one point in time, was headed by Bill Colby--he was deputy to Komer. So Komer felt that the CORDS staff was a separate entity over here, and if you wanted anything in the CORDS staff, you went through Komer. And that wasn't true at all; it was [the] CORDS staff and he was a deputy. But being Komer, he didn't accept that sort of thing. So it made it very difficult.

It caused a lot of heartburn in the totality of the staff, because he would end up giving you all sorts of directions, and then I'd have to go talk to him, and at some points in time get General Westmoreland to get things straightened around. And then, of course,

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there was--well, there was antagonism between he and General Abrams. Komer thought he was an equal of General Abrams, and General Abrams was not about to have any of that sort of thing. Do you know General Abe?

G: No, sir. I never met him.

K: Well, I'll tell you, fantastic individual.

And so time and time again, it would sort of get into a showdown between he and--Abe said he's the deputy COMUSMACV, and Komer is over here as the CORDS man. Now he may be a deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS, but he wasn't deputy COMUSMACV for that whole shindig.

As a matter of fact, I'll tell you a story. It really came to a head many times, but one time we were going up to Danang, I think it was--one of the few times I could get out of the headquarters. Abe said, "Do you want to come along?" So I checked with Westy, and he said, "Sure, go ahead." Komer found out about it, and he called me up on the squawk box and said, "Can anybody [?] go along?" I said, "Yes, as far as I know. I'll check with Abe." Abe said fine. So we got out to where we were at the airport, and a T-39 was standing there, and I was in the T-39, the aide, and Abe. No Komer. So we waited and waited and waited. No Komer. So finally, Abe said, "Let's go."

So we were shutting the door and getting ready to taxi out on the tarmac there, and old Komer shows up, breathing hard as usual. Well, one thing you didn't do with Abe was hold him up. So Komer, in his typical overbearing manner, comes in the plane, and starts to give all this crap about you know, he was late and held up by all these sorts of things and so forth. And I was sitting in the seat between the two of them, and the exchange was quite

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acrimonious. (Laughter) And it was settled right then and there that there would be no more of that, and any time Komer wanted to ride in a plane, he could ride in his own plane, or words to that effect. It was fantastic.

G: General Abrams didn't hold back when he had something on his mind.

K: When he had something on his mind--I'll tell you some of the stories about it. I tell you these things about Komer because, in the first place, I have a tremendous respect for the man. He had an idea every two minutes, and a lot of them were very, very good. And a lot of them were very, very bad. But he himself couldn't determine which was which. And he wouldn't, in his manner which he had, listen to people. And if anybody said, "This is pee-poor[?], and let me tell you why," then you were just an obstructionist.

So he'd go off in his own little inimical way and get things all fouled up. And in a staff like that--and it's a fairly big staff; it was certainly a hell of a lot of responsibility--as the chief, I would often say, "Yes, that sounds good. Now let me get it down in there, and I'll come back at you in twenty-four hours"--or some sort of time--"and I'll let you know what the options are." Well, as soon as you said that to Komer, you [were a] "typical, military mind," and all that sort of thing. But God, he had ideas! And he did a hell of a lot of good. But he just couldn't implement very well.

And now I'll tell you a story. We got over there, and he had an office right around the corner in this quadrangle from me. This was about five or six days after we got there. One night I'm in there shuffling all the papers out, and Westy's up on the third floor in his office. And I was pulling stuff out of the in box, and there was a back channel. And the back channel was to the White House, signed by Komer.

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G: Whose channel was he using? Whose back channel?

K: Well, he was using the back channel right there. He could use the back channel like anybody else, being an ambassador. Well, I read the goddamn thing, and--gee! He was setting up an individual reporting system between himself and the White House, on Westmoreland and what was going on. So I looked at this, I said, "Well, I'm the chief of staff. The boss is upstairs; he'd better know about this." So I went upstairs, and I sat down in front of Westy, and I said, "Chief, you've got to look at this thing." So he read it.

[It was] the only time, in my whole time as chief of staff--and as DCSPER [Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel] and everybody else but Westy--I saw him get mad. His face got red, and he said, "Where'd you get this?" I said, "It is quite obvious that it was misrouted, and I got a copy of it, and how it got to my place, I don't know. But as the boss, you ought to know about it."

Well, he came down that three flights of stairs, across that courtyard, and into Komer's office, and, God, they really had a knock-down, drag-out fight as to who was running this goddamn thing.

So that started Komer off in the first five days with all flags flying. Which reminds me, too--he hadn't been in there about four or five days when he came to see me, and he said, "I'm an ambassador." I said, "I know you are, Mr. Ambassador." He said, "I need a flag for my car." I said, "Well, you can't have an army general's flag, and furthermore, Westy doesn't run around with a flag. You just leave yourself open to something," although not much went on in those days as far as terrorism. And I said, "Ambassador Bunker is the ambassador, so you can't have an ambassador's flag."

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Well, he had somebody in his office draw him a car flag to put on his car, and it was one that had all sorts of designs on it and so forth. I said, "No, no flag." Well, then I became an obstructionist. (Laughter) It finally got to one of those nit-picking things, and I refused to have anybody build a flag for him. So finally I got so tired of that sort of thing, when we were fighting a war, I told Abe about it. And that got Abe mad. (Laughter) Anyhow, he never did get a flag.

G: What did he want a flag for?

K: Well, that's part of what I'm trying to tell you. That's part of Komer's personality. He's just got to be to the forefront. He's so egotistical that he just can't bear to think that somebody else has got something that he doesn't have.

Okay, where were we?

G: We were talking about the challenging aspects of your job. I was going to ask you where General [William] Knowlton comes into this picture with Komer. Didn't he have some special function to perform?

K: Yes, but he didn't--the guy that we gave Komer after a while, to help him out, was George Forsythe. Do you know George Forsythe, major general?

G: I know of him; I haven't talked to him.

K: He commanded the Cav Div [Cavalry Division], and he was brought over to sort of be the military guy to help us and help Komer. Well, unfortunately, Komer insisted that George Forsythe live with him in his "villa," quote, villa, the house that we had. (Laughter) And George could only stand Komer for so long without blowing his stack.

Anyhow, Bill Knowlton--I've forgotten now about Bill. He replaced George, I

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think. I think that's right. I can't recall much about Bill, because I think that was after I became corps commander. I left the job of chief of staff and became II Field Force commander in July of 1968.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about challenging aspects of the job of being chief of staff, and I guess that was one of the big ones.

