

General Westmoreland's Address to the VHPA at the Third Annual Reunion

The following is a transcription of the address given by Gen. William C. Westmoreland before the Third Annual Reunion of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association at the Washington, DC Hilton Hotel on July 5th, 1986. The transcription was prepared by Larry Clark, the founder of the VHPA.

Officers of the Association and ladies and gentlemen. I have been retired for a number of years now. I live in the old town of Charleston, South Carolina and one of the reasons that I moved there was that I am a native of that state from many generations back. I went to the Citadel for one year before I went to the Military Academy. But we've got good fishing around there and good hunting around that's when Reagan showed his real colors to me, because other politicians didn't have the courage to make that statement, wd Sergeant. It was his first year in the field and he was doing fantastic. He found the birds, he kept them on point and he retrieved them after they had been shot. He did so well that his owner said "I think I'll have to promote him." So the next year he promoted him to Captain. The next year in the field he was even more fantastic. He said "I've got a national champion. It worked once, so I'm going to do it again, I'm going to promote him and change his name to General." The next year in the field he wasn't worth a damn. All he would do is sit on his behind and bark.

So now I am off my backside and I am going to do a little barking. Because I feel that I have quite an affinity with you guys. I was not only a pilot myself, it took me twelve years to qualify, but I finally did. I was Chief of Staff for the Army and they couldn't turn me down. But I was also involved in the early days as an instructor at the Command and Staff College and the War College and developing tactics to exploit on the battlefield the helicopter, and I will get into this in a moment.

Meanwhile, I just want to tell you that I have talked to a lot of audiences in my life and I make an average of one speech a week. I tell you that this audience tonight is one of the finest looking group of gentlemen with the prettiest wives that I've seen in a long time.

Shortly after I became Chief of Staff, I went to the Secretary of the Army and I said "You know I've fought three wars and I've seen the Army Nurse Corps and the Women's Army Corps do a magnificent job. These ladies have fine leaders and good administrators and I think that the time has arrived to recognize the Women's Army Corps and Army Nurse Corps by promoting the heads of these two female organizations to the grade of Brig. General." And I got turned down. I got turned down and I went back a couple of months later and made my case again to the civilian secretary and I got turned down a second time. But I'm a very persistent guy, I don't give up easy I can assure you. So I went back the third time and I made my case and it went all the way, apparently to the President, and by that time we had a change in the administration, and I got word back that

we could promote. Anna May Hayes, the Chief Army Nurse, and Elizabeth Worthington, the Chief of the Women's Army Corps, to the grade of Brig. Gen. This was quite something. It was the first time that a female general officer had been promoted in the western world since Joan of Arc. So that was quite a benchmark.

The day after I had promoted Anna May Hayes, the first to the grade of Brig. Gen., my wife found herself seated the next day at the beauty parlor next to Gen. Anna May Hayes. My wife said, "Anna May", Anna May was a widow, "I wish you would get married again." And Anna May said "Mrs. Westmoreland why in the world would you want me to get married again?" My wife said, "Very simple, I just want some man to know what it's like being married to a General."

My wife is typical of most Army wives and I do want to recognize you ladies at the outset. I did not get married until after World War II. My wife and I have been married for 39 years and we have three children and our baby is about to have a baby any day now. My wife, since she married me, has lived in 33 houses, 7 states and some of those states more than once, lived in 3 foreign countries, 4 years of almost total separation where she raised the kids and that is the basic reason why all three turned out pretty well, she raised them. The day, ironically, that I was sworn in as Chief of Staff, and I only mention this because you have been to The Wall, her baby brother was killed in Vietnam. So, you wives carry a heavy burden and I am very sensitive to it and very aware of it.

Now I am going to talk to you a little longer than you want because I've got so much I want to say. I want to talk first about the change in attitude that I have observed in this country toward the Vietnam Veteran. I want to talk about who the Vietnam Veteran is, because his image has not been accurately portrayed to the American people and I want to give you some facts. And finally, I want you chopper pilots to understand and appreciate, and I don't honestly think you do at this juncture, what you were involved in, the contribution you made, you were pioneers, and I want to explain to you, from the standpoint of the senior commander, the role that you played, which is virtually unique in the annals of military history. And I will talk about this.

