

CHAPTER ELEVEN

General Officer

1968–1973



EN ROUTE HOME from Saigon in August 1968, I stopped in Honolulu to brief the Commander in Chief, Pacific, and key members of his staff on MACV/SOG. The conference room of Admiral John McCain's Pacific Command headquarters was in a handsome old building at Camp Smith, on a hill overlooking Pearl Harbor. As I stood at the map of Indochina, I could look past the conference table out the window at the smooth lawns and bougainvillea. The distant gray slab of an aircraft carrier and a line of destroyers marked the naval harbor.

I had been a college student construction worker on this very building the summer of 1941, when the facility was built as a naval hospital in the middle of a hilltop pineapple plantation. That summer before Pearl Harbor had been America's last period of true peace in almost thirty years. And there was no real prospect for peace that I could see.

The small group of admirals and generals at the table were somberly attentive. Like most senior American military men, they were resigned to the fact that, for a variety of political reasons, our country had not followed up on the Communist defeat in the Tet Offensive. Now I had to report that SOG Recon Teams had sighted a steady flow of enemy reinforcements on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

This was one of my final duties as SOG commander. I was on orders to the 8th Infantry Division in Europe, as Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver. That summer, I'd been selected for promotion to brigadier general. So, in many ways, going "home" to the 8th Division knowing I'd made general—even though I wouldn't officially wear the rank until the next

year—was a very pleasant prospect. But I was troubled by the situation in Indochina, and uneasy about the future of our efforts there. Our muddled strategy meant the war would probably stretch on indefinitely, and ultimately end in defeat.

After the meeting, Admiral McCain asked to see me alone. I sat beside the Admiral's desk as he silently wrestled with some inner problem. Then he spoke.

"Jack," he said, clenching his wiry hands, "you know my son is a POW?"

"Yes, sir," I nodded. Lieutenant Commander John McCain, Jr., had been shot down over North Vietnam, reportedly badly injured during his bailout, and was now officially listed as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese.

"You've had a lot of experience with Communists in the Far East, Jack," the Admiral continued. "Do you believe they'll try to . . . well, exploit the fact that they have John?"

It was a question any father would ask. Admiral McCain was a tough professional, a combat veteran who had seen close friends die in two wars. His son had followed his profession. But now that relationship was a threat to them both. I had no choice but to be frank.

"Sir," I said, "if you give *any* indication whatsoever that his captivity is a personal burden for you or your family, if you even publicly acknowledge that your son's a prisoner, they will make every effort to exploit his position. They'll definitely try to get to you personally."

Admiral McCain stared at me for a long moment, his lips pursed. "Thank you, Jack," he said, rising from his chair. "I suspected as much, but I needed some confirmation."

As I walked across the beautifully kept grounds of Camp Smith, I was haunted by McCain's dilemma. The war had dragged on far too long. And I knew that the issue of American POWs would be cynically manipulated during any negotiations, just as it had been in Korea.

I recalled a story told by a Spanish army officer in Germany several years before about his country's civil war. During the struggle for the Fortaleza in Toledo, the commander of Franco's besieged troops received a telephone call from his enemy counterpart, a colonel. We have your son, the Colonel said, and we'll execute him if you don't surrender. The Fortaleza commander demanded proof that his son was still alive, and the younger officer was allowed to speak on the telephone. "Son," the father said, "prepare to meet your maker. I can do nothing to save you." The enemy headquarters was furious. They later executed their young prisoner.¹

As the staff car took me from the gardens of Camp Smith into the bustle of civilian traffic en route to the airport, I wondered if Admiral McCain would face similar cruel pressure.

On the commercial flight to Seattle, I noticed a vague but perceptible

coolness toward me by some of the civilian passengers. Most were middle-age vacationing couples returning to the mainland, but a few younger men and women gazed with open contempt at my uniform and the rows of campaign ribbons I wore. It was my first indication that the mood in America had shifted since my last trip home the year before.

Nineteen sixty-eight had been a year of chaotic change around the world. After the shock of the Tet Offensive, there'd been the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. Europe had been rocked by the student uprisings in France and the Soviet suppression of the new and more liberal Czech government. In both Europe and the States the growing anti-war movement was reaching a crescendo. And the war in Vietnam was mirrored by a conflict in our streets. Whole sections of black ghetto neighborhoods in our major cities had been destroyed in bloody rioting.

Some of my fellow citizens obviously found the military a convenient scapegoat on which to focus their confused anger generated by this turmoil. It was no wonder. Every night the screens of the new color television sets around the country blazed with napalm and American artillery. The images of dead and wounded GIs and Vietnamese civilian casualties seemed endless. Footage of enemy casualties or captured weapons was rarely shown.²

The media's portrayal of the situation in Vietnam bore little resemblance to the reality I had experienced only days before. One interesting outcome of the failed Tet Offensive was the overall excellent performance of the ARVN and the Regional and Popular Forces auxiliary troops in the countryside. But the press accounts I read dwelt on ARVN inefficiency, poor leadership, and that old standby "corruption."

I was reminded of an earlier incident in Saigon. Bill Donnett, my senior embassy adviser who knew the country well, angrily dropped a copy of a news magazine on my desk one morning. The story in question concerned ARVN officers who were more concerned with procuring prostitutes for GIs than fighting the enemy. This ludicrous charge came directly from Vietcong propaganda leaflets. That evening, Bill and I encountered the reporter who wrote the article on the terrace of the Caravel Hotel. Bill lit into him over the piece. The reporter, an honest, old-school newspaperman, was chagrined.

"I filed my story citing that as VC propaganda," he complained. "But my editors rewrote it the way they wanted."³

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MARY met me at the Seattle airport. We were going to have a few days together in the Northwest before returning to Washington to complete plans for the move to Germany. I was tired after crossing nine time zones, but it

was wonderful to be home again with my wife. She reminded me that this was my fifth return from duty in foreign war zones.

Waiting for my bags to arrive, however, I met hostility even stronger than I had encountered on the plane. One long-haired young man glared and scowled as he strolled by, his exaggerated bell-bottom jeans flapping. "Oh, wow," he said in a stage whisper to his girlfriend, "check out the *war* hero."

Maybe that type of anger was understandable, coming from a boy of draft age. But I wasn't prepared for his girl, a young woman in miniskirt and granny glasses, the age of my own daughters, who mouthed a truly foul obscenity when she turned to examine my uniform.

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IN Washington, a strange mood of limbo prevailed. The Democrats fought an internecine battle while the Republicans uneasily coalesced around Richard Nixon, who hinted vaguely he had a secret plan to win the war. McNamara and most of his cost-effectiveness whiz kids had left the Pentagon for high-paying positions in the private sector. Clark Clifford, an old Democratic workhorse, was the caretaker at Defense. General Westmoreland was now Army chief of staff, and Creighton Abrams, the cigar chomping tanker, ran MACV.

Naturally, it was great to be reunited with Mary and the family. Our older girl, Elisabeth, was established in college and struggling to survive the social chaos around her. Mary Ann, the youngest of the three children, was doing well academically and was about to enter high school. But I felt sorry for my son, John. Since childhood, he had hoped to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and follow me in a career as a professional officer. But during a brief leave the previous winter, when he and I had gone skiing in New England, he'd told me he'd decided against applying to West Point.

"Dad," he'd said, riding the lift on Mt. Snow, "I just don't think it's a good idea."

I didn't pursue the matter, half hoping he'd change his mind. Then, after a few days, I learned what had shaped his decision. For almost a year, John explained, teachers at his high school in suburban northern Virginia had viciously harassed the children of career servicemen serving in Vietnam, sometimes going so far as to label them "killers' kids." Although John certainly didn't share their sentiments, he had come to believe the military no longer had the "respect of the public," and anyone launching on a military career could expect to serve without the support of the American people. To an officer who had fought for his country in three wars, this was a bitter pill to swallow.

Before flying to Germany, I briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on SOG in the "Tank," their Pentagon conference center. This windowless, light-green room was the inner sanctum of the American military. The Tank was dominated by a highly polished round table with room for the four service chiefs and the chairman. There was a handsome oak rostrum at one end of the room, surrounded by an impressive array of audiovisual screens and projectors of various calibers that could display maps, electronic situation charts, and the amazingly detailed photographs from our new reconnaissance satellites.

