

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

No Parade

1976-1978



THAT FALL, THE U.N. Command slowly drew down the augmentation forces massed for the operation. For the moment at least, the new conciliatory tone of the North Koreans at the Military Armistice Commission meetings was matched by their tactics elsewhere along the DMZ. There were no sniping or booby-trap incidents for several months. It appeared our show of force had instilled sober caution in the Communist command.¹

General Richard Stilwell retired that fall and was replaced by General John W. Vessey, Jr. The new commander in chief was a soldier's soldier, having risen through the ranks as a rifleman in World War II to gain a battlefield commission on the Anzio beachhead. Jack Vessey was a man of calm demeanor and absolutely rock-solid integrity. He was the perfect man for the U.N. Command in Korea.

Vessey's leadership was quickly put to the test. As the American presidential campaign wound down, senior Korean military and government leaders voiced alarm and concern to their American counterparts in Seoul. One of the planks of Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter's foreign policy platform was the withdrawal of all American ground combat troops from Korea. Some of Carter's speeches stressed the need to avoid entanglement in another Asian ground war; others described the withdrawal as an economy measure. He didn't seem to grasp that basing the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea was cheaper than maintaining the unit in the States.

To the Koreans, such a withdrawal would be another betrayal, plain and simple. They had sent 50,000 combat troops to South Vietnam and kept them there, despite heavy casualties, as a gesture of allied solidarity. In

1971, we had shown our gratitude by arbitrarily withdrawing the 7th Infantry Division from Korea without even consulting the Seoul government. Now the leading presidential candidate proposed pulling out the remaining American combat unit. The 2nd Infantry Division was the only mobile strategic reserve unit equipped with high-technology communications and firepower in South Korea. American combat troops were the major deterrent to a new North Korean invasion.

After Carter's election, I had the occasion to meet with General Lee Sae-Ho, chief of staff of the ROK army, and later with Lieutenant General Lew Byong-Hion, director of the Joint Staff. *Why*, they asked, did the President-elect still propose withdrawing American combat troops from Korea? Hadn't he received proper intelligence briefings on the North Korean buildup? They reminded me that the abrupt pullout of American troops in 1949 had triggered the 1950 North Korean invasion. Their human intelligence sources in the North—which were frankly better than ours—all indicated that a new pullout would have the same result.

"If your troops leave," General Lew told me, "Kim Il-Sung will invade again."

I assured the generals that our Joint Chiefs of Staff would set the new president straight on this matter soon after the inauguration. They were not convinced. Their Washington embassy had received ominous reports that Carter's military advisers came from liberal think tanks and left-leaning pacifist groups. I tried to reassure them, but I wasn't optimistic myself.²

Then, in December 1976, we received a revised intelligence estimate on the probable warning time we would have in the event of a North Korean invasion. Previous estimates had given us several days to a week to prepare for an assault. Given the North Korean forward deployment of artillery, armor, and aircraft in underground facilities, the new joint CIA-DIA estimate was less than twelve hours. The UNC staff was stunned.

The pessimism in Seoul increased on January 21, 1977, when, as his first official act, President Carter pardoned 10,000 Vietnam War draft dodgers. The symbolism was clear to my Korean colleagues: Our allies in Asia were not worth defending.

Less than two weeks later, General Vessey received a back-channel message from General George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President had given the JCS Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 13, a draft plan for the troop withdrawal, and asked their opinion on which of three schedule options was preferable. Pointedly, Carter did not solicit the Joint Chiefs' opinion on the overall merits of the pullout. It's interesting to note that PRM-13 was dated January 27, 1977; it had obviously been quickly drafted and released for interagency review within the first week of the new administration. President Carter, therefore, could not have had

time to adequately review the sensitive new intelligence on the North Korean buildup before issuing the document.³

The first option was immediate withdrawal; the second called for pulling out a battalion every two months, with a total draw-down in two years. The final option was a phased pullout over four or five years, which included transfer of modern weapons and equipment to the South Koreans and training in their use. The White House had specifically requested that the Joint Chiefs not consult with the U.N. Command in Seoul on this matter. The Joint Chiefs informed Carter that all of these options entailed "grave risk," and therefore were unacceptable, given the North Korean military buildup. When pressed by Defense Secretary Harold Brown, the Chiefs stated the last option was the least objectionable.⁴

General Vessey assured the staff that Carter hadn't been properly "read in" on the latest intelligence estimates of the North Korean military threat and offensive intentions. Indeed, we had evidence that the North Koreans had resumed their full offensive posture after the limited, temporary defensive redeployment of the previous fall. The General noted that the White House request that the Joint Chiefs not consult Seoul was a clear indication that the matter was still being debated in Washington. He intended to forcefully present our opinion on this vital issue.