K: Yes. Aside from that, the question of personalities, and you're always going to have that in any place that you have. The big problem in that MACV headquarters--it was a joint headquarters--[was that] very few people ever had a joint experience. As a matter of fact, I would just give you off the top of my head that of all the people coming in there on that staff--and mind you now, it's only a one-year tour, and [actually] less than that, because they've got their R&R, and by the time they got in and got themselves settled, you lost a week at least in getting them acclimated and briefed and getting ready to leave.

Now, that didn't pertain to the general officers. The general officers were there for two years or more. But everybody else was one year. Then, a lot of them came from USARV [U.S. Army, Vietnam] or came from battalions or other staffs down below, so they would only be in that joint headquarters for six months. And it wasn't like going out to CINCPAC or over to CINCEUR [Commander in Chief, Europe] or something like that in peacetime; you were fighting a war.

So there you were, with maybe 2 per cent of those people, or even less than that--even most of the general officers never served in a joint command. And if you took the captains and majors and lieutenant colonels, most of those guys were comparatively

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young and didn't really know too much about their own services. You take an infantry lieutenant colonel who'd maybe been to the infantry school, a couple of jobs; maybe he's been on the DA [Department of the Army?] staff or something like that, and you plunk him over there in wartime, and with all the ramifications of country team, that means that you just don't think about fighting the battle out there. You've got all the economic ramifications; you've got all the ramifications of the Thais and the Koreans participating--the Thais had a division there--three hundred thousand-plus Vietnamese, the social ramifications and economic, philosophical, cultural ramifications; the country team downtown with Ambassador Bunker. You take a young fellow, and you flick him into a place like that, and you work him--literally, after Tet time, we were working him twenty hours a day, sixteen at the minimum. And to pull a staff along like that, a joint staff paper come up--some of them were pretty awful. So just doing that out of a clear blue sky on a one-year tour is a real difficulty in trying to--you know, they're coming along, and you're pulling those guys out; maybe that lieutenant colonel, regardless of what service he might happen to be in, and you plunk him out and pull him up there from the DCSOPS or the Combat Information Center down there, or the Two [J-2?], and put him in front of the ambassadors--maybe he's never even given a briefing to people of that level, much less understand the ramifications of it, and things of that type.

So that was a real problem in running that staff.

G: Did you ever talk to General Westmoreland about that one-year tour business?

K: Oh, yes. And if Westy had his way, he couldn't see that everybody wouldn't stay there for the whole war. And part of that is Westy's makeup; part is the fact that he'd been over there

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for a long time, four years. And he couldn't quite--well, you know, the senior advisers out there with the ARVNs--tough job. A job that many lieutenant colonels and colonels felt was--you know, they got pushed off with the ARVNs instead of down there fighting with U.S. battalions. You were there; you know. So they always thought they were second-class citizens. And as you know, we did a tremendous program to try to upgrade that sort of thing, bringing the wives out to Hawaii and giving them extra R&Rs and all that sort of thing, special efficiency report consideration, *et cetera*.

But I can remember time and time again, a guy would come over and be assigned to [the] Vietnamese 25th Division, and come the end of a tour, a normal tour of one year, Westy would say, "That's a damn good guy." And I'd say, "Yup. From what I hear, he is a good guy." So Westy, when he would be going around on his visits, would drop in and see this fellow, and he'd say, "How about extending for another year?" Well, if the guy was a full colonel, which he usually was, he'd already been over there on a previous tour as a lieutenant colonel or a major, and he had a family back home. And the wife didn't look kindly on one tour, and then she didn't look kindly on the second tour, and if he extended the second tour to make it a third tour consecutively, he probably wouldn't have any family, or a hell of a difficult time.

Westy couldn't quite grasp that. So the guy would hem and haw and so forth, and he'd let Westy go. And then he'd call down and say, "I just can't do it. I've got a wife and family." And old Westy, you know, he'd--he didn't understand that. So he'd get me--"Call him up. Put the pressure on him. Tell him, you know, patriotism, we're fighting for our country, all that sort of thing." So I'd have to do that, or I'd get somebody who knew him

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better than I did. "Go up to the colonel, talk to him." A couple of occasions when they were close in around there in the 25th Division and II Field Force, I'd go see them. And of course, I knew how they felt, and I'd talk to them as I could and Westy couldn't. And just come back and tell him, "There's just no way." And of course, Westy couldn't order them, because the tour was one year. He could order a general officer; he could keep him over there for eternity if he wanted to. But not them.

Everybody recognizes that the one-year tour, in effect, had a deleterious effect, mainly from the fact that the GI came over and fought for his eleven and a half months, minus his R&R and so forth, and the battalion commander stayed six months and went off somewhere else, over to USARV or up to the J [?] staff, or some other job. Or he was over there originally, and he came down and then spent six months and went home. Some extended, but very--comparatively few.

Then, of course, the guy would burn himself out. He knew he only had six months, so he was a go-go twenty-four hours a day. And that, I think, is the same problem that we had when I went into Africa with the British. I went in with the 3rd Infantry Division in Morocco, near Casablanca, and then they sent me up. After everything quieted down, I went over with a desert rat British division and was with them almost five weeks while they went into Tunisia. And they used to say, "You Americans are just goddamn crazy. You try to fight twenty-four hours a day. We've been fighting for a couple of years now, and you can't do that. You've got to get your sleep, and you've got to get your rest. You've got to do all sorts of things, and you can't drive everybody twenty-four hours a day." And they were right. But the typical Americans, you know, we went into Africa and so forth;

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our whole approach to life was, "Work twenty-four hours a day and we're going to win the war quickly."

Well, that's the same thing, in many respects, that the battalion commander or the brigade commander did in Vietnam. He put a tremendous pressure on, and he was going to make his mark, and if I were down there, I'd do the same thing, probably. You want to have the best goddamn battalion you possibly can and do the job.

What was the answer? Well, as long as we didn't call up the reserves and mobilize to the extent that we needed to, I don't see how you could do [it] any other way. Now, whether you have one-year or fourteen months or eighteen months or whatever it is, I don't know. But you couldn't, under those circumstances--when you only have part of the army involved--send them over there with a stake to the people back home and expect them to stay there and fight the war. Because as we keep saying democracy's not built for a long war. You can't see what's going to happen. And everybody in World War II, and of course, we called people up in Korea, and you could all see that, and everybody took his turn, but you couldn't see that when it came to Vietnam.

So I don't know what the answer is. Theoretically, if I were ever to do it again--of course, the mistake was made that we didn't call up the reserves and mobilize the country to support the war effort. You know that, and I know it, and everybody knows it. If you do that, then you can do the personnel things a lot differently. But we didn't do it that way.