Just before I began my briefing, General Earle Wheeler, the chairman, received an urgent summons to Secretary Clifford's office. I continued in his absence. The service chiefs were especially interested in enemy strength and infrastructure along the Trail in the southern Laotian panhandle. They asked about NVA reaction to SOG helicopter insertions of Recon Teams, and they wanted my opinion on the ability of SOG teams to capture valuable NVA officers on the Trail. I pointed out the Pentagon's previous refusal to authorize tranquilizer darts for this very purpose. Westy made it clear the matter would be reconsidered. While I had their attention, I suggested the Chiefs also overrule the bureaucrats on using Bitrex to sabotage NVA rice caches along the Trail. I couldn't be certain, but it seemed to me the Joint Chiefs were planning for a serious land operation to cut the Trail in Laos, should the next administration take that logical course.

On my way back from four-star territory on the D-ring, I ran into General Wheeler just returning from the Secretary's office. He had that expression of calm, unruffled precision senior officers usually adopted during times of crisis.

"Jack," he said, shaking hands, "as you know, Soviet forces just invaded Czechoslovakia. It looks like you're going from the frying pan into the fire."

Upon arrival in Germany, I had a chance to debrief Chuck MacCrone, who was the Chief of Delegation of the U.S. Parachute Team at the World Championship Parachute Meet in Graz, Austria. He told me that their Russian counterparts had begun the meet with their usual strained conviviality, but then had become quite "nervous." On the third day of the competition, the airport was closed to accommodate a Soviet military Ilyushin jet transport. The head of the Soviet delegation, General Lisov, commander of the Red Army's airborne forces, had boarded the transport for a mysterious errand. A few hours later, the plane returned. But MacCrone had snooped around and discovered that the transport never left Austrian airspace. Apparently, Lisov used the airborne command post for a secret briefing. Toward the end of the parachute meet, Soviet airborne troops seized the airfield at Prague and East German forces rolled into Czechoslovakia to crush the "socialism with a human face" that had had the audacity

to encourage non-Communist participation in the government of Alexander Dubcek.⁴

To give the devil his due, the Soviet invasion was preceded by a classic special-warfare operation. Red Army Spetsnaz troops commandeered a Polish airliner on a regular flight from Warsaw, then declared an emergency and requested immediate landing clearance at Prague. Instead of stopping at the terminal, the jetliner rolled up to the control tower, and the troops seized the building and called in the reinforcements on the Soviet military airlift.

By the time I took up my new assignment in 8th Division headquarters in Bad Kreuznach, the Soviet Red Army had almost ten divisions in Czechoslovakia and NATO forces along the frontier were on a high state of alert. Major General George L. Mabry, Jr., the division commander, was a short, wiry South Carolinian. He was a lively and dynamic speaker, but I sometimes had trouble understanding his strong southern accent. General Mabry was pure infantry. In World War II, he had earned an impressive array of combat decorations, including the Medal of Honor, which he won while commanding the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Infantry in the Huertgen Forest. Mabry stressed the need to keep up high unit standards, despite our critical shortage of experienced officers and NCOs.

Our primary area of responsibility was defending the Fulda Gap, about a hundred miles to the east, on the other side of the Rhine. The 8th Division was divided into three brigades, each with three to four maneuver battalions. The Pentomic organization with its impractical battle groups had been abandoned years before. And we were back to normal battalions, which seemed to be the most sensible structure for infantry troops. In turn, using battalions as building blocks, we could tailor our brigades as task forces for particular assignments. The division was well suited for such flexibility because our brigade in Mainz, commanded by my old friend from JACK, Colonel Skip Sadler, was both Airborne and mechanized, and the other brigades were mechanized infantry, one being tank heavy.

As Assistant Division Commander, Maneuver, I was responsible for close and direct supervision of these brigades' operations, training, and combat readiness. In addition, I was the designated commander for the NATO Airborne task force, which was tasked for emergency deployment anywhere in the NATO area of interest. We had the full gamut of mandatory Annual Training Tests and Operational Readiness Tests, which were the bread and butter of the American Army in NATO. Given the diverse structure of the division, this meant I had to become expert in tank operations and gunnery, mechanized infantry operations, as well as making sure Skip Sadler's brigade was current on the latest Airborne doctrine. I also supervised the division's Airborne school and noncommissioned officer academy.

The job was normally held by a brigadier general. But given the congressional limitations on the numbers of generals authorized for the Army, I would not actually wear my new rank until a vacancy occurred sometime during the next year.

Instead, all my official documents were signed "Colonel (P)," which indicated I'd been selected for promotion. I was kept so busy by all these responsibilities that I didn't have time to worry about whether I wore eagles or stars on my shoulders.

The division's shortage of officers and NCOs was common to most Army units outside Vietnam. When the decision had been made three years before to expand the Army by several hundred thousand men without activating the reserves or extending terms of service, a dangerous process was set in motion. The U.S. Military Academy, embattled ROTC programs, and the overextended Officer Candidate School (OCS) system simply couldn't keep up with the demand as more and more units were formed and deployed to Vietnam.

The reluctance of many well-qualified young Americans to serve in the Army exacerbated the shortage. As the war dragged on, anti-military sentiment grew among our best-educated youth. The college draft deferment fed this process. Graduate schools were jammed with young men earning master's degrees and Ph.D.s simply to maintain student deferment status.⁵ The need for company commanders in Vietnam siphoned off most skilled West Point and ROTC graduates. So in order to encourage junior officers to stay in the Army, first lieutenants were often promoted to captain after only two years in the service. But still the Army could not retain adequate numbers of junior officers. In retrospect, it's hard to blame these young men; they faced the prospect of repeated combat tours in Vietnam, interspersed with assignments at training bases where disgruntled draftees and the swelling anti-war movement poisoned the atmosphere.

After inspecting the brigades, I was shocked to discover that *every* company in the division was commanded by a first lieutenant, most with only two years' experience. The battalions were all commanded by seasoned professional lieutenant colonels, combat veterans of Vietnam and Korea. But the battalion staffs, normally composed of field-grade officers, were also made up of green first lieutenants. A similar situation prevailed among the NCOs, who when all is said and done, are the heart of any unit, especially the infantry. As with junior officers, career NCOs were leaving the Army in record numbers. The combat units in Vietnam also absorbed the majority of experienced infantry NCOs. So we had a number of draftee sergeant squad leaders, who were constantly rotating back to the States as their two-year terms of service ended.

During our first large training exercises that fall, I observed firsthand the

terrible level of inexperience among our officers and NCOs. Standard procedures such as organizing combat formations and establishing effective perimeter defense on night bivouacs—setting outposts, registering defensive artillery fires—were only vaguely familiar concepts to our young lieutenants. Visiting the units in the field, I saw harried battalion commanders tromping through the snowy woods to make sure individual machine-gun and anti-tank teams were correctly positioned, a task normally conducted by second lieutenants twenty-one years old and verified by captains and majors of the battalion staff. These battalion commanders worked sixteen hours a day back in the garrison; on field exercises, they simply went without sleep.⁶

I couldn't help but compare the plight of these battalion commanders with my own situation leading an infantry battalion in combat in Korea. There my company commanders had also been first lieutenants, but several had been West Pointers, and they all had had at least three years' experience before taking command. Equally important, my battalion staff officers were experienced pros; several were combat veteran reservists recalled for Korea. The mobilization of reserve and National Guard units during the Korean War had in fact guaranteed the quality of our commissioned officer and NCO corps. But we didn't have this critical support during the Vietnam War.

When General Westmoreland inspected the division that winter, he was also deeply troubled by the chronic shortage of officers and NCOs.

"General," I told him as we watched a company of APCs maneuvering across frozen rye fields, "commanding a battalion in Europe today is a far greater challenge than commanding one in Vietnam."

Westy cocked an eyebrow. Obviously he doubted my assertion.

"Sir," I continued, "the entire burden of command is on one man. These battalions are completely lacking qualified subordinates."

Westmoreland personally questioned several young lieutenant colonels and verified my statement. The specter of the "hollow" Army that had haunted the Pentagon in 1965 was now a reality.

We were just beginning to see organized assaults on troop morale by American anti-war activists manning off-post "coffee houses," where drugs and advice on desertion were available in equal quantities.⁷ But there were well-organized European "peace" movements urging our young GIs to question orders, to disrupt training, and to evade combat duty in Vietnam by deserting to Sweden, which offered unquestioning sanctuary to any American serviceman. Our military intelligence learned from German authorities that some of these local peace organizations were financed by the Soviets and East Germans, which should have come as no surprise.⁸ What was surprising, however, was how few of our troops caved in under this pressure. While I was with the 8th Division, only a handful of Americans deserted to

Sweden. And in each case, there were factors other than sincere anti-war feelings behind the action. Some soldiers and airmen had committed offenses and were fleeing military or local civilian prosecution. Others got involved with drugs or were convinced by their local girlfriends to leave.