Vessey flew to Washington in March for some meetings. While there, he had the opportunity to confer with President Carter on the proposed withdrawal. At their White House meeting, the General carefully outlined the latest intelligence estimates, emphasizing the unmistakable evidence of North Korean offensive intentions. The President, Vessey later told me, remained inexpressive during the General's presentation. Vessey was not given to hyperbole; he had more combat command experience than almost any other general in the armed services. When he made such a presentation, people had to listen.

Finally, Carter responded. "General," he said, "you've made some very good points that I was not aware of. I promise that I will not reach my final decision on this matter until I've consulted you again." That was exactly what General Vessey had hoped to achieve.

A few days later in Seoul, General Vessey told me, "Jack, I think I shook up the President when I briefed him on the scale of the North Korean buildup."⁵

"I certainly hope so, sir," I replied.

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ON MARCH 9, 1977, President Carter held a press conference. He did not mention Korea in his opening statement. But a reporter asked him to rec-

oncile his campaign promise to withdraw combat troops with the recently submitted fiscal 1978 budget, which included hundreds of millions of dollars to support those very troops in Korea. Carter explained his "commitment" to withdraw U.S. ground troops from Korea. He outlined an "appropriate" four- or five-year withdrawal schedule, which, he added, "would have to be worked out very carefully with the South Korean government."⁶

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THE matter did not emerge again until late April, when Army Chief of Staff General Bernard Rogers came to Seoul. I attended a luncheon in his honor at Ambassador Richard Sneider's residence.

"General," I told him, "we're just having one hell of a time trying to explain the reasons for this withdrawal to the Koreans."

Rogers nodded in grim resignation. "Jack," he said, "I sympathize with you. But you've just got to realize the President is serious about this." He shook his head sadly. "He intends to go through with it."

"Well, sir," I added, pressing Rogers, "can you at least explain his rationale for the plans?"

Rogers shook his head. "No, General," he said, "I cannot."

Senior officers around the table were frowning now. The United Nations Command certainly had not received any formal indication that the withdrawal decision had been made. Indeed, the President's assurance to consult with General Vessey before reaching the final decision was the basis for our optimism that Washington would soon come to its senses.

That optimism increased in early May, when the embassy and U.S. Forces, Korea, received a joint State/Defense Department telegram detailing plans for the visit of a senior American consultation team. The group was headed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General George Brown and Undersecretary of State Philip Habib, and was due in Seoul later that month to discuss the withdrawal issue with the Korean government. The telegram ordered us to stress to the South Koreans that no final decision on the withdrawal had been made and that none would be reached without "thorough consultation" with all parties involved, including the civilian and military leaders of both Korea and Japan.⁷ To the officers of UNC headquarters, this message was clear evidence that wisdom was beginning to prevail in Washington.

But then the situation became badly muddled again. We received word that the Congressional Budget Office was about to release a study claiming that withdrawing American ground troops from Korea would save billions of dollars over the next five years.⁸ This was ridiculous. Unless the 2nd Infantry Division was disbanded, it was much cheaper to keep the unit in

Korea where KATUSA and Korean Service Corps personnel cost us nothing and we paid no rent for valuable training areas. General Vessey was beginning to get uneasy that the White House might be staging an end run, sliding into the decision without consulting him again as Carter had promised.

Presidential Review Memorandum 13, we learned, was being hotly debated in Washington intelligence circles. The intelligence community would not yet state conclusively either way whether South Korea would be able to stop a new North Korean invasion without the support of American ground troops. But Pentagon analyst John Armstrong's group was now working literally night and day to evaluate the masses of new evidence depicting the North Korean buildup. Above all, Armstrong expected that the new information would prove North Korea's offensive intentions, which validated the role of the 2nd Infantry Division as a "trip-wire" deterrent.⁹

When I was sure our own Intelligence and Operations staffs were assembling the latest field estimates on North Korean strength and intentions, as well as our own war plans, for the consultation team, I put the withdrawal question aside and got on to more pressing business. Running a joint staff in a large command entailed a series of long working days, punctuated by tightly scheduled meetings.