First, we came back from Vietnam, it was an unpopular war, we didn't start the war, it was started by our political leaders, we were sent to the battlefield, we did the job we were expected to do, and no soldier on the battlefield has ever done it better. But we came back, we were not well treated, we were ignored and it was kind of hard to take, but we are big boys, and we .

understood that eventually we get it, and have. It started in Nov. of 1983 and the Vietnam Veterans throughout the country converged on Washington, DC. And we had a welcome home for ourselves, nobody else would do it. And then we marched in a parade in honor of ourselves. Nobody else would do it. And as you will remember, I voluntarily led that parade. And then we dedicated a memorial to our dead, without asking the government for a dime, just a piece of real estate. Now that got the attention of the American people. And one year later we dedicated the memorial with the three soldiers and put a flag on the premises. The President was there, and the President said during his campaign for President that our commitment to Vietnam was a noble cause. You know as you look back on it he was the only President that had the courage to make that statement. And I must say that's when Reagan showed his real colors to me, because other politicians didn't have the courage to make that statement, which is a true statement.

And then in 1985, Mayor Koch of New York had a parade in honor of the Vietnam Veterans, the biggest ticker tape parade in the history of New York City. And then a year later, the city of Chicago, which is not to be outdone by New York City, had a parade in honor of the Vietnam Veterans. Some of you were there and the rest saw it on television. Chicago went all out. In the last several days you have observed the activity in New York City, the rededication after 100 years of Lady Liberty. I was there, I flew in this morning. As a matter of fact I was up until 2 o'clock this morning, my wife and I were talking with Bob and Lois Hope. The festivities were very colorful. We have seen our country unified, rededicate itself to the principles that have made our country not only unique but has made us great, the principle of liberty, the principle of freedom, and that's what we fought for in Vietnam. We fought for that principle. And we have everything to be proud of, in spite of the attitude of some people toward that commitment at home. That principle of freedom has made our country unique. And it did my heart good to see the attitude of the people, I've never seen such a spirit as displayed in New York City. Everybody was friendly, everybody was upbeat, I saw no discourtesy, I saw no drunkenness, I saw no unruliness, everybody was dedicated to a principle and seemed to be concentrating on that, and I think that is a very important benchmark in the history of our country.

It's like people are beginning to understand a number of things. You and I have understood this for years, but they are beginning to now understand that the American Military was not defeated in Vietnam, we didn't lose a battle of any consequence. From a military standpoint, it was almost an unprecedented performance. When the North Vietnamese Army came down, our troops had left the battlefield approximately two years earlier. Now these are simple things, you know this. But it is amazing how many Americans do not realize this, and some of them who took strong stands against the war, don't want to understand it. They don't

understand that the American Military did not lose a battle of any consequence. That it was an unprecedented performance by the military, and I am not quoting myself, I'm quoting a man named Douglas Pike, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley who is probably...he is the renowned expert on the Vietnam war, and he stated that the American military performance in Vietnam was unprecedented and that they did not lose a battle of any consequence. But now the world can see. The boat people. A million tried to escape and a half a million went down at sea. We still see the refugees in Thailand. I was in Hong Kong about six weeks ago, and there is a tremendous number of refugees in Hong Kong. But there are also refugees in other countries in that part of the world that get on boats, that do anything they can to get out.

Nobody wants to go to Vietnam anymore, everybody wants to get out. We see the terrible state of the economy. We saw the invasion of Cambodia, where there are still over 50,000 military troops. We have seen the ugly face of communism. To those of us that were there, were aware that's the type of government they had in Hanoi. A few years ago I was asked to speak to an international conference in New Delhi, India. There were representatives there of the ASEAN countries, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, these are the countries in southeast Asia outside of Indochina. Indochina consists of North and South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The ASEAN countries are the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. They have all been colonies of the west, except Thailand. I talked to this group and during the question period and while socializing with this group in New Delhi, they came out very bluntly and said, "You Americans won in Vietnam as far as we, ASEAN countries, are concerned. You held the line for 10 years, which gave us the time we needed to develop confidence in running our own affairs, to improve our infrastructure, to develop a resistance against communist pressure, to develop our economy." And he said, "I remind you that in 1966 the Indonesians threw the Soviets out because America had made a commitment." And they are thankful to us. If we had not made that commitment, communism would have swept all the way to the Malacca Straits, which is just south of Singapore, and which is of great strategic importance to us. Set aside the resources from that part of the world that are important to not only our country but our friends in the free world.