But from my perspective as an officer who had managed psychological operations, I could see that the large, expensive Soviet effort was an overall failure. If anything, NATO was growing stronger as the Soviets brutally suppressed freedom movements in their East European satellite colonies.

Spain was not yet a member of the European alliance, but NATO leaders hoped the country could eventually be brought into the fold of democratic nations. It had been thirty years since the bitter Spanish Civil War. Dictator General Francisco Franco was an old man. Although there were American Navy and Air Force bases in Spain, our two armies had little contact. The year before, 8th Division troops had participated in a brief field training exercise, which had opened valuable contacts between the Spanish and American officers.

This year we planned to expand the exercise to include the 8th Division's Airborne brigade. From previous visits to Spain, I knew there were sparsely populated areas that would make excellent training grounds. I took a small advance party to Madrid in November to meet with the commanders of the Spanish army's parachute brigade. Their base was in a former medieval monastery near Torrejon. At first, the Spaniards were disappointed that the American delegation was led by a colonel; they'd made complex protocol arrangements for an exchange of greetings between generals. I did the best I could to assure them I was indeed the senior officer in charge of our Airborne brigade, and that I would soon be wearing a general's star.

Behind their aloof formality, I sensed feelings of inferiority. Compared to a modern Western army, the Spanish forces were poorly equipped and inadequately funded. On the nearby air base our big turboprop C-130 stood beside a row of ancient JU-52 tri-motor transports, relics of Franco's alliance with Nazi Germany. A squadron of equally venerable Messerschmidt 109s was parked across the runway. Many of the soldiers I saw at the base carried vintage bolt-action Mausers.⁹

During our initial discussions, it became clear the Spanish simply didn't have the budget or the equipment to participate in the exercise as equal partners with the NATO units. So I suggested a face-saving compromise. The Spanish forces could be deployed as lightly armed guerrillas, who would harass and attack the NATO airborne troops. This worked out quite well as far as the parachute brigade and the Army GHQ were concerned. The critical issue then was where the exercise would be run. GHQ informed me that I would have to work out the details of the location with the captain general who exercised control of all military activity in the area where I

thought the maneuver should be conducted. I went to call on him at his headquarters in Valencia. Luckily, the Captain General's aide had been an observer in my battle group in the 16th Infantry seven years before. He smoothed the way and we soon had plans for Pathfinder Express, the largest training operation to date of American troops in Spain.

I flew back to Germany, where I got down to work with Colonel Skip Sadler preparing the brigade for the exercise. The original contingency plans for the deployment of Airborne forces in the Mediterranean area called for the unit to stage through Italy, departing Germany on a piecemeal, non-tactical airlift, then loading up for the drop at an Italian air base. When the principal tactical transport aircraft was the small C-119, this was not unrealistic. But in the current situation using the longer-legged C-130s and with Soviet missiles aimed at all NATO airfields, an actual combat drop would not allow us the luxury of such a leisurely deployment. I shook things up by insisting the entire task force, with its vehicles and support equipment, be loaded aboard Air Force C-130s at Wiesbaden and fly directly to the drop zone near Albacete in southeastern Spain. We had to get special permission to overfly France, which had withdrawn from NATO's joint military command several years before. This was not received until the very last moment, reflecting an anti-American attitude of the French government which was typical of this period.

As a gesture of gratitude to the Spanish airborne commander, General Crespe del Castillo, I had him join my headquarters unit aboard our C-130 in Germany for the mass drop. He had never jumped from a C-130 before and was clearly impressed by the aircraft. We put on a good show, dropping my command jeep by parachute-extracted pallet, then jumping right behind it from the "tailgate" of the C-130. We landed near an olive grove almost on top of the jeep. Within minutes, I had a command post set up and was able to take over control from the exercise headquarters at Torrejon. We were now involved in a ground sweep of troops dropped across the valley. When an operation like this worked well, it was quite impressive.

After weeks of practically round-the-clock work, the training exercise went off perfectly. Our Airborne units were dropped in realistic fashion, escorted by U.S. Air Force fighters from bases in Germany and Spain. The Spanish parachute brigade made worthy adversaries as guerrillas. And all my unit commanders reported excellent training results.¹⁰

The Spanish paratroopers repaid our hospitality by letting us jump from their historic old JU-52. They even allowed me to jumpmaster the mixed load of U.S. and Spanish officers. The interior of the plane reminded me of the RAF Stirlings I'd trained in as a Jed. But the small oval door near the tail seemed too narrow to accommodate a jumper wearing the bulky American T-10 parachute and reserve. After a little trial and error, I figured

out a good exit position. The plane rumbled down the runway, sounding like a cement mixer with stripped gears. Takeoff speed was only about eighty knots and cruise was around seventy. From my narrow sling seat, I could look straight down to the olive groves through cracks between the rattling corrugated aluminum fuselage panels. Inside, I noticed Lieutenant Colonel Al Hall, my exercise deputy and division provost marshal, anxiously fingering his reserve as the old JU-52 bucked and staggered in some turbulence.

When it came time to lead the stick, I was a little nervous. Spotting the drop zone from an unfamiliar aircraft wasn't easy, and I sure as hell didn't want to sour all the good relations we'd cultivated by putting the Spanish airborne commander, who was to jump right after me, down on a village or into olive trees. But the jump went well, and the seven Americans who were lucky enough to make the jump had earned a unique entry in their parachute logbooks.

Pathfinder Express, however, was not without a nasty hitch. Several months after the exercise had been declared an outstanding success, two American reporters came to Europe from Washington and began interviewing our troops and the Spanish paratroopers, trying to uncover the sinister *real* purpose behind the exercise. When they struck a dry well with the Airborne and those who planned and conducted the exercise, they shifted to our air base at Maron, where they found a talkative officer (who didn't know much about the exercise at all). They worded their questions in such a way as to imply that Pathfinder Express was actually a rehearsal for an American intervention to aid Franco in suppressing a rebellion. They cited as proof the fact that the exercise involved suppressing "guerrillas." This provoked an unnecessary, time-consuming controversy within NATO.

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PRESIDENT Nixon's plan to end the war turned out to be "Vietnamization," the long-term expansion and support of South Vietnamese forces until they supposedly would be strong enough to face the NVA alone. The gradual reduction of American troops in Vietnam would accompany this buildup. And the sporadic Paris peace negotiations had now been expanded to include the government of South Vietnam and representatives of the Vietcong's ostensibly independent National Liberation Front. For the officers of my generation who had commanded troops in combat during the frustrating cease-fire negotiations in Korea, this policy seemed doomed to failure. For the Army's young officers and draftees, the policy offered the prospect of fighting in a war that the government had no intention of winning.

I took the time to personally interview every new officer assigned to the division. For me, these interviews were quite revealing of the social corrosion

caused by the protracted war of attrition in Vietnam and our bankrupt strategy. Most of the young lieutenants had become officers almost by accident. They seemed to lack a sense of direction in their lives. It was a time of limbo, of waiting for the war to be over. Several of these new Infantry lieutenants had spent four or more years in college majoring in subjects like animal husbandry or sociology, simply to keep up their student deferments. Now, however, they found themselves dressed in the starched fatigues of an Infantry second lieutenant. For many, the situation was confusing, even bizarre.

I sensed that some of them had the makings of good professional officers and that, with a little encouragement, they might stay in the Army. An officer had to have two fundamentally important traits, I told them: integrity and courage, both physical and moral. If an officer lacked those qualities, no amount of careful planning or help from influential connections would bring him a successful career. Don't worry about your "career," I said. Solve the Army's problems and your career will take care of itself. If they felt at all inclined to become professional officers, they should "follow the sound of the cannon," go to Vietnam, lead men in battle, and, if they survived, then decide if they had a future in the Army.

For most of them this was unusual advice. Their college professors had often encouraged them to avoid hard decisions. I advised them to stand up and be counted, to test their individual mettle. Not surprisingly, some of these young officers took my advice and decided to follow the profession of arms.