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I WAS in the middle of just such a schedule on Wednesday, May 18, 1977, when I got a call from Jim Hausman, General Vessey's civilian special adviser. Hausman was an old Korea-hand, having served in Seoul as adviser to Korean and American officials since 1946. His office was right down the hall from mine, on the other side of General Vessey's conference room. Jim explained he was with John Saar, the *Washington Post* Tokyo bureau chief, who was in Korea to report on the upcoming consultations. I felt a twinge of wariness. American embassy officials had warned me about Saar, who they said had a bad attitude about the government of Korea, which might have been nurtured by his contacts with Korean exile leftists in Tokyo. In any event, Ambassador Sneider no longer allowed his staff to brief Saar.

But Jim explained that the U.N. Command had agreed to give Saar an on-the-record interview with the UNC Deputy Commander, Air Force Lieutenant General John Burns, concerning the role of U.S. air power in the future defense of South Korea. The Burns interview was followed by a strictly background, off-the-record briefing by Jim Hausman on the current political and military situation in Korea, so that Saar could write from a knowledgeable position. Hausman added that Saar had always honored his requests for anonymity and seemed sincerely interested in a thorough background briefing.

"Chief," Jim Hausman said, "Mr. Saar's asking some technical military questions about the role of the 2nd Infantry Division, which I frankly don't feel comfortable answering. Have you got a couple of minutes to answer his questions as part of the backgrounder we're giving him?"

"Hell, Jim," I said, "this guy hasn't done any good by us in the past. We should probably stay away from him."

"Jack," Jim Hausman said, "he's sitting right in my office and promised he'll follow all the ground rules we've laid down. He seems sincerely interested."¹⁰

I looked at my appointment schedule. "I've got twenty minutes free. If you can bring him over right now, I'll try to answer his questions."

I pulled the cover across the classified military situation map of Korea and closed my classified reading file. Even in a background briefing I didn't intend to inadvertently reveal any secrets.

Jim introduced the reporter and left us alone. John Saar was a slight, intense young man in his thirties. From his questions about the role of the 2nd Infantry Division, I saw he was unfamiliar with certain military principles, such as air mobility and massed firepower. I outlined the division's strength in tank-busting helicopters and TOW missiles, armored personnel carriers, and modern communications, all advanced systems the ROKA did not possess.

Saar asked why we simply couldn't sell these systems to the South Koreans.

I patiently explained that the 2nd Infantry Division needed this equipment, wherever it was stationed, and that the ROKA simply was not yet trained to operate such modern hardware as the Dragon anti-tank missile, the Cobra gunship, or the battlefield radars that made American combat troops in South Korea a formidable deterrent force.

Saar probed me about the nature of this deterrence.

I noted that U.S. combat troops provided a "double" deterrent. First, given the firepower and mobility of the 2nd Infantry Division, the North Koreans would have to concentrate their forces to successfully attack our troops. This concentration would increase the chances of our detecting their attack. Second, I added, China and the Soviet Union would restrain Kim Il-Sung from stepping on the American "trip wire" and escalating a regional conflict to global proportions. Without this constraint, I emphasized, the North Koreans might be encouraged to act recklessly.

Saar pressed me for a military evaluation of the pros and cons of withdrawing this force.

"Are you saying that you think President Carter's plan to withdraw all ground forces from Korea is likely to encourage Kim Il-Sung and lead to war?"

I carefully considered my words because I didn't know what General Burns

had already told him. Moreover, this question clearly went beyond the technical explanation I'd agreed to provide.

"Well," I answered, "I think that the senior ROK officers would give you a very definite yes to that question. They're convinced of it. From a purely military point of view, I agree with them." This was a sensitive area, and I wanted to make sure Saar understood my position. "However," I added, "President Carter had many other factors to consider. Since he has available to him the same military intelligence that we have, we assume that other, non-military factors are overriding."

