

ABRAMS IS CHOICE AS CHIEF OF STAFF

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Nixon Expected to Nominate
Westmoreland's Successor

After Return From Trip—
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By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

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WASHINGTON, May 31—

Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of United States forces in South Vietnam, will be nominated as the Army's new Chief of Staff "within a few days" of President Nixon's return from his European summit trip tomorrow night, well-placed Army sources said today.

General Abrams, who is 57 years old, will replace Gen. William C. Westmoreland, whose four-year tour of duty as Chief of Staff will end June 30. The promotion requires Senate confirmation, but such nominations have traditionally been approved without opposition.

The appointment of General Abrams, a gruff-talking World War II tank commander who previously served in the Pentagon as Vice Chief of Staff, has been widely rumored in recent weeks.

Sources said that the White House initially planned to announce the four-star general's

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promotion on April 15, but held back because of the North Vietnamese offensive, which began in late March.

"It really wouldn't have done to announce him as the new Chief of Staff if the MACV [Military Assistance Command-Vietnam] compound is being resupplied by air," said one Army officer jokingly, referring to the early defeats suffered by South Vietnamese troops in the offensive.

A spokesman for the Army, asked about the pending appointment, said officially that



Associated Press

Gen. Creighton W. Abrams

"the Army is not aware of any nominations" by the White House to replace General Westmoreland.

Three other generals have been publicly mentioned as General Westmoreland's successor in recent months—Gen. Michael S. Davison, head of Army forces in Europe; Gen. Bruce Palmer Jr., now serving as Vice Chief of Staff, and Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, who is General Abrams's deputy in South Vietnam.

Sources agreed that General Weyand would undoubtedly be appointed by President Nixon to replace General Abrams, although that decision was said to have not yet been made formally known in the Pentagon.

These military sources said that the post had always been available to General Abrams, despite the rumors of other possible choices, because the general was the enthusiastic first choice of Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird.

"Laird feels obligated to Abrams because Abrams has gone along with Vietnamization even when the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected," one highly

placed source said.

General Abrams's support for the Administration's Vietnamization policy was particularly crucial during vigorous debate among the chiefs over President Nixon's plans—announced on Jan. 13, 1972—to cut American troop levels to 69,000 this spring, the source added. "If Abrams had not gone along, they [the Administration] may not have been able to turn the chiefs around," he said.

Some Disagreement

Although General Abrams's promotion was expected, sources said, there was some disagreement—most notably by Secretary of Army Robert F. Froehke, who reportedly wanted "to reach way down in the ranks" and nominate a younger four-star general or even a three-star general as Chief of Staff.

Because of this, it was said, the top leadership of the Pentagon reached "an informal understanding" with General Abrams, calling for him to step down after two years in office. Under law, the appointment of Chief of Staff is a four-year appointment.

Army insiders, in disclosing the tentative agreement, said that General Abrams was known not to be in the best of health, having suffered from pneumonia and recurrent gall bladder problems in recent years.

In a series of interviews in the last two days, a number of young Army officers—ranging in rank from major to general—described General Abrams' advancement with mixed emotions.

"Look," said one high-ranking officer, "he's a great guy, but he's too much of a traditionalist. He's not going to shake the boat and it really needs shaking right now."

"I don't mean we have to pull out our hair," the officer, a West Point graduate, added, "but we've got to have some rifts in the officer corps—we've got to have some ruthless selection [promotion] policies."

Internal Problems

Other officers voiced concern that General Abrams's five-year tour of duty in South Vietnam had left him out of touch with social problems that many in the Army consider to be critical, such as racism and increasing drug usage.

Despite the criticism, all of the officers interviewed agreed that General Abrams would be much more forceful and effective than General Westmoreland.