The Vietnam Veteran has been given an unfair image. Unwittingly by the media. There are numbers of the media I think are vicious and are irresponsible, but I think they are the exception rather than the rule. But they have a killer instinct, they like bad news. If somebody criticizes somebody, they like to get on the bandwagon and join the herd. Then the image of the Vietnam Veteran is then inaccurately portrayed. I've been the point man for this and I haven't let it get to me. I haven't been happy about it, but at the same time I

have been very philosophical about it and I've thrown it back in their laps. The Vietnam Veteran is not the drug ridden, psychotic, outlaw and unwilling participant in an unpopular war as he has been depicted.

Now listen to this. Listen to these facts. 91% of the Vietnam Veterans say they are glad they served, 74% that they enjoyed their time in the service. 2 out of 3 said they would do it again serve as they did, even knowing the outcome. There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non veterans of the same age group. The Vietnam Veteran and the non Vietnam Veteran are apparently, or have a proclivity to use drugs or experiment with them in generally the same proportions. This is from a Veterans Administration study. The other statistic I quoted you about 91% saying they are glad they served and 74% said they would do it again, is from a survey by The Harris Survey organization, a very reputable survey organization.

Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison, says the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Only 1/2 of 1 percent of the Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes. 97% of the Vietnam Veterans were discharged under honorable conditions, the same as 10 years prior to Vietnam. Listen to this, 2/3 of the men who served in Vietnam were enlisted volunteers. 2/3 of the men who served in World War II were drafted. 86% of the men who died in Vietnam were Caucasians. 12.5% were black, 1.2% were other races. Listen to this one. The average age of a man who fought in Vietnam was under 19 years of age. The average man who fought in World War II was 26 years of age. The psychological burden carried by that young man, less than 19, was unprecedented. Not only the burden of fighting in a foreign land, half way around the world, but a culture alien to him, far from a pleasant climate, against an unorthodox enemy. Also the psychological burden of realizing that what he was doing did not have overwhelming support by the people at home. This was a tremendous psychological burden.

Let me say, and you know this, when I talk to other groups of enlisted men primarily, they are not necessarily sensitive to the fact that the Vietnam Veteran is doing very, very well in our society and he is a national and a very valuable asset. The Vietnam Veteran in our society is moving into positions of leadership in our society. I think one of our most salutary organizations that has emerged in the Vietnam Veterans community, is the VVLP, Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, which is a self help program. It's a program where Vietnam Veterans who do well in society, and the vast majority are, are banding together at state and city level and they are attempting to ferret out their former comrades in arms who need help, try to put them in job training programs, find jobs for them, pass the hat if they need cash at this particular time in their lives, hold them by the hand and give them encouragement and try to pull them up by their bootstraps. I have talked to VVLP groups I would say in

30 or more states. And this is, I think, America's best. Vietnam Veterans helping Vietnam Veterans, it's a self help program. It is not a program looking for handouts from Uncle Sam, it's a program where Vietnam Veterans who are doing well in society lending a helping hand and encouragement to those that do need help. After every war you have people of that kind. The Vietnam war is not unique in that respect.

Now you chopper pilots. Whether you realize it or not you were pioneers. You fellows have made military history. Because you introduced to the battlefield a vehicle, and you manned it skillfully, that gave us unprecedented mobility on the battlefield. You know what you did, but you do not, and I say probably, I do not think you appreciate the extent of your contribution. By virtue of the military services appreciating the battlefield potential of the helicopter. And develop other copters in accordance with science and technology that prevailed in the 40's and 50's. When we went to Vietnam, at your hands we exploited this battlefield capability. You provided unprecedented mobility to our infantry, you provided unprecedented mobility to our artillery, by being able to pick up 105s and 155s Howitzers and move them around the battlefield and put them on top of mountains and hills where they were easily defended. By virtue of this mobility, this close support by the gun ships, the very important function of the med evac ships which had paramedics aboard that could administer whole blood enroute to a hospital, med evacs saved thousands and thousands of lives, when a man is wounded on the battlefield, his longevity is not measured in miles, it's measured in minutes, the quicker you can get a wounded man to professional care, a hospital, the chances of his surviving is tremendously enhanced. You saved through the med evac literally thousands and thousands and thousands of lives. Those of you who manned the land and sea rescue helicopters, particularly the Jolly Green Giants, you were able to extract men from behind enemy lines and save them from falling into the hands of the enemy. In addition to that by virtue of the heavy lift helicopters, the Chinooks, the Flying Cranes, you were able to pick up helicopters that were down and move them to maintenance facilities and save Uncle Sam millions of dollars. By virtue of the mobility of the helicopter, you were able to move supplies to the troops, ammunition to remote areas, even ice cream to the troops and in that very very humid and hot climate. Whether you know it or not, you became the heroes of the doughboys, the Marines, the Army Infantrymen and to the Artilleryman in remote areas. There was no sweeter sound than that slapping of the wings that chopper sound, that rhythmic bang bang as your rotors went through the atmosphere. It was a sound of sweetness, it was a sound of compassion, it was a sound of help when help was needed. The Huey, the slick and the gun ship, the Cobra, the Chinook, the Flying Crane, the Sikorsky in the hands of the Air Force and the Navy, the H-19, many of you have flown those, so have I, it flies like a .