That fall, as I was still busy preparing the division for the annual winter training exercises, I received a real shock: immediate orders assigning me to Fort Hood, Texas, to be Director of Plans and Evaluation for the secret new Mobile Army Sensor Systems Test Evaluation and Review, Project MASSTER. I made a few phone calls and discovered that, once again, my unofficial godfather, Lieutenant General Bill Depuy, then the assistant to the Vice Chief of Staff, had personally recommended me for this job. The project's commander was Major General Jack Norton, who had replaced Harry Kinnard as commanding general of the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam.

Professional officers become accustomed to sudden disruptions, but this unexpected move was especially upsetting for the family. I'd more or less been promised two uninterrupted years in Europe after thirty straight months in Vietnam. The move would be rough on Mary, who had finally gotten our quarters in Bad Kreuznach comfortably organized. And two of our children, Elisabeth and John, were enrolled in German universities. Moving back to the States meant leaving them in Europe for the rest of the academic year.

On the professional side, the MASSTER job was a real challenge. Once more, I was ordered to staff, organize, and supervise the rapid expansion of a brand-new priority project. I again faced the prospect of thankless months of sixty- and seventy-hour weeks.

Even though Robert McNamara and his high-technology zealots were long gone from the Pentagon, his strategy of interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail through air power alone was still intact. And it was believed that the only effective way to implement this strategy was through a massive use of sensors. So the Defense Department had pulled out the stops, wallpapering American industry and academic research labs with "Requests for Proposal" for innovative sensor technology. The Army realized that new sensor systems might not be the most effective way to find the enemy on the Trail, but many senior officers also realized that electronic sensors could play a real role on the modern battlefield. More to the point, these sensors could help protect American firebases in Vietnam, keeping casualties down while we slowly withdrew our combat forces and shifted our resources to Vietnamization.

Jack Norton was a big, cigar-smoking paratrooper with extensive combat experience in three wars. His dramatic physical presence often obscured his lively intelligence and deep tactical expertise.

We set up shop at West Fort Hood, an isolated former Strategic Air Command base in the arid juniper scrub of central Texas. The Fort Hood reservation had been opened during World War II as a camp to train newly developed tank destroyer units, and had been an Armor post ever since. The area was supposedly too dry for cattle, but supported marginal goat ranching. To the GIs and Army brats stranded in this wasteland, the local people were known as "goat ropers."

I knew from my experience in the Pentagon that you could get more from a staff on a new project if you imposed a set of rigorous but not impossible deadlines and requirements, then subdivided the goals and deadlines into much smaller milestones. This process infused a sense of urgency that kept people working without overpowering them with impossibly complex tasks. Once we had our people together, I met with our chief scientist, a brilliant young physicist, Dr. Phil Dickenson. His job was to choose candidate technology for our initial field tests. My job was to take these gadgets and thoroughly test them using individual soldiers and units to make sure the equipment not only worked, but, just as important, that it was "soldier proof."

I told Phil Dickenson I wanted to begin extensive material and troop tests within a hundred days. He wasn't sure we could pull this off, but I told him to concentrate on the science side and I would organize the Army to support him. Jack Norton made it clear that the Army gave this project high priority.

In Indochina, the Air Force had finally deployed effective interdiction gunships along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The AC-130 Spectre was the armed variant of the workhorse Hercules turboprop transport. The Spectre carried massive side-firing ordnance: 7.62mm mini-guns, 20mm Vulcan automatic cannons, and even a long-barreled 105mm howitzer that could knock out a truck or a tank day or night with precisely aimed high-explosive shells. But more sensitive ground sensors were needed to optimize the performance of these gunships. And such sensor technology would also be put to good use by our ground troops in Vietnam.

Our first priority was to develop the Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Night Observation (STANO) system. Industrial and university labs had presented the Army with a bewildering selection of competitive technology. We had to quickly evaluate these offerings, build practical prototypes, then put them to field tests that would hopefully replicate conditions in Indochina.¹¹

I learned that scientific researchers are inveterate tinkerers, many with perfectionist qualities. If left to themselves, they'd still be fine-tuning their gadgets ten years later. But the Army needed effective combat systems, not brilliant inventions. There was a natural horizontal division between scientists on the one hand and soldiers on the other. I saw that the best way to combat this was to establish four functionally oriented directorates, each of which would combine science staff and Army personnel. This system worked well, but we still faced the challenge of adapting new technology to practical hardware.

The problem of night surveillance, for example, could be approached from many directions. Radar had long been used to detect aircraft and ships. We now had exotic new radar technology, which tuned the search beam with computer-assisted electronics to such precision that a battlefield radar aboard a helicopter or at a ground site sweeping a valley could detect troops moving along a hidden trail many kilometers away. But the first such system we were offered was too cumbersome for practical use. So we set about reducing the radar size on a crash program basis.

Another approach to surveillance was through sophisticated infrared equipment. Warm-blooded creatures such as soldiers or water buffalo radiated heat. So did truck engines and field kitchens. With the right equipment this heat could be detected day or night, even through the forest canopy. One of our sections worked around the clock on this approach. They began with clumsy gear that worked well on a laboratory bench, but was too fragile for the field. Some of it required precisely calibrated optics chilled with liquid nitrogen to detect distant ambient heat. It was difficult to imagine such equipment operating on a jungle mountaintop in the central highlands. But once more, the process of assembling the right combination of scientific,

technical, and military staff and focusing them on the objective paid dividends. Practical infrared target acquisition equipment was one of our first effective combat systems.

An interesting sidelight to testing this infrared equipment was the discovery of several illegal stills in the woods of east Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Helicopters equipped with the new sensors picked up unusual heat sources in isolated forests. On close investigation, these turned out to be moonshine operations. I had my aviators plot the exact locations, then turned the information over to Fort Hood's provost marshal for transmission to federal authorities. But the word quickly came back from the judge advocate's office that we couldn't transmit this evidence to civilians. The posse comitatus laws prohibited the military from assisting in civil law enforcement. It would be years before American immigration and drug enforcement officials had access to the sensor technology we developed at considerable cost to the taxpayer.

Once the project was rolling, we encountered a shortage of skilled technical personnel, especially in applied physics and advanced electrical engineering. This was surprising because there was a deep employment slump just then in aerospace companies, which had been working full bore on the Apollo moon program and defense contracts from the Vietnam buildup. Phil Dickenson told me there was no actual shortage of skilled people, but they apparently preferred to live on unemployment compensation in northern California and Florida rather than come to the barrens of central Texas. But I knew there were plenty of young draftee enlisted men with advanced science degrees, even physics doctorates, who had finally exhausted their student deferments and were now serving as clerks and radio technicians. I put out a dragnet through the Army personnel bureaucracy and soon was able to staff our technical directorates with PFC scientists and engineers.

Within a few months, we had the 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion set up as one of the Army's first combat Electronic Warfare Intelligence units to field-test our new equipment. This battalion had several former Special Forces officers and NCOs with extensive Vietnam experience, some of whom had served on cross-border operations. Their practical, hands-on approach was invaluable as we modified our prototypes.

And practicality was certainly needed. One of our proposed sensors, for example, was a "people sniffer" based on the principle that the Mexican bedbug had the unusual ability of sensing his food source, *Homo sapiens*, as far as a kilometer away and crawling in that direction. This little biological homing device had promise, but eventually proved impossible to adapt to practical hardware. Another, similar biotechnology involved the photoplankton found in seawater, which produced brilliant phosphorescence when agitated by the passage of a large sea creature. The idea here was to somehow

place sealed containers with these plankton along enemy infiltration routes; the plankton would phosphoresce when enemy vehicles or troops disturbed the container. Photo-sensitive detectors would activate an alarm circuit and broadcast a warning.

This kind of exotic technology delighted the scientists, but never went very far. However, the micro-miniaturized automated electronics required for automated sensor circuits advanced with amazing speed. By early spring of 1970, we had a variety of sensors ready for deployment along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in South Vietnam. I traveled to Indochina to see firsthand how the equipment was being used. To my utter amazement, the rudimentary sonobuoy network along the Trail had grown inexorably in size and complexity. The Task Force Alpha monitoring center at Nakhon Phanom air base in Thailand, bordering the Laotian panhandle, was housed in a huge prefab steel building almost as big as MACV headquarters near Saigon. The windowless structure was air-conditioned to a frigid chill to protect the banks of big IBM computers from the dusty heat of Thailand. One wall was taken up with electronic visual displays reminiscent of the North American Air Defense Command Center in Colorado. As sensor nets along the Trail automatically responded, their coded signals were captured by orbiting C-130s, which were jammed with computers and radio-relay equipment. Sensors damaged in air attacks or knocked out by the enemy were replaced by SOG teams or airdropped. This approach to interdiction was still far inferior to ground operations, but, with the new gunships, the NVA was finally beginning to pay an unacceptable price to move men and matériel south.