G: Do you think General Westmoreland should have created a field army and named a commander?

K: Well, you know, you could come up with all--time and time again, we studied the

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organization from the MACV viewpoint, USARV viewpoint, the navy's side, 7th Air Force, and so forth. I think that a comparatively small force, and it was a small force--the legal limit was what, five-twenty-five? I think five hundred and twenty-five thousand. Up until Tet, we never got over about five hundred thousand. Well, that's a pretty small force. So I don't think that the job was such that the logistical USARV--to take care of all the army affairs, and the bombing program, the [Rolling] Thunder program, being run mainly from CINCPAC and back home, with the targets being chosen by LBJ himself, I don't think we necessarily needed a field commander. It wasn't that big that with four three-stars commanding the corps--and of course the Delta guy being a two-star adviser--that we necessarily needed another layer.

G: Was it General [Bruce] Palmer that was USARV then?

K: Was he what?

G: General Bruce Palmer; did he have USARV? Was that his--

K: Yes, Bruce had USARV. And then Bill McCaffery had it after that. Of course, USARV was mainly the logistical backup, as you know; the actual operational, tactical side of the house was conducted by MACV.

G: Did you have an advisory function in addition to being chief of staff?

K: Yes.

G: Who was your counterpart?

K: My counterpart was the chief of staff of the JGS [Joint General Staff], Vietnamese. And each one of the deputies, the DCSOPS and DCSLOG [Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics] and so forth, worked with their counterparts over in the Vietnamese Joint General Staff. So

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there was a tremendous amount of interplay back and forth and all that sort of thing. My opposite number was their chief of staff of ARVN. So we held many meetings in my headquarters, in which we had all of us present, or we'd go over to their headquarters with all of them present. Or I would go over at times when we had differences between the staffs and so forth to get everything settled down, take along the J-2 and talk to their J-2.

And then I wasn't an adviser, but I had a lot of dealings with the Thai force. They had their representative downtown, the Thai division. And then the Korean force, they had their representatives downtown with MACV, and [I] did a lot of things with them. But mainly my advisory was supervising the MACV staff in its advisory function with the ARVN staff, the Joint General Staff. So that was my advisory job.

G: Did you have occasion to get into this controversy that developed beginning about May of 1967 over this order of battle thing between MACV and CIA, I guess would be the way to characterize it?

K: No. Since I got depositioned by everybody and his brother--I arrived on May 27. The famous alleged statement by Westy, and the question between he and [General Joseph] McChristian as to how you count the enemy, all occurred two days before I got there. McChristian left--and I'm not sure of this time--but within four or five days from the time I arrived.

G: Early June, I think is right.

K: Yes. So as far as McChristian being the J-2, I didn't even get my feet on the ground before he was gone. And then a little bit later on, Phil Davidson came in. So I had no involvement whatsoever in "who shot John." [?]

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G: Do you know where General McChristian is these days?

K: Oh, yes. He's down in--I've got an address for him here somewhere.

G: Don't bother, sir.

K: No, I've got it right here, I think, in my book.

You know, they had the conferences back at CINCPAC; the whole group came over to MACV, and I was present at the go-rounds there. They had the conferences down at Langley; people were running back and forth on how do you count the Indians, and so I--when they say it was a conspiracy, as I told Dan Burt, who is a lawyer down here at Capitol Legal Foundation, and was the chief lawyer for Westy, "It's the biggest goddamn conspiracy I ever participated in." And I don't exaggerate; there must have been a thousand people who were in on this thing, and it wasn't a question of covering up. It was a very simple question: do you put the self-defense forces and the secret self-defense forces under this column, which is called the Main VC-Main Regular NVA and so forth, or do you put them over here in this column? That's just as simple as it was, and we ended up putting them over here, after a tremendous amount of conflict and discussion. So I think in all this to-do that we had in all the courts and all the fiddle-faddle back and forth was that somebody just didn't come out and say, "Now, what is the problem? Did we conceal anybody?" And the answer is, "No." Every telegram, every back channel, every front channel, every service channel, every conference, you had them lined up there as to what columns you put them in.

Now, the number changed, naturally. Hell, do we know how many enemy we had? Nobody does, particularly those people of the self-defense forces down in the villages and

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the hamlets. Those numbers changed and varied back and forth. As you look up the definition of a conspiracy, that's a pretty small number of people who get together to try--

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

K: --to keep things quiet and not let the truth get out. (Laughter) I sat in MACV sometimes as the chairman of a conference with literally twenty or thirty people there, and messages running back and forth and telephone calls and so forth. So it bothers me deeply that the thing came about the way it did, and that guy [Gains] Hawkins.

G: Did you know him over there, Gains Hawkins?

K: Yes, I knew Gains Hawkins. Now, I wasn't in on it when--as I say, I didn't get there until after that part of it had occurred. I don't know whether Westy said it or not, what would we tell the people back home, allegedly, or whatever that statement was. And I could see that. Somebody comes into the office and says, "Now, here we've got another hundred and fifty thousand enemy." (Laughter) And you say, "Have things changed?" And the answer is, "No, sir, they haven't changed." "Are they still out in the hamlets and the villages?" "Yes, sir, they're still out there." "Do you know how many we have?" "We think we have a range of a hundred and thirty to a hundred and fifty thousand." "Well, why are we putting them in the armed enemy column? How would I explain that to everybody? Go back to the drawing board." And I think that if I were sitting there at that time, and I wasn't even present, that I would have said probably the same thing.

So the whole thing has gotten completely blown out of what the problem really was. And it occurred to me when we were--and I was in on it from the time I got there on May 27--though it wasn't that; it was probably about two weeks or three weeks later before

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I even got in on the problem--until the time that we finally got it resolved, way back in the late fall. But it never occurred to me that we were having any conspiracy on anything. It was a normal staff-agency disagreement, of which we had literally tens and tens and dozens of them.

G: What do you make of Colonel Hawkins' testimony, that he felt he was given a ceiling beyond which he could not go?

K: Now, again, I don't know what he was told at that time, because I wasn't there. Then I think--I would suppose that it would be perfectly normal. Somebody believes that it is supposed to be this number of people; other people said that it is supposed to be this number of people. He obviously had the feeling that it was somewhere above what [inaudible]. So finally they said, "Look. Take this number, and let's hold to that number, because we don't know what the true number is. It obviously couldn't be greatly above it or greatly below it." And you know, I don't see anything wrong with that.