flying Mack truck. But all of these vehicles gave the Army in Vietnam an unprecedented mobility. I think we must give credit to our military services in foreseeing the utility of the helicopter.

Now let me put this in a little different context. As I stand here and talk to you and you politely listen, which I am appreciative of, lets just image that our country had committed ourselves to the support of South Vietnam. Lets just assume that we didn't have these helicopters. Now here is something that I doubt if many of you have thought about. That battlefield was unprecedented in the history of American arms since the civil war. There is a certain similarity between the civil war, the war between the north and the south, and our battlefield experience in Vietnam. And that was that it was not a war that you could measure on the map, it was a war of mobility. Terrain didn't amount to very much unless it appropriate to secure an airfield or port or food producing area or major communication center. In the civil war that mobility was provided by boats on the Cumberland, Tennessee and Mississippi rivers, and by the horse. In Vietnam we used river boats manned by the Navy on the waterways particularly on the Mekong and the (unreadable) along the DMZ. But we didn't have the horse, but we had the helicopter. And the helicopter gave us unprecedented mobility and without it we would have been in real trouble.

Now lets assume that we didn't have it. We had a hostile front of over 800 miles along the Cambodia and Laos borders and the DMZ. Our policy makers in Washington thought that the wide open flank to the west, over 800 miles long, would be secured by the Geneva conventions of 1954 and the Geneva accords of 1962 which we adhered to. Remember we were not allowed to ever cross the border! That is a "Generals" statement. What I am really saying is that we were not allowed to cross the borders in mass. Overtly. But lets assume that we had no helicopters, 800 miles of hostile fronts, few roads in Vietnam, a lot of waterways. If we had not had the helicopter, we would had to open roads and build roads through the jungle and through the mountains with tremendous numbers of engineers. We would have had to run truck convoys, we would have been plagued by the ambush as the French Groupe Mobile 100 was wiped out on Highway 19 in 1954. We would have been confined to small beach heads along the coast. In order to accomplish what we accomplished in Vietnam, it would have probably taken at least three times the number of troops that we had by virtue of the fact that we would have only had ground mobility. As it was, with this 800 mile hostile front, we couldn't defend it by stationing troops along the whole border, all we could do was lightly outpost it mostly with Special Forces Camps. By virtue of the fact that we had the mobility of the helicopter, it was not confined to the roads, was not subject to ambush, that we could move by helicopter artillery pieces without moving them thru jungle trails, we were able to keep the enemy constantly off balance with a relatively small number of troops that

our government provided for us. And that was done by you guys. You guys flew a machine that had never been introduced in numbers to the battlefield before. In Korea we had a few H-13s, that was the helicopter that I qualified on with the reciprocating engine and no black boxes, but Vietnam was the first time that we had massive helicopters, trained pilots, skilled pilots, courageous pilots and we had machines adapted to the purpose and in the interim we had developed the airmobile tactics so that we could exploit this type of mobility. So you fellows commanding this new machine made it possible for us to be successfully militarily in Vietnam under battlefield conditions virtually unprecedented. To understand that, you have to take a look at the map, take a look at the terrain, take a look at the enemies ambush tactics without the helicopter and you will soon discover that we would have gotten not very far inland, we would have been confined to very shallow beach heads. So you gentlemen have much to be proud of, I mean you were truly pioneers in a new form of warfare and mobility unprecedented by history in that magnitude, but with a counterpart in the civil war where the mobility was provided by the horse, where terrain did not amount to much, it was the enemy who you tried to bring to fight. The civil war could not be followed readily on a map. The Vietnam war likewise. This was disconcerting to the American people because they had seen so many World War II movies. They thought warfare was the World War II vintage.

Now I think that all of us have a job to do. Some of you have been working with me on this particular task. I think that we got to get the Vietnam record set straight in the public mind. It was terribly distorted. The performance of the military, which was almost unprecedented in the annals of American history, was distorted in the minds of the American people. The time has arrived to do what we can to straighten out the public perceptions. That is now beginning to occur.