Despite this impressive technological effort, the NVA supply line remained intact. As I studied the reports of Recon Teams at the local SOG detachment, I became more convinced than ever that our failure to attack the enemy on the ground in "neutral" Laos back in 1965 had doomed our overall military effort in Indochina. The North Vietnamese would be a threat to South Vietnam as long as they could move troops and supplies down the Trail through Laos.¹²

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I THEN returned to the combat zone in Vietnam to inspect one of Project MASSTER's new Fire Support Surveillance Bases (FSSB). One base I visited was on a hilltop in southern I Corps. It had a clear view across two scrub-jungle valleys that were known NVA attack routes from the mountains to the coast. The base was connected to sensor networks implanted along these enemy approach routes in the surrounding jungle. Strings of hidden seismic, acoustic, and magnetic sensors at precisely registered locations alerted base operators to NVA troop movements. ARVN intelligence per-

sonnel verified through the acoustic channel that the voices heard were enemy soldiers. The NVA columns could then be tracked with the new sensitive battlefield radar and positively identified even on the darkest monsoon night with our new infrared and light-amplification night-vision systems.

In the middle of the hot, drizzly night I spent at the base, I stood on a squat observation tower of shrapnel-pocked timbers, watching the young GI at his big Night Observation Device (NOD). This was a composite instrument we'd perfected at Fort Hood. The NOD combined high-powered Navy gunnery binoculars with electronic light-amplification equipment and a precise laser range finder. The sensor network had alerted us to suspected enemy movement, three kilometers to the northwest, up a dark valley. The young soldier patiently swung the NOD on its mount, adjusted several focus knobs, then turned toward me.

"We got 'em, sir," he whispered. "Take a look."

I crouched at the binocular eyepieces. There in chalky green detail, like phantom figures on a badly tuned television, I saw a fully equipped NVA platoon, hiking in a well-dispersed column along a trail through low cane grass. An enemy platoon leader was shadowed by his radio operator, and NVA machine gunners led their ammo bearers. The formation was straight out of a North Vietnamese field manual.

The GI slid in beside me and took over the instrument. With an unseen burst, the laser range finder pinpointed the enemy column. We now had the *exact* range and azimuth. The fire-control computer at a nearby American artillery base instantly solved the necessary trigonometry equation. The fire mission was on its way. This was a Fire-for-Effect, Variable-Time (VT) barrage. The sensor system and NOD allowed the artilleryman to fire without preliminary aiming rounds that always drove the enemy to cover.

"Watch this, sir," the soldier said, turning over the NOD to me.

I gazed at the enemy column, still trudging through the cane grass up the valley. Then the familiar freight-car rumble of howitzer rounds passed overhead. The NVA soldiers heard the incoming shells. They looked up in unison, then began diving for cover. But it was too late. The VT rounds exploded with overlapping incandescent orange fire. When the smoke cleared, the ground was littered with enemy dead. Five minutes later, our observation helicopter reported no NVA survivors. Forty enemy troops had been killed without risking a single American life. I had the grim satisfaction of knowing our work at Fort Hood was paying off on the battlefield.¹³

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UNFORTUNATELY, managing such technology in a combat zone was too complex for our ARVN allies. As I learned from friends at MACV, Vietnamization—the process of expanding and upgrading the ARVN so that they

could take over the fight as American troops progressively withdrew—was making slow, uneven progress at best. Advanced American equipment and adequate supplies of munitions were finally available to the new ARVN units. And the new crop of American advisers to these units included savvy young professional officers and NCOs with valuable experience fighting—and defeating—the NVA. As I flew back to the States, however, I knew American combat units would be needed in Vietnam for at least two more years. And I had serious doubts that the country had the political or moral will to sustain this effort.

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ONE brutal incident more than any other in the long war helped sour the American public on Vietnam. The event became known as the My Lai massacre. On March 16, 1968, a battalion-size task force of the Army's Americal Division conducted a sweep through the sprawling coastal village of Son My, searching for the 48th Vietcong Local Force Battalion.

Company C, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, was typical of the brigade, poorly trained draftee soldiers led by inexperienced nonprofessional officers. The company commander was Captain Ernest L. Medina, a former sergeant in his early thirties, who had been among the thousands of NCOs pushed through training courses and commissioned following the decision to deploy units to Vietnam without a reserve call-up or extension of terms of service.

The commander of his 1st Platoon, Second Lieutenant William L. Calley, was almost a parody of the weak, unqualified junior officer. Calley had to be recycled through Officer Candidate School because of ineptitude. The fact that he commanded a rifle platoon of the U.S. Army in 1968 was tragic proof that our officer corps had become seriously debased, just as General Johnson and I had feared in July 1965.¹⁴

Lieutenant Colonel Frank Barker, the task force commander, had told his company commanders that most of the population of Son My village were either "VC or VC sympathizers."¹⁵

Calley's platoon of approximately thirty men led the sweep through the hamlet designated My Lai 4 on the maps and known as "Pinkville" to the troops. His men immediately opened fire on old men, women, and children. Thatched huts were set ablaze, pigs and water buffalo slaughtered. The villagers not immediately killed were rounded up into groups, taken to ditches on the edge of the hamlet, and machine-gunned. When one of the platoon machine gunners refused to shoot, Calley seized the weapon and fired into a crowd of defenseless women and children himself. At least 400 Vietnamese civilians, almost all old men, women, and children, had been murdered.¹⁶

In my opinion, the murders at My Lai were worse than the SS slaughter

at Oradour-sur-Glane. Such bestiality was to be expected from thoroughly indoctrinated Nazi troops, who committed hundreds of similar massacres in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. But, having served in three wars with American infantrymen, I knew the murder of unarmed women and children, no matter how sympathetic they might have been to the enemy, was a gross aberration. In World War II and in Korea I'd seen GIs risk their lives to spare civilians. And in Vietnam most American units often took avoidable casualties by adhering to strict rules of engagement. But the stigma of My Lai grew to unjustly taint the record of the entire American Army in Vietnam. My Lai became a metaphor for the supposed uncontrolled brutality of America's military.¹⁷

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THE shame of the My Lai massacre was only one factor eroding Army morale as the Vietnam War dragged on with little serious prospect for victory. By mid-1970, the radical counterculture and the mainstream anti-war movement had coalesced to foster a pervasive national anti-military mood. Soldiers on passes were taunted and heckled by their peers. The retention rate of skilled personnel was at an all-time low. I was chief of staff of a much expanded Project MASSTER now, and decided to do what I could to improve the troops' confidence and spirits by instilling pride. From my experience with the 16th Infantry in Germany, I knew sport parachuting brought the kind of military esprit de corps I wanted to see in the men.

But there was a problem. An earlier attempt to set up a sport parachuting club at Fort Hood was a disaster. The clubhouse, replete with bar, had been on the main post, right next to the dependents' Teen Club. The mix of skydivers, beer, and teenage girls meant trouble. Within a few months, several girls were pregnant and the club was shut down by the MPs. However, Fort Hood was a sprawling post, with plenty of room for a clubhouse and competitive drop zone away from the built-up areas.

One day that spring I called in Major Jim Hanke, operations officer for the 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion. Hanke was a former Special Forces officer who had served on Project Delta, the original cross-border Recon Teams in Laos that had evolved into SOG's Prairie Fire. He was a consummate parachutist, having trained one of the Green Berets' first high altitude-low opening (HALO) Airborne detachments.

"Hanke," I told him, "this post needs a skydiving club, and you're going to start it."

Like many Green Berets with extensive combat experience, Hanke thought for himself and was not a ticket-punching yes-man. "Sir," he said, considering my order, "I'll need authorization for a building, an FAA certification . . ."

"Just get the job done," I told him. Special Forces officers were known for their innovative skills.

"What kind of timing did you have in mind, sir?"

"Hanke," I said, in my best gruff-general manner, "that club *will* be operational in thirty days."

On receiving such instructions from a brigadier, most majors would salute smartly and depart. Not Hanke.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "I only have one condition."

"Condition?"

"Yes, sir," he continued. "The club will have its first jump within thirty days." He suppressed a grin. "And you will be the first club member to jump."

He had me there. And he also had a valid point. With a general officer involved in the project, Hanke could cut through the bureaucratic tangle. I nodded, trying hard not to smile myself. "Hanke, get the hell out of here."