Saar nodded, but did not reply. He was jotting notes furiously. I hope he keeps those notes confidential, I thought. Colonel Don Gelke, the public affairs officer, had set up the briefing by Jim Hausman as an off-the-record backgrounder.

"If the decision is made," I continued, "we will execute it with enthusiasm and a high level of professional skill. But, since a decision has not been made and since the ROK expect a full discussion of the subject, it's imperative that the military provide their best judgment and advice. We feel it's our obligation to do so until a decision is announced."¹¹

I couldn't discuss the Armstrong group's efforts or detail the shocking evidence they'd uncovered of the North Korean buildup and offensive deployment. But I wanted the reporter to know this matter was serious. "An intensive intelligence effort over the last twelve months has revealed that North Korea is much stronger than we thought." The problem as I saw it, I added, was that "people who are making the decisions are basing them on information that's two years old."

As my ROK colleagues had stressed, the situation was similar to 1949. It was also similar to 1947, when America decided to undercut the Chinese Nationalists.

After the fall of China and Vietnam, I told Saar, the specter of an intelligence failure was raised and the question was asked, "'Did the military people in the know express themselves loudly and clearly enough that the decision-makers understood?' We want to make sure this time."

I then reminded him of the American pullout in 1949, which triggered the North Korean invasion of June 1950. I felt it was important that this young reporter understand that the men on General Vessey's staff intended to raise these vital issues during the consultations the next week.

Saar thanked me, then left, just as my next appointment arrived in the outer office. Before starting the meeting, however, I called the UNC public affairs officer, Colonel Don Gelke. "Don," I said, "why didn't you come up here to sit in with me and that reporter?" He'd always insisted on being present at other briefings I'd given.

"General," Don Gelke answered, "I didn't think it was necessary. I sat

in for a few minutes with Jim Hausman, and that was going fine, so I left Saar with him." Gelke paused. "Sir, you did remind Saar that was an off-the-record backgrounder, didn't you?"

"No," I said. "Jim Hausman did that already. Was I supposed to do it, too?"

"Technically speaking. . . ." He paused again. "Did Hausman accompany Saar to your office?"

"Sure. You always tell us not to allow reporters to wander around UNC headquarters unescorted."

"Well . . ." Don Gelke was obviously uneasy.

"Look, Don," I said, "get hold of Saar and remind him that was a background briefing. And try to get a copy of what he writes."

Late that afternoon, I got a call from Saar. "General," he said, "I want to confirm that our interview was on the record."

I frowned, but resisted the urge to lash out. Arguing with the press was a no-win situation. "John," I said, as calmly as I could, "that's not the way I understand it. It's my clear understanding that our discussion was part of the background briefing you were receiving from Jim Hausman." There was silence from Saar's end. "Hausman called me in the middle of his briefing," I added, as reasonably as I could, "and asked if I had time to answer some specific military questions. This was all part of the same briefing."

Finally Saar replied, his voice edged with defiance. "You know what the rules are, General. If you don't specifically tell *me* at the beginning of the interview it's off the record, I have to consider that I'm authorized to print your comments."

I sighed with frustration. He was conveniently forgetting that Jim Hausman had escorted him to my office, thus keeping the background briefing "chain" unbroken. But such civilian intrigues were alien to my world. When you dealt with military men in either war or peace, confidences were kept. "Well, I understand the rules you're explaining now," I said, "but you certainly didn't explain them when Jim Hausman brought you to my office."

"Unless you want to retract or change what you said," Saar added, "I'm entitled to print it."

"What was your interview with General Burns, background or on the record?"

"On the record, General."

I reviewed in my mind exactly what we had discussed. The information about the vital role of the 2nd Infantry Division was valid. And all my Korean and American colleagues shared my concern about the proposed withdrawal. I was not divulging any secrets. After all, in January General Vessey himself had given Saar an interview on the same subject in which Vessey had emphasized that the troop withdrawal would "increase considerably" the risk of war with North Korea.¹² And Vessey had also recently

given an on-the-record interview to United Press International, in which he'd noted, "In my view, the withdrawal of all the American ground troops would raise the possibility of war in Korea."¹³ As I recalled my Saar briefing, I hadn't gone beyond anything General Vessey had already said to the press.