I would suggest that you look into the text books being studied by your children. I have received several letters with copies of what the text books your children are reading about the Vietnam war. It is not the war that you and I were fighting. It is distorted, it is a reflection of public attitudes that are now old hat. Public attitudes born of emotion, not derivative of fact. I would look at those text books and if you feel that they are off base, and I think many of them are, I think you should do something about it, and you can do something about it.

I would also suggest that you gentlemen get involved in the political life of this nation. Its the political life that's going to bring about the destiny of our nation. We got to get away from this Vietnam psychosis. Every time anybody thinks of committing any of our forces, we have the politicians come out with "another Vietnam, another Vietnam, another Vietnam". In most cases there really is very little counterpart to Vietnam. It is what I call the Vietnam psychosis. We've got to get away from it. We've got to have a military force that is ready, and is equipped with modern instruments of transportation and

modern weapons. We can't let the Vietnam psychosis weaken our military posture. If we do, in due time we're got to be in very very great difficulty. It is the politics of this country that is going to influence our destiny. I would hope that many of you could get involved in political life. Because you had the experience, you served your country, you served it well, you understand the value of military forces, you understand what it is all about, you understand what it takes to field a military force, you understand the importance of new and modern equipment, you understand the necessity of having a maintenance and logistics backup of any transportation or weapons system. The average civilian doesn't understand that, we do. I would hope that many of you would get involved in political life.

Finally, our most important asset which you gentlemen have exemplified, exemplified by volunteering for hazardous service, exemplified by

performing on the battlefield. I think this characteristic is so essential it is well described by Roger Hammerstein who said, "Give me some men who are stout hearted men, Who will fight for the right they adore, Give me but 10 who are stout hearted men, And I'll soon give you 10,000 more. O soldier to soldier and over and over, Where they go and move as they go to the fold, Then nothing in the world can mar or stop a plan, And stout hearted men stick together man to man."

You gentlemen were stout hearted men. The future of our country, and it is an uncertain future, is to be determined by stout hearted men. You have proven that you are such men. You have served your country nobly in the past and I hope that you will continue to serve your country in another capacity, a civilian capacity, as our country moves into the future. Thank you.

William C. Westmoreland

SECTION II - Unit Histories

The VHPA Directory and Historical Committees have been publishing unit histories for several years. Volume 1 contains nine unit histories. The committees have also worked with various associations of Vietnam Era helicopter units to insure their histories are collected, recorded, and distributed. The collect that follows shows the fruit of this effort.

It is important to remember that every history published by the VHPA is considered a "living history". This means two things: First, anyone can add to (or correct) the material. So if you have a related story to tell, please know it will be enthusiastically received by the person dedicated to receive updates for that history. Second, all histories will be periodically republished in the Historical Reference Directory. Currently we believe the reprint cycle will be every five years.

There is another message here. The VHPA has the energy and resources to economically print and distribute unit histories. Anyone with candidate material is encouraged to contact either the VHPA Directory Committee or the VHPA Historical Committee.

All comments concerning this section should be director to VHPA Headquarters, ATTN: Directory Committee.

No 9 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force History

April 1964 to 20 December 1971

Introduction

The following unit history was taken from a 26 page documents sent to the VHPA Historical Committee some time ago from a source that is now unknown. A careful review of this history leads one to believe that it was compiled as an abridgement of the unit's command journals. There are many noteworthy events that happened to the helicopter unit that are missing from this history. Examples of missing events are: How and when the unit started using the radio call signs Albatross for its slicks and Bushranger for its guns. How and when the unit exchanged its UH-1Bs for UH-1Hs. The details concerning all (only a few are mentioned in detail) its aircraft and personnel losses. Anyone who can "fill in these blanks" is encouraged to provide this information to the VHPA Historical Committee Chairman, Robert Davies, 1212 Weeping Willow, Woodstock, GA 30188.

It is important to note that while this unit history covers the period April 1964 to 20 December 1971, the squadron served in Vietnam from 3 May 1966 to 9 December 1971.

1964

During this month, Flying Officer H.R. Thomas flew the first solo flight in a UH-1B, thus being the first pilot on 9 (UH) Squadron to be trained to solo standard by the instructors of that squadron. It is recorded that he probably was the first service member in the world to be converted direct from fixed wing aircraft to Iroquois helicopter.