G: Were you in on the conferences that took place in September, I guess it was, when George Carver came to Saigon to try to reach some kind of resolution of the thing, and--

K: Well, I didn't sit in on that conference when George came over. Phil Davidson did all that. So the only thing I can do is just--you know, that was there; they had a hell of a disagreement and so forth on what the numbers were, and how you counted them, and what columns you put in and so forth. And it finally was resolved after a while.

G: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about Tet; that always strikes chords. What was your personal vantage point to observe the kickoff of that and the ensuing days?

K: That was New Year's, Tet. I can remember I came back from the office--never got out of

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that damn office before seven or eight o'clock at night. The enlisted aide had some dinner ready for me, and as [was] typical, I went to bed early, because indubitably during the middle of the night I would be disturbed with calls from the director of the joint staff, or anybody. I guess it was along about two o'clock [when] the phone rang. I got up, and I heard all these firecrackers. Well, anybody that's been in the Far East, even in Hawaii, on New Year's or there at Tet, they put that long string of firecrackers down. Sometimes there's firecrackers four stories high, and they light the bottom one and it keeps going for what seems like an hour. I heard all this going on. And it was John Chaisson, Lieutenant General--then a BG--marines. He was the chief of the Combat Information Center. And he said, "We've got a real fight going on. You better get down here."

So I dressed quickly, and I heard all this going on, and I suddenly realized that there was a fight going on. So I got out and I got in the car and got the Vietnamese driver out of bed. He lived in the back. Got the gate open through the walls and started down the street. Boy, it was quite obvious that I wasn't going anywhere. The top of the car got shot, motor got hit; we were trailing gasoline around. So I got out of the car, and we just left it there.

In Saigon, they had a lot of these walls, you know, on the street, and the gardens behind the walls. So the driver and I are going back along the walls, to get back. (Laughter) We weren't very far from that little compound I was in. Got back and got in there, back up in the house. Between me, where I was, the quote "villa," and MACV headquarters, was that MP [military police] station where they were having that tremendous fight. Remember that? Well, they really had a fight. Well, I was about three blocks from there, so I had to go past that, eventually.

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Well, I called back the center and said, "Boys, I don't know when I'm going to get in. I'm going to try, as soon as I get myself under control, here. How in the hell I'm going to get back down there . . ." But anyhow, I didn't get up there for about two hours. What I did, I got out there in the street and commandeered an MP jeep that was coming down there to get in the fight, and he and I had some very harsh words. (Laughter) And I told him, by God, I was going to shoot him if he didn't take me down to MACV headquarters. (Laughter)

Well, anyhow, [it's] a long story about how we got around a couple of back streets back there and got into MACV. And I'd no sooner gotten in there and was just trying to find out what in the hell was going on, than the phone rang. It was Bert Spivy. Bert Spivy was the director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for General Wheeler; he was a good friend of mine. He was back there in Washington. He said, "What the hell is going on over there?" I said, "Bert, to be frank about it"--I was still breathing hard from making it through all that shot and shell, "Bert, I don't know *what* the hell's going on!" The initial report is that they're fighting all over the whole countryside, all four corps. I know we've got a fight right here, and they're fighting over outside the JGS compound, and I'm going to have to call you back after I find out what's going on."

Well, I got diverted, because Westy was down at the embassy, and of course, one of the big things was--God, the American embassy couldn't fall! The psychological impact of that! So he gets on a horn, and he said, "Now, the one thing I want you to do is personally direct the helicopter and get an outfit in here and get this embassy in hand." And so I get with John Chaisson and the people down there and call up Fred Weyand, who then had II

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Field Force. I told him what the problem was. He already knew some things about it. So I'm trying to tell Westy what I'm doing on the phone, a thousand phone calls coming in, people running in and out. Bert Spivy called back, saying that the SecDef [Secretary of Defense] is wanting to know what's going on; the Chairman wants to know what's going on. (Laughter) And I said, "Bert, right now I'm involved with the embassy, and I'll call you back." (Laughter) "No way," he said, "no way. I've got to have the information."

Well, we floundered around there for a long time, finally got the embassy thing back in hand with the air assault and all that sort of thing. I got Bert on the phone finally and gave him the best picture I possibly could, which wasn't good right at that particular moment. So from there on in, I slept in that headquarters down in the J-5 office in order to--since my office was right next to the outside, to get in the inner ring so I wouldn't get shot. And I slept in that office, I think it was forty-seven days and nights, except to go down to my little villa and take a bath at noontime once in awhile. And that was my contribution to Tet.

Of course, the big problem was that Westy was out in the field all the time, as any commander should be. He was out there day and night, and had been before Tet. And then Abe, DEPCOMUS[?], [Westmoreland] sent him up to Hue and took part of my staff; I gave him part of my staff--Will Pearson, to be his chief of staff--and key members out of my staff to go up there to be on his staff to get that Hue situation with the marines squared away. So my staff got reduced at a very critical time, and Westy and DEPCOMUS--Abe was gone, and COMUS was out beating the trapline with the troops, finding out what was going on, doing all the things that a commander has to. Well, that left me with--and

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Westy's directive was that, "By God, when I'm not here, you're running it, and when COMUS is not here."

So he had a very interesting philosophy. After I'd been there a couple of weeks, in June of 1967, and [he was] upstairs getting ready to go home, and I was handing him this paper, "You've got to sign this; here's what we did today," and so forth, when he came in out of the field. So I knew him very well, and I said, "Now, I'm new at being your chief. Is there anything different that you want me to do? You'd better tell me now. And if you think that I've not got the thing in hand, you'd better let me know now while I'm new, and I can get things changed." He said, "No, no. I think you're doing a great job," and so forth. "I have one thing. You know I'm in the field a lot." I said, "Yes, sir. I know that." He said, "Well, I'm in the field a lot; Abe's out a lot, too. And when that happens, I want you here. And when I come back in here, I want you here, too." And that was my charter. (Laughter) In other words, "Chief, *you're here*."

I wanted to get out once in a while. Very few times did I get out of that headquarters. The first time, when I got there--I'd been there about six or seven days, maybe eight or nine--and I went on an orientation trip to all four corps. That took about eight, nine days.

G: And this would have been about the first week of June or so?

K: Yes, into the first week in--maybe the second week in June, by that time.

G: Do you remember when the ammunition dump at LZ English went up?

