

General Greene Denies Telling Newsmen of '5-to-8-Year War' Study

By John G. Norris
Washington Post Staff Writer

Gen. Wallace M. Greene denied yesterday that he had told newsmen in South Vietnam of "Pentagon studies" which predicted a five-to-eight year war that probably would require 500,000 to 800,000 U.S. troops for victory.

The Marine Corps Commandant, however, confirmed at a Defense Department news conference that he had held a "deep background" conference with American correspondents in Saigon. But under unusually blunt questioning by reporters, he repeatedly declined to say whether or not he had "speculated" at the session as to the forces needed or length of the war, or what he might have said.

Greene, however, had some important and interesting comments on the course of the war. He said the U.S. Marines and South Vietnamese in the 1st Corps area in the north "very soon" will link the two

leatherneck-held perimeters around Danang and Chulai into one continuous area.

Three Areas

This would be a major accomplishment. U.S. Marines are divided in three major areas in the north: Hue and its Phubai air base; Danang; and Chulai. The coastal roads between these centers are open to armored American columns, but the Vietcong control much of the area between, at least at night.

If American Marines can link up Danang and Chulai, some 60-odd miles apart, with a 25-mile no-mans-land between the two present perimeters, into one large holding, it would be a significant military and pacification achievement.

Greene brought up the matter of the news stories which appeared early last week in a written statement he read. The Saigon dispatches forecast a long war — probably eight years with current U.S. forces and five years if U.S.

troop strength in Vietnam were raised from the current 290,000-man strength (and a goal of nearly 400,000 already projected) to 750,000 men.

President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara already have denied that there are any such official studies on the probable duration of the war and the American troop strength required to win it. In his prepared statement, Greene said of his "deep background" last Sunday:

"I did not make any reference to any Defense Department or JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) studies or any other study which contains conclusions on the length of the war or the number of U.S. forces required to conduct the war. I know of no study which draws the conclusions reported and I will not speculate on the length of the war or the force levels required to support it."

Questions Fired

Newsmen repeatedly fired questions at the Marine Commandant as to what he had said at the Saigon background. He would only repeat his earlier prepared statement and add that he would not speculate on U.S. troop strength and length of war prospects.

Some of the questions were sharp. One reporter asked, "why won't you level with us?" Greene remained calm and turned off all such queries. There was one softer question, however, which seemed to explain the whole matter of what Greene may have said to correspondents a week ago and why he and other top officials feel they now can deny that there have been any Pentagon "studies" on the Vietnam war.

A reporter noted that Pentagon "studies," under military procedure, usually referred to formal inquiries into a subject ordered by higher authority with the findings and conclusions put into a definite report. He went on to ask if military staffs were not constantly making estimates and speculations on all matters, including the possible length of war.

Greene agreed, saying his Marine Corps staff, "like all other staffs," was "constantly thinking ahead and planning."



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GEN. WALLACE M. GREENE

... denies telling newsmen in Saigon of five-to-eight year war.

Viet 'Backgrounder' Has Repercussions

By John G. Norris

Washington Post Staff Writer

News stories resulting from a "backgrounder" held a week ago in Saigon by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Wallace M. Greene have become the subject of considerable dispute here.

True to the traditional rules laid down for a "backgrounder briefing," the official giving it was not identified when what he said—or what the correspondents present understood him to mean—was published.

And as usually happens, though, in big-leadline stories, the name of the official who gave the Saigon backgrounder quickly became known to top Government officials and the press corps here and eventually was published.

The stories written from the session differed in detail but generally agreed that peace studies made in the Pentagon forecast a long war in Vietnam—perhaps eight years. Another study, it was said, estimated it would take 750,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam to end the war in five years. There are now 280,000 GIs in Vietnam and plans call for sending another 100,000 men soon.

Estimates Projected

President Johnson told a news conference later that Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara could find no evidence of any such studies having been made in the Defense Department. McNamara, the President added, said he did not agree with the estimates given.

The President added that he knew there had been some "deep, deep, deep, deep backgrounder"

in Saigon, indicating he thought the stories emanated from them.

Later, "U.S. officials"—again on a "backgrounder basis"—said no such studies had been made, except perhaps as one man's opinion, and that estimates of the length of the war were worth less anyway.

There are no set rules regarding meetings of officials with the press, but it is generally agreed that press conferences are "on the record" and reporters may quote the official concerned. On the other hand, officials sometimes hold "off-the-record" meetings with reporters or go briefly "off the record" at a news conference. The material may not be published at all but is given to enable newsmen to understand some touchy matter in dispute.

Purpose of 'Backgrounder'

The "backgrounder" has come into growing use. In such circumstances an official gives the press representatives information which they may publish but not attribute to the individual who said it. The backgrounder news conference can serve a useful purpose in getting information to the public that is important but which might provoke an uproar if stated on the record.

Officials also sometimes use the backgrounder to float a trial balloon—a controversial proposal which subsequently can be officially denied if the reaction is adverse. At other times the backgrounder is used by an individual to gain popular support for his ideas. Then there is the "deep backgrounder" in which re-

porters may publish the information given, but not attribute it to "U.S. officials," or even say there has been a meeting. The President's emphasis that the Saigon conferences were in this category was indicated by his repetitive "deep, deep, deep backgrounder" comment.

The backgrounder can be a two-edged sword, especially if it produces headline news.

One Held by McNamara

There was the famous backgrounder held by McNamara a few weeks after taking office. He made it plain to newsmen that studies made by the new Kennedy Administration had concluded that there was no "missile gap," as claimed by Mr. Kennedy and other Democrats in the 1960 political campaign. Republicans, who had been denying that the Soviet Union was ahead of the United States in missiles, had a field day and McNamara soon was revealed as the source of the

stories by newsmen who had not been present at the backgrounder.

In 1955 Adm. Robert B. Carney, Chief of Naval Operations, held a backgrounder in which he told newsmen that Red China had prepared for an attack on the Taiwan-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu and that the United States might be at war within a few weeks. (There was a dispute within the Administration at the time over whether the United States should resist an attack on the islands under its commitment to defend Taiwan.) The big headlines the day after Carney met with newsmen suggested that war with China was imminent. A reporter who had not been present at the backgrounder then wrote that Carney was the source of the story.

President Eisenhower publicly disagreed with Carney's view and a shakeup in the Navy's public relations division followed. What Green's status may be

as a result of his backgrounder in Saigon last week is not clear.

President Johnson in an election year, would not want to agree with Greene's assessment that a long war, with much heavier U.S. troop commitments, is necessary. But some observers here suggest that the Marine commandant spoke with Administration knowledge to pave the way for heavy troop movements there after the election. Some basis for this view is suggested by the fact that Greene made similar statements at a backgrounder in Tokyo before the Saigon session, and reportedly at a similar meeting with newsmen after the storm broke in Hong Kong.