He snapped off a crisp salute and was gone.

On a warm spring Sunday twenty-six days later, I sat in the open door of a Huey 4,500 feet above the mesquite and juniper of our new drop zone. Hanke, the first jumpmaster of the Fort Hood Sport Parachute Club, crouched beside me.

"Go!" he shouted above the thump of the rotors.

I slid forward and dropped into the dazzling sunlight, arched, then reached a stable position in the hot wind, falling parallel to the ground. I opened a little above 2,500 feet to get a nice ride down and managed to pull off a respectable landing within the cleared sandy oval of the drop zone.

By that fall, club membership had grown to several hundred. Fort Hood skydivers now jumped at almost every parade and local sporting event, often spiraling down, trailing red, white, and blue smoke, to land on the fifty-yard line at football stadiums. The American military in general might not have been held in very high esteem in some parts of Texas at that time, but our skydivers were a popular act in great demand.

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WE had a major test of Project MASSTER technology scheduled at Fort Hood for early 1971, using the Air Cavalry Combat Brigade's helicopters as platforms for a variety of our new STANO devices. As I laid down the requirements for this exercise, I encountered a familiar, subtle resistance from the Army aviators involved. Helicopter men had a natural reluctance to taking orders from non-helicopter pilots. For this reason, officers like Jack Norton were all helicopter-qualified. I realized that my future in the Army would probably involve Air Mobile troops and without being a qualified helicopter pilot, I would be the equivalent of a "straight-leg" to the Airborne.

So I bit the bullet and volunteered for helicopter flight school that fall. I was accepted into a special general officers' flight course offered at the Army Aviation School at Fort Rucker, Alabama. The only other student in my section was Major General Edward M. "Flywheel" Flanagan, Jr., the commander of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. I'd known Fly Flanagan since Korea, where he was the artillery commander of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. In Vietnam, he was the senior training adviser to the ARVN. Like me, Flanagan had decided the only way to gain the respect of the Air Mobile people was to become a helicopter pilot himself.

Going back to school at age fifty is never easy. Going to helicopter ground and flight school at that age is a lesson in humility and diligence. I'd had some flying experience in light civilian aircraft during World War II. But learning how to fly a Piper Cub and UH-1 Huey helicopter was an entirely different matter.

A fixed-wing aircraft, be it a single-engine Cessna or a Boeing jet, was designed for lift; left to itself it will glide. Fixed-wing planes have inherent aerodynamic stability; it is often said that they *want* to fly. Helicopters, on the other hand, are rotary-wing. They have as much inherent lift as a cinder block. There also is absolutely nothing inherently stable in their design. The pilot has to force a helicopter to fly. Left to itself, even for a moment, it will become unstable and crash.

Flying a light plane doesn't require much more hand-eye coordination than driving a car. You set the throttle and propeller pitch, then move the control yoke with your hands and rudder pedals with your feet. Flying a helicopter requires simultaneously manipulating two hand controls—one of which has two functions—as well as foot pedals. The cyclic control stick in your right hand tilts the rotor disk, which governs flight direction. The collective throttle, rotor-pitch control in your left hand governs engine rpm and airspeed. Your feet control movements of the tail rotor, which acts like a rudder. Each control "input" has to be smoothly integrated with the others. If not, the helicopter becomes unstable, bucking and twisting dangerously.

Someone once said that flying a helicopter was much harder than simultaneously patting your head and rubbing your belly. After four weeks of ground school and a few days in the right-hand seat of a Huey cockpit, I learned that flying a helicopter actually wasn't harder than the head-patting, belly-rubbing exercise—providing you could do it while riding a unicycle on a tightwire.

Fly Flanagan and I also learned that there was a good reason most Army helicopter pilot trainees were nineteen- and twenty-year-old warrant officers. Manual and visual dexterity are supposedly optimal at that age. I can attest they are not at age fifty.¹⁸

But we persevered.

The week before Christmas, 1970, I had amassed a total of sixty-seven hours of flight time in Hueys. And to my instructors' collective relief, I had survived a required solo flight. Back at Fort Hood, my instruction continued on a part-time basis. The 55th Aviation Battalion (Combat) was full of experienced Vietnam veteran gunship, troop carrier ("slick"), and medevac pilots. The battalion assigned me a young chief warrant officer with two Vietnam tours behind him. With his guidance, I learned to actually *fly* the Huey.

From my instructor's point of view, Fort Hood's fine, dry weather was a handicap. He wanted low overcast and thunderstorms, which would offer more realistic conditions. So on many of our flights we took off from Fort Hood and flew toward bad weather up around Dallas or down toward the Gulf. Once in the clouds and turbulence, he would direct me along a complex flight plan. This required absolute, white-knuckle concentration. Losing visual orientation—vertigo—was every helicopter pilot's nightmare. One minute you could be flying along straight and level, the next you might be slipping upside down into fatal instability.

"Sir," my instructor repeated on every flight, "you can't rely on instinct. You've got to learn to trust those dials because, in the soup, they're all you've got."

In mid-April 1971, I was able to pin on my Army Aviator's wings. To me they were as hard earned as any combat decoration.

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IN THE summer of 1971, the Army was preparing to leave Indochina, and the White House ordered the Defense Department to examine the shape of the post-Vietnam military.

Three major cross-border ground operations (two in Cambodia and one on the Laotian panhandle) had battered enemy sanctuaries. The NVA, however, had quickly recouped and reinforced their logistical bases in Laos, actually moving Soviet SAM missiles down the Trail to discourage further ARVN spoiling attacks.¹⁹ But the tactic wasn't even necessary. The high casualty rate and the political cost of these "invasions" precluded similar operations. The U.S. Congress went so far as to pass legislation forbidding American ground forces from fighting in Cambodia or Laos.²⁰ So we were locked into Vietnamization as our sole strategy.

The repercussions of this for the Army meant a drastically smaller peacetime service within eighteen months. The White House also envisioned the new military as an all-volunteer force, a political expedient to disarm the controversial issue of the draft before the 1972 election.²¹

I became enmeshed in this process when I was ordered to the Pentagon to become the Director for Plans, Studies, and Budget in the Office of the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER). My boss was Lieutenant General Walter T. "Dutch" Kerwin, who'd been my last housemate in Saigon.

Dutch Kerwin gave me a familiar task: organizing yet another new Army staff to meet an unusual challenge. The Vietnam emergency had come along just as the Army was hoping to rationalize its personnel system so that recruitment and training of regular NCOs and officers could be tailored to fit planned future needs, as detailed in our Force Development Plan. Now that the worst of the emergency was behind us, General Kerwin wanted me to develop a rational plan that would match our skilled manpower pool with the needs of a leaner—and hopefully meaner—volunteer Army.

I enjoyed the challenge. But I was not sure a volunteer Army would work. At several meetings with Generals Kerwin and Westmoreland I laid out my apprehensions in detail. I knew the Army of the future would need skilled technicians, capable of manning computerized battlefield equipment. But given the all-pervasive anti-military mood among young people, as well as the robust and prosperous civilian economy, I was afraid the Army would not be able to attract volunteers with the education level and intelligence of our present draftees. The draftee scientists I had used so effectively at Project MASSTER were fresh in my mind. I warned that the Army, which couldn't offer as much attractive technical training as the Air Force or the Navy, would be a job of last resort.

Westmoreland listened patiently to my arguments, then replied. "Well, Jack," he said, "I raised these same issues with the President. He told me, 'Westy, you're either going to have an all-volunteer Army or no Army at all.'"

The message couldn't have been any clearer.²²

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BEFORE I had a chance to influence the shape of the officer corps of this new Army, I was shifted to yet another assignment.

The drug problem in the military, particularly among our troops in Vietnam, had reached crisis proportions.²³ Cheap, very pure heroin was flooding South Vietnam, and spilling over to our bases in Thailand and the Philippines. Increasing numbers of young servicemen in Indochina were becoming addicted to heroin and running afoul of the military justice system. And if they weren't picked up in Asia, some of these young men were being discharged back in the States with heroin habits.

The White House decided that major action was required. Whereas drug

use had traditionally been a matter for military justice authorities, with each service making its own policy, President Nixon now required the Defense Department to develop a single comprehensive policy to fight drug and alcohol abuse throughout the military on a global basis. Defense Secretary Mel Laird created the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Drug and Alcohol Abuse) in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health and Environment). The new man would be responsible for creating and implementing the military's drug-abuse policy.