K: Oh yes, yes. Was that you? Yes, I remember that. And then right after that they had the SEATO, big Southeast Asia Treaty Organization thing in Thailand, and I went over to be

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the American commander of that. And I was gone about two weeks, I guess, on that thing in Bangkok. So I didn't really get--that made General Abe kind of mad, too, because he felt that the air force deputy wasn't a very strong character, to take me away from the headquarters at that time. But that was what Westy said to do, so that's what we did.

G: Was that General [William "Spike"] Momyer or General Brown?

K: No, General Momyer, Spike Momyer, was the commander of the 7th Air Force.

G: You've said a number of things about General Abrams and General Westmoreland, and the press was fond of drawing comparisons when the change took over. Are there any valid points of comparison between their performances as COMUSMACV?

K: Well, the two were entirely different people, personality-wise. Westy--and I had a tremendous admiration for him; the things that he went through in that four years, carrying that thing, with growing lack of support back here in the States, and the infiltration of that thing into the forces itself, which led to drug problems and so forth--you know what was going on. Westy was a very intense individual. He dedicated his life there to try to win that thing. And he is a very difficult man to know, to be friendly with. He's a very austere man. The poor guy, the first four or five months that I was over there, he tried to get down to that tennis club downtown--he loved to play tennis; he wasn't very good, but he loved playing--and he only did it maybe once on a Sunday; sometimes for a couple of weeks he wouldn't get down there. But when he was in, he'd go down there and try to play a few sets of tennis. Some newspaper guy wrote an article about him playing tennis while people were dying in Vietnam, and so he cut that sort of thing out.

The whole time I was with him--and I was probably the closest guy to him in the

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whole fourteen months that I was chief of staff; I was probably closer to him than anybody.

I never heard the man, except the time that Komer sent that back channel, or tried to--I never heard Westy swear, and I never really heard him ever get mad.

G: Remarkable.

K: Yes. Well, I don't mean to say he didn't get excited, upset, all that sort of thing. But the normal reaction of people, I think, particularly under stress and strain, is to blow once in a while, and if you don't blow in front the troops, one of the ways you blow is you blow to your deputy or you blow to your chief. You know, really rack them up against the wall, and they understand that. That's part of letting a commander sort of get things--call everybody a son of a bitch and do all these sorts of things, and having been in those positions before, I know that. Westy never did that, never.

He was an immaculate individual, immaculately dressed all the time. In contrast, Abe was almost diametrically opposed to that. Abe always looked like he'd been rolled out of an old dusty footlocker, with a pair of fatigues on that didn't fit, hadn't been cleaned for two months--I exaggerate; of course, they had--with a big cigar hanging out of his mouth. Westy didn't smoke; hated anybody who smoked, and I'll tell you a story about that.

And Abe--profanity! And Abe would really blow you. So the two of them were--really, it's almost impossible to see two people who were [so] diametrically opposed, as far as their appearance, their sociability. Westy, God bless him, couldn't empathize with people. And here I was, even though I was a major general and he was a four-star, and he was a world-wide known character, and I was, in effect, a nobody, I was still a close friend of his. And yet I never felt close to Westy.

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I think it was, if I were to give an example, when he ran for governor of [South] Carolina. He called up a lot of us--not a lot of us, about five of us, who had been close to him in Vietnam, and other times, and we all recommended, no way. And the reason is that he can't empathize with people.

In his briefings--his briefings were stereotyped. It was one of an instructor, standing up with a butcher paper map or something like that, and a pointer in his hand, and lecturing to people, and that did not go with the press corps, no way. Particularly since a lot of them had been over there for three or four or five years, and thought they knew more than Westy. If they didn't, they thought they did. And they also had been out in the field a long time, and maybe they knew what was going on, maybe they didn't. But they still . . . Then in contrast, you had Abe. Now, I had been Abe's divarty commander. I had also been associated with him when I was an instructor and he was a student at Leavenworth. Abe was the old shoe type. He could sit down with a bunch of people, and reporters, and smoking and chewing that old big, fat cigar, drinking a martini, and he'd have those people in his hand in about ten minutes. And tell all sorts of jokes. And he could empathize with people. That was one of the differences with the press, of one being able to empathize with the press and one being--I shouldn't say unable, but to a lesser degree.

G: Were you present at a meal that was being eaten during the Tet thing, when a bullet came through the wall?

K: Oh, yes.

G: You know that story.

K: Yes. If you go back--people tell stories about General Abrams. There are a thousand

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stories. As a matter of fact, I go to the War College--I'm going up two weeks from now. I lead off on what they call the Abrams Series. It's five lectures--not lectures, talks--to selected members of the class, about fifty. And I start out with General Abrams and professionalism. I talk for about twenty-five minutes, and then I sit down, and I tell about ten stories that involved he and I over our time, all of them funny or hilarious, all of them to carry a lesson in leadership by him, and all of them involving me, so I can say that this actually happened. And some of which could have been disastrous to me, if he hadn't had the leadership ability that he had.

So the different approaches to the problem, I think, is indicative with Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh, to Westy--he put Khe Sanh in; it was part of his strategy. Abe thought Khe Sanh shouldn't be there, because it's not a part of *his* strategy. Abe, of course, is the Battle of the Bulge man, who Bruce Clarke says was the finest--even surpassed Bruce Clarke as an armored battalion commander. Remember, at the Battle of the Bulge? It's probably true.

And Abe was a go-getter mobile warfare [man], and he was against Khe Sanh. As a matter of fact, I think it was the day that Westy left, after we had the change of command ceremony down there--and departure ceremony, really, for Westy--he came up to the office, and, I think, that afternoon he called me on the buzz box. I was downstairs and came up, and he said, "What do you think we ought to do about Khe Sanh?" Well, I agreed with Abe. Khe Sanh just sat there and was a blister, a boil. So we got rid of Khe Sanh. As a matter of fact, when that happened, he sent me as chief of staff up there to make sure that the marines came out--(Laughter)--that the marines actually came out. I was there when,

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oh, about the last fifteen or twenty of them came out of that place, and we evacuated Khe Sanh.

Anyhow, the two of them were entirely different men, and the reason you hear so many stories about Abe--and I challenge you to tell me one story about Westy--is the difference in their personalities, empathizing with people.

G: That's a very interesting observation, and it's interesting that you brought the press up, because that was going to be my next question.

K: Yes, well, Westy, God bless him, he worked with that press. And I must say, they were a mixed bunch, and when you get people in the press who have been GIs in the 1st Cav Division, and then get tabbed to be a press guy and go downtown, and the guy had been no more than a spec 4, you know what you got.