And I didn't have time to conduct a debate with Saar. "Well, John," I said, "I guess you've got me. I'm not going to retract anything I said because I don't believe in changing what I consider to be the truth."

We left it like that, and I made a mental note to avoid smooth-talking young reporters in the future.¹⁴

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It was around ten o'clock the next night when General Vessey phoned my quarters. I took the call in the living room where Mary was pouring coffee for our dinner guests.

"Jack," he said, chuckling warmly, "I just got a call from George Brown. It looks like John Saar's story made the front page of the *Washington Post*. George said to tell you he appreciates your taking the media heat off him."

General Brown, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had been pilloried over statements attributed to him that Israel's influence with American news media was out of proportion to the country's strategic importance. It was still Thursday morning in Washington and Brown had just read the *Post*.

"I hope this isn't serious, sir," I said.

"No, don't worry, Jack," General Vessey said, "George was laughing about it."

At 12:30, General Vessey phoned back. "General Brown just called again," he said. "This time he wasn't laughing."

"What happened, sir?"

"The President is furious. You are ordered to fly to Washington on the first available transportation and report to General Brown who will escort you to see President Carter. The President wants to see you personally on this matter."

"Am I being disciplined?"

Our last dinner guest, Malaysian ambassador John Denis de Silva, looked up sharply as he heard my question.

"I don't know, Jack," General Vessey answered. "You are to write a report on the incident and deliver it to General Brown ASAP."

My immediate reaction was that Jack Vessey was playing a practical joke on me. To clarify the matter, I called the headquarters public affairs office and asked them to get a copy of the *Post* story from Washington and have it at my quarters by 0600.

"What's all this about, Jack?" Ambassador de Silva asked.

"I'm not sure," I answered honestly, "but I've been ordered to report to the President by the first available means."

"Excellent," he said. "This way the whole bloody stupid withdrawal issue will get a proper airing." Everyone in the Seoul diplomatic corps was concerned about Carter's plans for the troop pullout. So the Ambassador was pleased I'd have the chance to discuss the matter directly with the President.

But I didn't share his enthusiasm.

When I read Saar's story at dawn, I understood better what the flap was all about. The telegraphic text sent by the Pentagon public affairs office noted that the article had appeared in a separate, highlighted box on the front page. "U.S. General: Korea Pullout Risks War" read the headline. This was an obvious echo of Saar's earlier interview with General Vessey. Saar's article had quoted me as calling President Carter's plan to withdraw American troops "a mistake." He had made the assessment of my ROK colleagues that the troop pullout "will lead to war" appear to be my unsolicited opinion. Instead of reporting my summary of the Korean generals' views, Saar quoted me as saying, "Many other senior military people challenge the wisdom of Carter's plan." To make things worse, Saar noted, "The unusual situation of serving generals openly differing with the President's declared policy arises on the eve of talks to implement that policy."

I put down my coffee cup, my hands clenched on the telegram form. This was nonsense. I certainly had not "openly" differed with President Carter's "declared policy." Only a week earlier, the U.N. Command had been specifically instructed by Washington that the President had not yet *declared* a final policy. Besides, the briefing had been background only. But either Saar or his editors had structured my words to raise the specter of a cabal of "serving generals" publicly defying their commander in chief.

Army regulations and traditions were very clear on this matter. An officer was free to voice his opinion on pending policy matters up to the moment the civilian leadership made a decision. Once the President or the Secretary of Defense announced that a policy had been decided, however, an officer could no longer criticize it. But John Saar had ambushed me on two counts. He published our background conversation, and then distorted my words to make me appear the spokesman for a group of disgruntled, defiant generals.

Saar did note that I wanted to avoid repeating events during the fall of China and Vietnam when military leaders did not express themselves clearly enough to Washington policy-makers. He also correctly quoted me as stating, "If the decision is made, we will execute it with enthusiasm and a high level of professional skill." And he accurately summarized my statement that I was "deeply concerned that decision-makers may be working from outdated intelligence that substantially underestimates current North Korean strength."