General Westmoreland and the other service chiefs were obliged to send the names of two general or flag-rank officers to Dr. Richard S. Wilbur, the Assistant Secretary for Health and Environment. My name was one of the Army's two, the other being Brigadier General Bob Gard, a specialist in drug-abuse prevention. Westy told me Gard was the prime candidate for the job and that I probably would be able to continue with my work for the DCSPER. Things didn't work out that way. In September, I was introduced to the public at a Pentagon press conference as the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Drug and Alcohol Abuse). Since the job title was a mouthful that didn't easily compress to a Pentagonese acronym, I became known as the general in charge of "Drugs and Drunks."

My new assignment was in the Pentagon's inner sanctum, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Our section was on the E-ring, on the south side of the building. We even had a window. But all I could see were the concrete walls and windows of the D-ring. Dr. Richard Wilbur was a talented physician and skilled administrator. He was similar in age to McNamara's whiz kids, but Dick Wilbur had considerable practical experience as opposed to academic expertise. A grandson of the founder of the Stanford Medical School, Wilbur had been a Navy flight surgeon and had run the California State Medical Society before Nixon brought him to Washington. He made it clear from the outset he wanted a new drug policy that would be both humane and conducive to restoring military discipline.

As I found out, combining humane treatment and discipline was not easy.

Before I could develop a new policy, I had to have a clear idea of the scope and nature of the drug problem. I had some definite ideas about alcohol abuse and treatment in the armed services, but for the moment the heroin situation took priority.

A group of Army generals had just returned from Indochina after carefully analyzing the military drug problem there. Heroin as pure as 95 percent was flowing from the Golden Triangle region of the Burma-China border, much of it under the control of the Communist Chinese. This heroin was very effectively marketed in South Vietnam, where local dealers cultivated combat GIs on in-country R&R and soldiers in the sprawling base areas. The heroin was sold in small plastic vials containing about a gram of white

powder. At one dollar a vial, the drug was cheaper than black-market stateside beer in the bars and massage parlors around our bases.

The unusual purity of the heroin made it easy to use. In the States, heroin was cut many times over with powdered milk or sugar and had to be injected by needle to produce a high. GIs in Vietnam could lace a cigarette or a marijuana joint with heroin or simply snort the drug. Because they did not have to use needles, drug overdoses were not a problem. But widespread use certainly was.

I was able to quickly dispel one of the pervasive myths about GI heroin use, a myth being advanced by the anti-war left. They charged that our GIs were driven to use heroin by the brutal nature of their service in Vietnam, where, supposedly, massacres like that in My Lai were commonplace. A careful survey of GI drug users in the Far East, however, revealed that 91 percent of the men on heroin had used other drugs, usually marijuana and hallucinogens, before they were old enough to enter the service. They were now using heroin because of its cheap price and ready availability. One GI undergoing treatment wrote on his survey questionnaire: "At that price, I couldn't afford *not* to use it."

An initial drug-testing survey in Vietnam using random urinalysis as well as the mandatory pre-departure drug urinalysis revealed some fascinating data. There were proportionally far fewer men testing positive for heroin on their departure dates than among similar groups of GIs with most of their tours still to serve. This could only mean one thing: that men who had been "addicted" to heroin for many months had somehow been able to kick the habit in order to come up clean to climb on board the Freedom Bird for home.

I kept this fact in mind as I toured America's leading civilian and Veterans Administration drug treatment centers and met with our nationally recognized addiction experts. In Atlanta, I conferred with Dr. Peter Bourne, a psychiatrist who was firmly convinced that heroin addiction was an unsolvable medical problem. His approach certainly did not have much to offer the military. Dr. Bourne mentioned that he sometimes had his clients substitute marijuana for heroin.

"General," the Doctor told me gravely, "if we can just get these people off heroin and back onto marijuana, that's all we can ask for."

(A few years later, I wasn't surprised to learn that Dr. Bourne, an official in the Carter White House, had been disciplined for writing illegal prescriptions for his colleagues.)

A treatment center I visited in New York City was run by a tougher-minded psychiatrist, Dr. Judianne Densen-Gerber, wife of the Manhattan coroner. She was a large, dynamic woman with positive views. Her philosophy was the opposite of Dr. Bourne's. She felt drug addiction was nurtured

by a permissive, unstructured environment. Many young people, she said, had been encouraged to seek undisciplined gratification. They had low self-esteem, and drugs or alcohol gave them an excuse for dropping out of competitive society.

"You've got a real advantage in the military, General Singlaub," she told me. "In the armed services you can structure environment and insist on discipline. We can't do it as well in civil life."

But she certainly did better than Dr. Bourne and the others who followed his permissive approach. In treatment programs like his, methadone was readily available and its dosage was poorly controlled. Dr. Densen-Gerber's program administered methadone sparingly, under tight control, and, most important, as a device to instill structure and discipline in the addict's life.

Before proposing the Pentagon's new drug policy, I conferred closely with Dr. Jerome Jaffe in the White House. He was the President's Special Action Officer for Drug Abuse Prevention. Jaffe was a hard-working, dedicated professional, an expert on heroin addiction, who had established effective treatment programs in Chicago. He encouraged my effort to create a world-wide Defense Department drug-testing and treatment program.

With this high-level support, we got down to work on a practical policy. The first priority was a more effective testing and treatment program in Vietnam. Up to that point, the mandatory pre-departure urinalysis had been unevenly conducted, and men testing positive were treated arbitrarily. Some were court-martialed, while others were given a pep talk and sent home. A few were offered effective treatment. We first worked with civilian laboratories to improve the accuracy and speed of our field test units. Next, the pre-departure urinalysis was standardized in Vietnam, eliminating loopholes that had allowed some men to evade the system.

In Saigon, I conferred with an energetic young Regular Army psychiatrist, a Medical Corps lieutenant colonel. He was convinced that withdrawal from heroin addiction was more a psychological problem than a physical ordeal. To test his theory, the doctor proposed an unorthodox experiment, which, given the exigencies of the heroin problem in Vietnam, I approved.

We met with the staff of the Cam Rahn Bay drug treatment center to prepare them for this experiment. Patients testing positive for heroin would be carefully coached through their detoxification. All the doctors, nurses, and medical orderlies involved were to be warm and supportive—above all, positive in their attitude toward heroin withdrawal. The GIs were counseled that kicking a Vietnamese heroin habit was not difficult because the drug was not adulterated with "impurities," as was stateside heroin. The overall mood of the Center was upbeat, and patients were encouraged to talk about their drug-free futures in America.

With this system in place, the average patient at Cam Rahn Bay spent

less than a month at the Center. And very few needed medications to ease their withdrawal.

We used a different process at the other drug treatment center located in the military stockade compound at Long Binh, a grim place known to GIs as the "LBJ," the Long Binh Jail. There, the staff allowed all the usual rumors about the nightmare of heroin withdrawal to circulate through the ward. Some men were so convinced they would experience harsh withdrawal symptoms that they actually writhed on the floor of the ward.

The staff at the LBJ center now completed our two-part experiment. They divided their patients into three groups, and informed them they would be given one of three effective anti-withdrawal treatments. The first group was treated with Valium during a three-week period. At the end of treatment, 70 percent reported the drug had eased their withdrawal. The second group was given a stronger tranquilizer. After three weeks, 80 percent reported they had needed the medication during their withdrawal. The third group was administered intramuscular injections of distilled water, which, although the needle certainly looked impressive and the injections were painful, had no direct medical effect. A startling 90 percent of this group reported that they definitely could not have survived withdrawal without the placebo "medication."

At one of the urinalysis centers in Saigon, a humorist had tacked up the following sign on the latrine door: "The Pee House of the August Moon."

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ONCE I was satisfied that the testing and treatment program in Vietnam was up and running, I turned my efforts to the education side of the drug problem. I was shocked to discover that most of the drug users in the service had begun experimenting *before* high school. Clearly we had a long way to go. After visiting several innovative drug education programs at schools around the country, I got permission to begin similar programs in all Department of Defense schools, both in the States and overseas. The key, I learned at an especially effective anti-drug school program in Phoenix called "Dope Stop," was to use older students, not authority figures like policemen or teachers, as role models to go into the lower grades and work with the younger kids. And I also discovered that scare tactics and abstract medical or psychological theory had little impact on these kids. They needed to learn practical techniques for combating the relentless peer pressure toward drug use.²⁴

In Vietnam, all members of the service, from four-star general to private, had to be tested before departing the country. By July 1, 1972, we were ready to implement a universal drug-testing and treatment policy throughout

the armed services. Following the lead of both Dr. Wilbur and Dr. Jaffe, I stressed to my staff and to the chiefs of the four services and their senior medical officers that we needed a policy that was humane and that fostered military discipline. All the services were not equally convinced; some traditional Marine Corps generals and Navy admirals, for example, still felt the problem should be handled as a criminal matter. We made sure that they understood our approach: Criminal activity by a drug user, such as drug dealing or theft, would still be a court-martial offense. But simple drug use per se would lead to treatment, not a court-martial.

