



'A Soldier Reports'

John D. Lofton Jr.

"I WROTE IT because the military's side has never been told. A soldier has an obligation to report. We shouldn't sweep Vietnam under the rug like a chapter in history that we can't be proud of. We must look at it to learn our errors. After all, five Presidents and the Congress were involved in this. I'm not advocating a witchhunt, but an objective analysis."

The speaker is General William C. Westmoreland, U.S. field commander in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968, and what he's talking about is his new book, "A Soldier Reports," which was published this week by Doubleday. It is Westmoreland's conviction that history will reflect more favorably upon the performance of the military than upon that of the politicians and policy-makers.

Quoting General Douglas MacArthur's declaration that in war there is "no substitute for victory," the former superintendent of West Point feels the truth of those words was proven not only in South Vietnam but in all of Indochina.

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WESTMORELAND believes the strategic blunder that doomed the United States to defeat in Indochina was the "ill-considered policy of graduated response against North Vietnam," a policy forced on the military by civilian planners in Washington.

This policy is described as "bomb a little bit," stop it a while to give the enemy a chance to cry uncle, then

bomb a little bit more but never really enough to hurt." That was no way to win, says the general.

But even within the handicap of graduated response, the war in Vietnam could have been brought to a favorable end following the defeat of the enemy's Tet offensive in 1968, says Westmoreland, if President Johnson had allowed him to change strategy and take advantage of North Vietnam's weaknesses. Yet this was not to be.

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WESTMORELAND criticizes President Johnson for failing to level with the American people about the extent and nature of the sacrifice that had to be made in Vietnam. LBJ erred, he writes, in relying on the Gulf of Tonkin resolution for his authority from the Congress to do what he deemed necessary in Southeast Asia.

The general believes that when dissent developed against the war in 1966 and 1967, Mr. Johnson should have gone back to Congress for a reaffirmation of the Vietnam commitment. The failure to do so, says Westmoreland, created a credibility gap that grew into an unbridgeable chasm and allowed public opinion to become a leaden liability.

In his book, Westmoreland has accomplished what he said he wanted to do: He has swept nothing under the rug; he has hunted no witches. His is a book well worth reading.