

Westmoreland, in Saigon, Says Allies Are Ready for Enemy

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 31—After nearly a week of talks with field commanders, Gen. William C. Westmoreland said today that there was every indication that the North Vietnamese were preparing for a major offensive in South Vietnam soon.

The general, who is chief of Staff of the Army, said he expected the offensive to occur in February and to consist of several phases, with the fighting centered in the northernmost provinces and the Central Highlands, but perhaps also breaking out onto the coastal plain in the vicinity of the port city of Quinhon.

He added that he felt that American and South Vietnamese forces were well prepared and that they "have a great deal of confidence that they can handle any forthcoming enemy initiative."

General Westmoreland was the American commander in Vietnam during the major troop build-up and through the dramatic Tet offensive of 1968, which shocked the United States and is said to have discouraged President Lyndon B. Johnson from seeking re-election.

Many Predictions of Attack

High-ranking American and Vietnamese officials have been predicting an offensive coinciding with the approach of Tet, the Lunar New Year, on Feb. 15 and President Nixon's trip to China.

Shortly after the general's news conference at American headquarters, a spokesman for

the United States Embassy announced that Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker would leave tomorrow for 10 to 14 days of consultations in Washington.

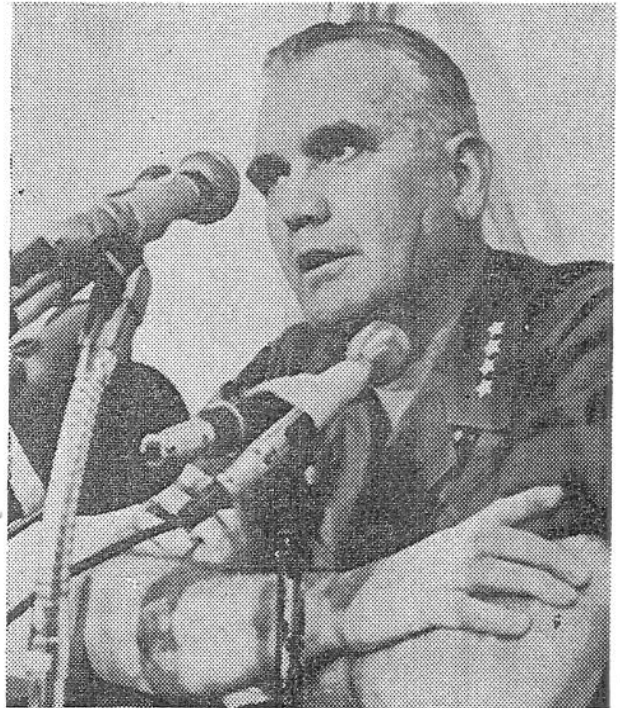
The spokesman would not comment on whether the consultations would concern the possible offensive, which Mr. Bunker also predicted, or Mr. Nixon's visit to China. The timing suggested that those two issues would be on the agenda.

American and South Vietnamese headquarters described continuing activity in the regions where the offensive is expected. The Americans reported saturation bombing in the Central Highlands on both sides of the Vietnamese borders with Laos and Cambodia and just below the demilitarized zone. The South Vietnamese reported sighting four enemy tanks near the highlands capital of Kontum and destroying three of them.

Tanks, Then Trucks, Then Both

The North Vietnamese have rarely used tanks in South Vietnam, but for the last few weeks Government troops have been saying that the enemy used them in the highlands. Last week South Vietnamese officers announced that four tanks had been blown to bits. They later revised the statement to say that the tanks had been trucks. Still later they said the enemy had lost a tank and three trucks.

General Westmoreland insisted today—as he and others have in the past—that the allied command had fully anticipated the 1968 attacks. "This



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PREDICTS ENEMY OFFENSIVE: Gen. William C. Westmoreland, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, in Saigon yesterday.

information was rather well known," he remarked today, "but was not given a great deal of visibility."

Neither he nor others who anticipate an offensive are willing to discuss why the reports are being given such widespread "visibility" this year in what almost seems to be a promotion campaign.

Some observers believe that officials are simply making every effort to insure that the American public is not caught by surprise. More skeptical observers say that if the offensive fails to materialize or proves small in scope, the official line is likely to be that successful

Vietnamization is the reason.

American officials maintain that the process of turning the conduct of the war over to the South Vietnamese is working well, but routs of Government troops in Laos and Cambodia have raised serious questions. Yardsticks upon which everyone agrees are difficult to find.