The Pentagon's new drug policy relied on servicewide random, mandatory, carefully controlled drug testing by urinalysis. Subjects were selected by a lottery method based on their Social Security number. Initially, any member of the armed services was subject to random testing. Later we concentrated our testing, education, and treatment on younger people where the drug problem was most acute. Anyone testing positive was placed in a treatment program. If drug use was discovered at the end of a man's term of service, he received a thirty-day detoxification and treatment program prior to release. If he needed more time, he was transferred to a similar program administered by the Veterans Administration.²⁵

In a break with previous policy, drug use would not be automatic grounds for separation from the service with a bad-conduct discharge. Moreover, successful completion of drug treatment would be considered a medical matter, which would not reflect on a regular serviceman's career.²⁶

Over the next three years, almost 5,300,000 members of the armed services were screened for drug use by random urinalysis or pre-departure tests from Southeast Asia. Seventy thousand of them tested positive for drugs, mainly heroin. They were all put into treatment, and 62,000 former drug users were returned to duty. Of the remainder who were discharged, 7,000 continued treatment at VA facilities. In July 1974, the Defense Department offered this forecast for the drug problem in the armed services: "Long-range view regarding drug and alcohol abuse is encouraging. Armed services may never be totally free of substance abuse, but the rate of abuse should continue to decline below that of similar age groups in civilian sector."²⁷

Not a single one of those servicemen testing positive was charged with a criminal offense stemming solely from his drug use. This is a record I am very proud of.

During the same period, almost 27,000 service members were treated for alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, the traditional prejudices against alcoholics, even those in successful recovery, often prevailed. In one particular fight I took all the way up to Dr. Jaffe's office in the White House, a recovering alcoholic Air Force pilot was still denied his return to flight status. This wrongheaded approach was dangerous. By definition, pilots wanted to fly,

but they were also human, and as a group were equally vulnerable to alcoholism as the rest of humankind. If a man faced permanent grounding for seeking alcoholism treatment, his career was jeopardized. He would therefore avoid treatment. I'm happy to say that our support of the particular Air Force colonel in question got him back on flight status and helped put the Air Force policy on the right track.

Dr. Wilbur and I traveled around the world several times on this program visiting service facilities. He always required that no tobacco be used at meetings or alcoholic drinks be consumed at working lunches. But at one luncheon in the Philippines hosted by an admiral, the white-clad mess stewards passed trays of frosty Bloody Marys. The first man to drink one was our admiral host, his hand actually shaking until he swallowed the vodka. This confirmed a suspicion I'd long held. Uncontrollable drinking among some senior officers was just as dangerous a problem as heroin use among bored and homesick GIs in Danang or Bienhoa. The incident in the Philippines spurred Dr. Wilbur to establish a confidential alcohol abuse counseling and treatment program for flag rank and general officers. In this new program a number of senior officers were successfully treated; both their health and their careers remained intact.

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IN THE summer of 1972, I was promoted to major general. The year before I received the Distinguished Service Medal for my work with MASSTER and a second oak-leaf cluster to my Legion of Merit for my efforts on the new drug policy. I certainly had never tried to punch the right tickets for my career advancement; rather, as I had tried to convince those young lieutenants in Germany, taking the hard, often unrewarding jobs was the best way for an officer to achieve success. But I knew the Army was in for troubled times in the immediate future. America was about to lose its first war.

President Nixon had shown real moral courage in December 1972 by finally using America's military force effectively to convince the North Vietnamese we were serious. The port of Haiphong was mined and B-52 bombers pounded military targets and lines of communication in and around Hanoi, day and night, for eleven days.²⁸ Although few liberals would admit it, this action finally convinced the Communist government to negotiate seriously at the Paris Peace Talks.²⁹ A cease-fire agreement was reached and the Hanoi government began releasing American and South Vietnamese prisoners of war.

Although the resulting cease-fire agreement allowed the Americans to withdraw the last of their troops with a semblance of honor intact, the future of South Vietnam depended to a large degree on the *honor* of the Com-

munists. For example, the cease-fire was overseen by an International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) that included a military delegation from Communist Hungary. This was obviously placing a fox in a henhouse. Within a year, American intelligence discovered that Hungarian ICCS commissioners were conducting detailed military reconnaissance for the NVA.³⁰ This treachery did not surprise me. Having seen Communists at work in Asia for almost forty years, I was not sanguine about the future. To me, the conflict had entered an obvious "Fight-Talk, Talk-Fight" phase similar to that I'd seen both in Manchuria in the 1940s and in Korea in 1953. Hanoi had absolutely no intention of ending its aggression.

What was amazing was the overall public gullibility, tinged with apathy. American troops were home from Vietnam and people wanted to believe the war was won. Somehow, those in Congress and the administration who should have known better were willing to describe the cease-fire as a victory. Again, they were ignoring the true nature of the North Vietnamese. Their massive Easter offensive of 1972, for example, had been a blatant example of duplicity. While their diplomats earnestly negotiated in Paris, the North Vietnamese high command unleashed a major, coordinated offensive, committing over 120,000 NVA regulars in a three-prong operation planned to overwhelm I Corps, cut the central highlands, and capture Saigon itself. The NVA was equipped with Soviet tanks, artillery, rockets, and, most ominously, with shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles.³¹ They were successful in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, capturing and holding the capital of Quangtri Province for four months. Although the NVA suffered horrible casualties (50,000 dead), they pressed their conventional ground assault for several months.³²

The only thing that stopped them was U.S. air power. American B-52s, Air Force and Navy tactical air support, and the superb use of our new AC-130 Spectre gunships finally tipped the balance in the ARVN's favor. In several desperate night actions, U.S. Army helicopter gunships equipped with new night-vision equipment broke up NVA tank attacks. I was proud that STANO technology developed in Project MASSTER made this Army air support more effective.

To me the relevance of the 1972 Easter offensive for the 1973 cease-fire was obvious. Unless the United States was prepared to support the ARVN indefinitely with air power, South Vietnam would ultimately fall to the Communists.

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IN February 1973, I was at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, where I visited the first American POWs flown out of Hanoi. These were the "old hands," some of whom had been in captivity for eight years. Most had been

savagely tortured, not for military information, but in order to extract propaganda messages. Some had broken physically, but all had kept their spirits intact. As I went from ward to ward chatting with these scarred, gaunt men, each group had the same question: Is Jane Fonda in jail? Several of the men who had been subjected to inhuman torture for years were badly beaten for refusing to appear with Fonda and her anti-war delegation in Hanoi, the same visit during which she was photographed gleefully seated at an NVA anti-aircraft gun. The POWs had gone so far as to draft formal complaints against her for treasonable action. But they were convinced by civilian debriefing teams at Clark to give up their grievances.³³

Like the rest of the military, these POWs were learning that America's traditional standards of honor and integrity had been eroded almost beyond recognition.

Meanwhile, America had a demoralized, unjustly vilified Army to rebuild. In May 1973, I learned I would have a major role in this rebuilding. My old commanding officer from Korea, Dick Stilwell, now a three-star general in command of the Sixth Army, with headquarters at the historic Presidio in San Francisco, requested me to take command of the U.S. Army's new Readiness Region VIII.

Of America's armed services, the Army had been most affected by the long war in Vietnam. Beyond combat casualties, hundreds of thousands of career officers and NCOs had quit. Draftees rarely reenlisted during this period. Overall competence and experience were at a low ebb. Traditionally, the reserve component—Army Reserve and National Guard—had served with distinction by providing a reservoir of skills and experience the active-duty force could call on in time of war. But the ill-fated decision to keep the reserves out of Vietnam meant that many Army Reserve and National Guard units had become havens for men evading combat and were filled with *soldiers* who proved to be no better than draft dodgers.

In short, the Army's overall readiness state, the ability to fight and win a war, had not been so low since the depression of the 1930s. And it would be my job to help correct this situation.