But my assessment that “an intensive intelligence effort over the last 12 months has discovered North Korea to be much, much stronger than we thought”—which was the whole basis of my concern—was tacked on as an afterthought in the article’s last paragraph.¹⁵

The article’s overall tone left the impression I was a disgruntled malcontent at best, and a dangerous loose cannon at worst.

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THE next morning on the Korean Airline flight to Tokyo, I received another lesson in devious journalistic ethics. Jim Hausman happened to be on the same plane with his wife and daughter, and he came up to the front of the jumbo jet cabin where I was seated to chat with me. I noticed earlier that he had been talking to a young woman who I assumed was the daughter traveling with him. She sat behind us, leaning forward to listen as he and I reviewed the exact sequence of the Saar interview. When Jim left the no-smoking section to go back for a cigarette, the young woman took his seat and began asking me questions. Her line of inquiry seemed unusual for Jim’s daughter. Finally, I asked her name.

“Melinda Nix,” she said, removing a tape recorder from her shoulder bag. “I’m with CBS and I’d like to conduct an interview.”

“Well, I certainly would not have talked to you, had I known you were a reporter,” I said. “And I sure don’t have any intention of granting an interview.”

When Jim returned, he told me the young woman was John Saar’s wife. Apparently, ambush journalism ran in the family. She got off the plane in Tokyo and filed an “exclusive interview” story on the eavesdropped opinions I had shared with Jim Hausman.¹⁶

But that was the least of my worries. At the Tokyo airport, I was mobbed by reporters who shouted questions in my face while prodding me with microphones and blinding me with their camera lights. It seemed the press had simplistically transformed the affair into an analog of the 1951 Truman-MacArthur confrontation.

I spent most of my time working on the report I was to deliver to General George Brown as the big jet droned northeast through the endless blue spring twilight of the Arctic. It was an exceptionally long flight from Tokyo to New York. When the report was finished, I did my best to get some sleep.

The media mob at Kennedy Airport was larger but better disciplined than their colleagues in Tokyo, thanks to the intervention of the Army public affairs officer in New York. If I hadn’t been so groggy with jet lag, I would have found the situation amusing. What did these people expect me to say? I was a two-star general who had been minding his own business twenty-

four hours before. Now they portrayed me as some kind of rogue out of *Dr. Strangelove*.

Luckily, airport security guards met the flight at National Airport. Given the international dateline, I had just eaten my second Friday dinner of cardboard airline rations and I wasn't eager to see more camera lights. The Army public affairs lieutenant colonel who met me had arranged a room in the general officers' quarters at Wainwright Hall at Fort Myer. He explained that General Brown had been unexpectedly called to Europe and couldn't receive me the next morning. Instead, I was to report to the Army Protocol Office in the Pentagon at 1000 Saturday morning and wait for a call from the Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, who would escort me to the White House. I didn't like the sound of this. The new schedule completely bypassed the military chain of command.

"Colonel," I said, "this is unacceptable. Please tell your boss that I consider it vital I meet with someone in the military chain of command before talking to the political appointee civilians."

He promised to contact Major General Gordon Hill, chief of Army public affairs, at once.

The next morning, Dick Stilwell, who had retired in the Washington area, joined me for breakfast at Wainwright Hall. He carefully read my report on the Saar interview, and agreed that I had stated my case accurately and succinctly. Although retired, Stilwell retained considerable influence in the Pentagon. It was obvious, he said, that even if I had been imprudent enough to have granted Saar an on-the-record interview, my comments certainly did not breach Army regulations.

But the situation had escalated far beyond the Department of the Army. Follow-up stories in the Friday and Saturday *Washington Post* described President Carter as "distressed and angered" by my "public" criticism of his policy. Everybody seemed to assume that the troop withdrawal plan was formal policy, even though U.S. Forces, Korea, and our Seoul embassy had been specifically instructed that no decision would be made until the consultation team met with the Korean government. But unnamed White House officials, obviously trying to stay ahead of the embarrassing situation, were portraying the Carter withdrawal plan as formally established policy. Had this been true, I would have been insubordinate. But everyone knowledgeable about the situation—including the self-proclaimed open and honest Carter White House—knew this was not the case. Worse, the White House had decided to cloud the issue further by circulating the ridiculous statement that my remarks would somehow "encourage North Korea to consider another invasion of South Korea."