And they were an arrogant bunch. Let me tell you a story on them. After Tet, [Earle] Bus Wheeler sent a back channel over to Westy saying, "Look, somehow or other, with all the unfavorable things coming out on Tet in the media, we've got to find a better way to present our picture, our story." So he and I got together, and instead of having a briefing, we thought one of the best things to do was to get six, seven, eight members of the press to come in the office on a Saturday morning, sit down and have coffee and doughnuts, and let Westy sit down in a chair and talk to them, answer their questions--no briefing, no dog and pony show--which we did. We got a couple from the television and a couple from the press, the *New York Times*, and the major papers.

Well, you wouldn't believe it. Most of those guys I knew from my association with them as the chief [of staff]. And the spectrum of the stories that came out of that group on

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that particular day would be from A to Z. So you'd ask them, "How come the seven or eight or six of you guys sitting in there all come out with these different [stories]?" Well, they were very frank, and they said, "Well, in the first place, we each have our own ideas. And Westy tells us this has happened, and we've been up in Danang or Cu Chi or someplace else, and we see a different aspect of it. Second, we send it back to our paper, and the paper has a certain policy. Some are for the war, some are rabidly against the war and some are not. Third, it goes to the copy writers, the desk guys, and they sift it out, looking for a good, hot story. And then it goes upstairs, and the subeditors take a look at it, and they sift out what they want to get a headline or do something else." They said, "Well, I'm going to tell you, we have very little control over what comes out of here."

So I think we did that about five times on Saturday mornings, and we quit. It wasn't productive, either.

So, what was your question again, now?

G: We were making points of comparison between General Westmoreland and General Abrams. But you said you had a smoking story about General Westmoreland that you wanted to tell.

K: Oh, yes. (Laughter) I was an inveterate cigar smoker, and Abe was--God almighty, he was a--as a matter of fact, that's one of the reasons he died of cancer of the lungs, he smoked cigars so much.

G: I thought it was cancer of the stomach that he had. It was lung cancer.

K: No, lung cancer. I happen to know that because he was right across the hall from my wife. She was dying of cancer at the same time at Walter Reed.

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Each morning they had what we called the WIU [?]-or not each morning, each Saturday morning. So the first Saturday morning back in the old MACV compound downtown, the WIU was up on the fourth floor--God, a little room; it was probably about the size of that dining room.

G: Which is fifteen by thirty, maybe?

K: Well, probably not that big. It was all closed in, and there was one little old window air conditioner, and you crammed at least twenty-five people in that room. So we go up there in the first WIU, and Abe and I are smoking cigars. Well, the WIUs lasted sometimes three or four hours, and the cigar smoke would come down and down and down. After a while, I must admit, you had to sort of look underneath to see where you were. It was awful. And so, after the first one, Westy called me in. He said, "Now, I don't like cigarette smoking; I don't like cigar smoking, and particularly in that room." And he was right. So he said, "Now, you tell General Abrams"--of course, when he said that, I knew I had to quit--"you tell General Abrams, no cigar smoking."

So I thought about that for a while: how do I tactfully get to the deputy COMUSMACV about smoking cigars? Because nobody told Abe what to do, particularly about smoking cigars. So one very propitious time when I was in the office, before the next WIU, I said, "COMUS says that you and I"--I included myself--"you and I should not smoke cigars in that room. I think he's right; it's enclosed, and it's pretty bad. Besides, you know he doesn't like smoking." "Umph," says Abe.

So the next Saturday we go up that series of stairs to that little room in there, get in there, and as the chief, I'm arranging everybody to get squared away and who's briefing

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what. Abe opens up a cigar. (Laughter) And he just deliberately smokes a cigar.

(Laughter) I know he did. From then on out, he was smoking, just puff, puff, the whole three or four hours, whatever it was.

We came out of there; COMUS calls me in. He said, "Did you tell General Abrams that we don't have cigar smoking?" I said, "Chief, I did." He said, "Well, remind him again." No way. Every Saturday we go upstairs, and I would almost cringe. (Laughter) I'd watch General Abrams deliberately light one of those great big long Havana, Cuba cigars, you know, great big long ones, and just blow smoke rings all around the place. And by that time, everybody knew what was going on, and it became the talk of the town amongst the staff.

G: That was quite a one to hang around your neck.

K: Well, yes. Westy was a very polite individual. As I say, he didn't swear, he didn't smoke. He took a drink once in a while, but never to the point that you would say he was drinking. As a matter of fact, it was very seldom that I'd ever see him take a drink. I might go to his house with him sometimes at nighttimes when he had just come back from a trip, and he'd tell me what he wanted to do the next day, and what he wanted the staff to do, and I'd be sitting there, and maybe have a bourbon and soda or something like that. But that was about it.

G: So you went down then and took II Field Force after your stay in Saigon.

K: Right. I took II Field Force in July--I can't remember the date now--mid-July 1968, and stayed until April fifth or sixth of 1969, and came back.

G: You came back to be deputy chief of staff.

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K: DCSPER, yes.

G: And that must have been a can of worms.

K: Well, it was a can of worms. I didn't want to come back, although I had been over there almost two years. My wife certainly wanted me to come back. But when Abe called me up and said, "You're going back to the Pentagon," I said, "Who says so?" He said, "Chief." Of course, he was chief at that time.

G: Wasn't that his nickname, too, in the army?

K: Yes. So I said, "Abe, I don't want to go back. I'm having a great time commanding this Corps." "Well," he said, "you're going back anyhow." So I'll always remember; I went over to say goodbye to President--well, before that, I said, "Okay. Goddammit, what am I going to be doing?" And the answer came back on the backchannel: "You're going to be the director of civil defense planning." Remember, at that time we were having a lot of riots.

Down in the bowels, near the DOC [AOC?], I don't know whether you knew about it or not, but there was a--what was the name of that? Garden Plot. Garden Plot was the name given to the whole handling of the riots, and the director of civil disturbance and planning, next [to the] DOC, had a fairly large staff. George--three stars; I can't remember his name right now--had it, and I went back as three stars to take it.

We had plans for every city; we had switchboards set up in every city. We had all the plans coordinated with the fire departments, the police departments; we had telephone lines strung specially. We took, very quietly, all the brigade commanders, and the 82nd had Chicago. The 82nd commander took his staff to Chicago and had conferences with

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everybody, reconnoitered the whole city; divided it up just like a fire support base plan or anything else like that.