"I don't know where the hell they got *that* idea," Dick Stilwell said, tossing aside the *Post*. "The whole thing's gotten political in a big hurry, Jack." He

noted that Senate Democrats were praising Carter for showing strong civilian control over the military.¹⁷

I was to learn from a Judge Advocate friend that Carter had first wanted to have me court-martialed and reduced a grade in rank. But the Army's Judge Advocate General had told the White House there was no legal grounds for this. I did not know this at the time, so I was approaching the day's activities with some apprehension. Dick Stilwell did report, however, that word in the Pentagon corridors was that Carter intended to salvage the embarrassing situation by playing the Harry Truman to my Douglas MacArthur. I wondered how far he would go.

To exacerbate the political tension, a new John Saar story from Seoul in the Saturday *Washington Post* reported that my UNC colleagues, from General Vessey down, were "saying privately" that they agreed with my view that the Carter withdrawal plan would lead to war. Saar summarized Vessey's April United Press International interview, in which the General stated that American troop withdrawal "would raise the possibility of war in Korea." The article also quoted Vessey's assessment of me as a "professional soldier with a distinguished combat record," who "will carry out faithfully and fully the policies assigned by superiors." There was a picture of General Vessey captioned "Possibility of War."¹⁸

I looked across the breakfast table at Dick Stilwell. We had served together in dangerous and sensitive assignments over the previous twenty-seven years. During that service, we had each luckily avoided public controversy and entanglement in politics. Dick was now safely retired. I was still a serving general. And my luck had just run out.

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ARMY Chief of Staff General Bernard Rogers called me to his office from the Army Protocol section. His manner was cold and abrupt.

"General," he said, "your conduct has not brought credit to the Army." It was clear that Rogers had made no effort to defend me.

"General Rogers," I said, trying to be reasonable, "all of us in Seoul believed the troop withdrawal decision had not yet been made. And I thought it was important that the reporter be familiar with all the issues involved."

Rogers glared at me, his face clouded red. "Damn it, Jack. I *told* you in April that Carter had already made his decision."

I saw the reason for General Rogers's angry posture now. He was not about to become caught in a political controversy about the President's deception over when the decision had been made.

But this was a vital issue to me. "General Rogers," I reasoned, "at that

luncheon in Seoul, you certainly weren't specific about the President's decision."

Rogers continued to glare without speaking.

"And subsequent to that meeting," I continued, "our command received a specific message stating that the decision had *not* been made."

General Rogers did not comment on this. Instead, he informed me that New York congressman Samuel S. Stratton, chairman of the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, had requested that I be permitted to testify on the troop withdrawal question the next week. Pentagon Public Affairs would help me prepare an opening statement and Major General Jim Lee, the Army Chief of Legislative Liaison, would work out the details and accompany me to the hearing.

Having determined what I was going to do next week, I was now anxious to get General Rogers's estimate of what was going to happen to me in the next several hours. I asked him if he had any idea what the President and Secretary Brown were planning to do in retaliation for what they seemed to think was a challenge to their civilian authority.

"I have no idea what the President will decide to do with you. I suspect that will depend upon how you react with him during the interview and what Secretary Brown recommends. I also suspect that he'll insist, as a minimum, that you be reassigned from Korea," General Rogers responded.

I asked the Chief of Staff if he had any idea about where I might be reassigned.

Bernie Rogers stared at me coolly, playing the gruff combat commander. "You'll be told of your new assignment after your testimony."

I assumed that was a not-so-subtle hint that, if I was too honest before the House committee, I'd find myself PX officer in Greenland.

After we finished our discussion, General Rogers had me pay my respects to the new Secretary of the Army, Clifford Alexander. The Secretary was an amiable black politician from Washington, whom Carter might have selected more to demonstrate his racial tolerance than as a measure of Alexander's qualifications for the job.

"I sympathize somewhat with you, General Singlaub," Secretary Alexander said. "When I ran for mayor of Washington some years ago, that same reporter misquoted me."

I did not correct the Secretary by explaining that Saar had not misquoted my strongly held views, but had only distorted the context in which I had expressed them.

I returned to the Protocol Office to await my summons to meet with Harold Brown in his office on the E-ring of the Pentagon, just above the River entrance.