Anyhow, I said, "My God." So I went over to see President [Nguyen Van] Thieu, because I'd been pretty close to him, being chief of staff, and he had me for lunch. And he said, "Where are you going to go?" I said, "I'm going back to the Pentagon." He said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I'm going to be director of civil disturbance planning." "What's that?" So I explained it to him. He said, "You know, that's funny, all those problems back there. You know, we don't even need something like that here in Vietnam." And I'll always remember that statement. Here's the President of Vietnam saying, "You've got to go back to control riots in your cities, and we have a war going on, and we don't have any of that sort of thing." And it was very enlightening to me and made me start to think that here are a people being accused of not backing up the government, not supporting the war--that's what the South Vietnamese were being accused of. But they didn't need somebody to come back to control the riots in the cities. But back here in the United States we did.

So when he made that statement across the table there at his place, it always has remained with me. Anyhow, I came back, and I stayed there four months, I think it was. I remember it was the time we had the big fights over in Howard University, and that was a can of worms.

So I was sitting down there, and Westy had told me that that was just a holding pattern. "And what am I going to do?" I said. "Well, you're going to be the DCSOPS." Well, that was sort of logical. Harry Lindley was due to retire, three stars, and I had been

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the ADCSOPS before I went to Vietnam. My whole life had been pretty much on the operational side of the house. So, great. DCSOPS is a real plum. So I was waiting for Harry to get the hell out of the way so I could run the place properly. (Laughter) And at lunch time one day the exec called me up, the exec to Westy, and said, "The boss wants you to come up for lunch." So I went up there, and we sat down at that little table, and we had our cantaloupe and a very light lunch, as Westy always did, and he said, "I'm having difficulty with the Secretary." I said, "Oh? What's the problem?" He said, "Well, the Secretary doesn't agree on the people that I want to be the DCSPER." I won't name the individuals. "But he's going through"--you know, in the three stars--two stars, the chief of staff pretty much tells all the two stars where to go. Three stars, four stars, the secretary has to approve. So he named the individuals, and I said, "Well, so?" He said, "Well, who do you think ought to take the job?" So I thought of my three best friends, and named them, and so forth. And we went on and got through the sherbet, and he said, "What about you?" I said, "Goddamn, Westy, I haven't even been a adjutant or an S-1. I've been strictly on the operational side all my life," and I began to feel uneasy. I said, "You brought me back here to be the DCSOPS." He said, "You're it." So I walked out of there as the DCSPER." (Laughter)

G: That's a command decision.

K: That's a command decision. He'd already made up his mind; he was just laying me into the saddle softly. So I walked downstairs, and I became the DCSPER--I've forgotten, a couple of weeks later, something like that

I remember walking into the office and sitting down at the desk. You know, the

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deputies [who] handled the appropriations are responsible for the appropriations; the chief is not. So when you sign that poop sheet, you sign for the appropriation. So I walked in the office, and there were eight or ten of them standing around, and I sat down at the desk to sign it. I looked down there and they had the wrong name. Assuming to be [?] the DCSPER. Not my name.

G: Welcome to the job.

K: Yes. And so my first remark was, "If the goddamned personnel system is no better than this, no wonder they called me back." (Laughter) And then two days thereafter, Chief wanted me to have that little ceremony to, you know, sign you in and administering the oath and all that. That night, I'd eaten something somewhere, and I became sick as a dog. So I came in the office and I could barely hold my head up. The ceremony was supposed to be a half an hour from then. So I went down to the dispensary. Do you know Dr. DeLorenzo?

G: No, that name rings a bell, but I can't think why.

K: Tony DeLorenzo; he's been down there--he was the chief--I went to see him the other day. Still there; sixty-nine or fifty-nine years old. And he took one look at me and took my blood count and so forth, and he said, "You're in bad shape." I said, "Okay, what do you do?" He said, "We're going to take you out to Walter Reed." I said, "I don't want to go out to Walter Reed." He said, "You're going to Walter Reed anyhow."

Since they didn't have anybody responsible for the monies, down came the AG and a captain, and I'm laying on that gurney there, feeling like the wrath of God, and DeLorenzo is a witness, and they swore me in as DCSPER while I'm holding my head off

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that table. (Laughter) And they'll always remember that down there. If I'm famous for anything, it's being sworn in as the deputy chief of staff of personnel on a gurney.

G: Not much pomp and circumstance.

K: No, there wasn't. And off they sent me to Walter Reed. I had gastroenteritis, or whatever the hell you call it; it was kind of a bad case. So that's how I got to be the DCSPER. And the next point is, "How did you get to be selected?" That's how I got to be selected.

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G: It was my impression that he had submitted a list of the changes that--

K: Yes, but it wasn't anything startling. Of course, that was the time of this whole ethics--remember that, the War College ethics study and things of that type? That's one of the leading causes to have us get into that whole question of conduct and an officer becoming a gentleman and all that sort of thing.

I guess maybe I should say I didn't find anything startling about the recommendations, but rather at that time, all these things were occurring at one point in time, where you even got down to the point of questioning, "Why an army?"

G: Oh, yes. That was when the volunteer army got to be blueprinted, wasn't it?

K: Yes. Why an army, and even the question of haircuts. (Laughter) Let me tell you a thing; it had nothing to do with this, but I'll tell you the story. He was trying to decide on the haircuts, and that fell in my department. George Forsythe, who was then the all-volunteer guy, he was in it, too. And George and I didn't necessarily agree on quite a few things as far as the all-volunteer army went, but we had a big briefing for Westy on how the haircuts should be, females and males and so forth.

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We had it up in that conference room, 3625 or whatever it is, and he couldn't agree. So we all went back to the drawing board. We had that--remember the pictures that we had, in the barber shops and so forth? Well, we had all those so we could specifically talk to lengths and covering of the ears, and *et cetera*. And we were in the conference room waiting for the Chief. And George and I had agreed that I would wear a red wig and he would wear a yellow wig. And all the deputies were sitting around; this was a big conference. All the Indians were sitting around the edge of the room, and when the Chief comes out of his office down the hallway there, the guy from the secretariat says, "The Chief's on the way." When the Chief comes in, he just makes the statement, "Gentlemen, the Chief of Staff." Everybody stands up and so forth. At that point in time, George and I were to come out from behind that little screen they have in that room with our wigs on, to give some hilarity to it.

But again, Westy is not a hilarious individual. (Laughter) And we chickened out. When that guy said, "Gentlemen, the Chief is coming down the hallway," we both took the wigs off. (Laughter)

G: I think you showed the better part of valor.

K: The better part of valor. (Laughter) And then we discussed the haircuts on all those diagrams.

G: That's funny.

How bad off was the army toward the end of our Vietnam involvement? You hear people say with some authority that the army was tearing itself to pieces; I don't know if that's too strong or not. What would you say?

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K: Well, the army is very resilient, and the army is made up of a tremendous number of very dedicated people. The army was in trouble; there's just no doubt about that. In the first place, discipline had gone downhill, drugs had entered into the problem; we didn't know how to handle drugs. As a matter of fact, we had difficulty recognizing that we had a drug problem. And so did the rest of society. It was exacerbated by the lack of support for a war, exacerbated by the fact that Europe--I was commanding general of the 3rd Armored Division, and we had a big exercise on nuclear warfare over there. So my division held all its NCOs and officers up until after that was over. It ended in October, just about two weeks before I left to come back and be the ADCSOPS.

All other divisions had been really ransacked. There were as many as three and four hundred NCOs out of a division, boom, just like that. Captains and lieutenants and lieutenant colonels and majors. So when I left, we had been exempt, but when we got that exercise done in the place, the door fell on the 3rd Armored Division. God, the things that happened to that division after I left--not because of me, because of pulling them out and sending them to Vietnam--were just horrendous. When it got to the point--my son, who is now commanding a battalion in Hawaii, he went over there as a second lieutenant to command a battery, and he was the only officer in the damned battery. And practically no NCOs. And they had one hell of a time, the 3rd Infantry [Armored] Division. And that was the whole atmosphere over there.

And then, of course, there was the reflection in Europe of our own involvement in Vietnam, which Europe didn't support. And to have a tour in Europe, versus the old days, when I'd been over there, was horrible. And then there was a reaction by the Germans

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about the indiscipline in Europe. I went over there as DCSPER to make a survey, because things were so bad, at Westy's instigation. And they were bad.

And then, of course, we had the reaction of the people in the schools. You had instructors who had been in high school, in junior high school, and in colleges who had been draft-exempt because they were going to be teachers. So in some ways it's kind of amazing to me that--it shows the resiliency of the army that we were able to live through something like that. And when you stop and think about it, then the yo-yoing back and forth. I sat there first in the transition of coming down from a tremendous number of people--I think it was what, 1.3 million people--down to an army of about six hundred fifty to about seven hundred thousand; I've forgotten what the numbers are now. When you do that, you just tear the structure down.

Then the drug problem, and then the movement, which was not favored by a lot of people in the army, a movement to an all-volunteer force. And a lot of people in Congress, a lot of people in the country, didn't think we should have an all-volunteer force. And all the things that that did.

I guess you could say that that was probably the most explosive time that the army has had, people-wise, in its history. Now, maybe that's not true, because I wasn't here during the Civil War or the Revolutionary War or anything like that. But it certainly would be one of the candidates for being number one in people problems.

G: An unhappy time.

K: An unhappy time. Well, the whole society was unhappy, when you stop and think about it. When you stop and think what has happened to society in the last--God, that's been fifteen

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years now--in the last fifteen years, as Vietnam began to sort of explode back here, fifteen years. The whole question of sex and divorce and drugs, permissiveness in society and abortions, and all of these sorts of things.

And the biggest mistake of it was, again, not mobilizing and drawing people into it.

And that's one of the major reasons we went to the so-called total force with reserve components, to get the reserve components integrated in the form of augmentation, and all that sort of thing, having a brigade as an integral part of an active division, which we have nowadays, as you know. It means that we can't go anywhere unless you get the reserves--

G: Built in.

K: Built in. So if you take the reserves, you've got to have the support of the people, and that's one of the basic reasons for having a total force integration as much as we possibly can, of the reserve components of the army reserve and the Guard, and of course of the other services, too. That was one of the basic reasons we did it. Never again, hopefully, will we attempt to do something that we did before without the support of the people.

G: Of course, nobody knew that it was going to get as big as it did.

K: No, that's true. It pointed out something very startling to me--well, maybe not startling. You can't fight a long war in a democracy. People have to see results, and any time when I was the II Field Force commander--absolutely appalling. I'd get in my chopper there at Long Binh, fly out along the Parrot's Beak--you know where the Parrot's Beak was, down there in the Delta, and that was only about a twenty-minute, twenty-five-minute chopper ride--fly along that and see the enemy across that damned swampland, and have them shooting at you, and not being able to do anything about it. Now, you can't fight a war like

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that.

It was the same thing with Swede Larsen, who was a classmate of mine. He had the corps up in the plateau, and he was fighting--of course, they'd come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, slip across there, come across the border [for] a couple of days, fight and go back across, and you couldn't pursue. Swede made the statement that one of his biggest problems was with the North Vietnamese battalions coming across, and then old [Robert] McNamara said, "There are no North Vietnamese coming across that border." Well, of course, that was utterly ludicrous. We were not--Swede came close to being relieved for making that statement and insisting that it was right. And it *was* right! There weren't Viet Cong coming across there; there were North Vietnamese battalions coming across, in companies. Well, when you get something like that and then you get SecDefs who came not to believe in the war, after a while--

So the army had a hard time. As a matter of fact, there was even a study made--I've forgotten what year it was, 1971 or 1972--when they were starting to think about doing CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] work again. And there was serious thought about that, which goes to show you how far things swung in the opposite direction from the basic cause for having an army.

G: These weren't happy years for General Westmoreland, either, as I've been told.

K: No, they weren't happy years. As a matter of fact, when you stop and think about it, General Westy has carried a tremendous load, and that's one of the reasons why he felt so strongly about suing in this recent case, although we all who were close to him all recommended that he not do it. As you noticed, the big law firms downtown wouldn't

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touch it with a ten-foot pole. That's the reason he got involved with the Capitol Legal Foundation downtown, this fellow Dan Burt, because none of the big people--they all told him, "Don't do it." But having fought over there as a theater commander, being tagged by many people with the perception that he lost the war, the only theater commander that's ever lost a war; it's a difficult load for him to handle.

G: Do you see him often?

K: Not often. The most recent time I was to introduce him for the commanders-in-chief award over here not too long ago. Well, I talk to him on the phone, see him whenever he comes through town, or almost every time he comes through town. He's aged quite a bit.

G: Well, what is he? Seventy-three or four?

K: No, Westy's not that old, I don't think.

G: He was class of 1936.

K: 1936, yes. I've got the book right here. I was guessing; I think he's seventy or seventy-one.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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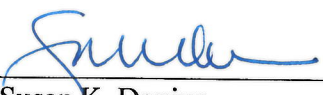
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