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown had a broad face with large glasses that gave him a somewhat owlish appearance. He carefully considered his

words before speaking, almost as if individual sentences were sections of mathematical formulas, which had to be verified before presentation. I suppose he wished I had been as circuitous in my dealings with John Saar. I learned later that Secretary Brown was privately opposed to the troop pull-out, but that he was too loyal to Carter to make his views public.¹⁹

He patiently listened as I explained the sequence of events that had led to the original Saar article.

In the course of the conversation, the Secretary suggested that things would go much better for me with the President if I would just explain to Carter that the reporter misquoted me. Like Secretary Alexander, Brown implied reporters had misquoted him in the past.

He was suggesting I lie on an important matter to save my skin. But I had not worn this uniform for thirty-four years just to start compromising my principles at this point.

"Well, Mr. Secretary," I said, "you obviously don't understand. I was not misquoted. John Saar distorted a few things, but his report was basically accurate. In addition to that, I believe very strongly in what I said or I wouldn't have said it."

While I spoke, Brown's special assistant, a young man named John G. Kester, came in and listened to the conversation.

Secretary Brown proceeded to give me President Carter's view on the matter. The President considered I had shown bad judgment by going public to speak in opposition to the decision he had already made to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea.

I couldn't let this point go unchallenged. "Sir," I interrupted, trying to keep my voice even, "every senior American in Seoul, in the embassy and UNC headquarters, was informed that the withdrawal decision would *not* be made until after there'd been consultations with the governments of South Korea and Japan." Brown and his assistant stared at me, expressionless. "I would have never spoken to a reporter on the record or off about this had I believed the withdrawal was already actual policy." Brown continued to gaze at me passively. I was frustrated now. "Mr. Secretary," I added, "we had orders to inform the Koreans the decision had *not* been made."

Now Kester spoke. "Tell me, General," he said, "if you had been told that the decision was made, but you were instructed to tell the Koreans otherwise, would that have made any difference?"

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean, John," I said. "Are you asking, would I have been willing to lie to the Koreans?"

Kester looked uncomfortable. He shook his head. "No, no, that's not exactly what I mean."

Secretary Brown and Kester exchanged glances. I sensed there was something important they were not sharing with me.

The controversy over exactly when and how President Jimmy Carter had

transformed his vague plans on the troop withdrawal into a formal presidential decision was to continue for years. The closest Carter ever came to publicly announcing a final decision on the troop withdrawal policy was the vaguely worded statements during his March press conference. A few months after I was recalled, it was revealed that he had privately signed a decision memorandum in early May, *before* we had received the Joint State-DoD message that no decision had been reached.²⁰ But Carter certainly had not informed his chief negotiators, Philip Habib and General George Brown, of his decision. Years later, Habib was adamant that he felt he had been sent to Seoul to negotiate, not dictate policy.²¹

Jimmy Carter, who as a candidate had promised the American people he would never lie to them, had as president obviously decided to lie not only to our Korean and Japanese allies, but also to the professional diplomats and military officers serving their country in Korea. The White House smoke screen covering this duplicity was unusually thick. Historians such as Richard Stubbing and Mark Perry have found it almost impossible to pin down when Carter signed his presidential decision paper on the troop withdrawal. And the National Security Council has kept the document classified Secret into 1990.²²

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THE Secretary's driver took us through the southwest gate of the White House and dropped us at the West Wing. It was a warm Saturday afternoon in late May, and the aides in the West Wing offices were dressed in slacks and polo shirts. A few wore blue jeans. As we walked toward the Oval Office, I was struck by the extreme youth and casual banter of the presidential aides in the offices we passed. Most seemed to be in their twenties or early thirties. Their animated conversation was apparently about an important White House tennis tournament, not vital matters of state. The last time I'd been in the West Wing was for a drug policy meeting during the second Nixon administration. His White House staff had been well-groomed, seasoned veterans of Washington's bureaucratic wars. President Carter's staff looked like summer interns.

We waited in a small anteroom off the Oval Office. A sense of surreal weirdness rose in me. Just down the hall, young voices whooped and hollered mock warnings of the slaughter about to be unleashed on the White House tennis courts. And I was about to confront the most powerful man in the world.

One of the President's aides came in and announced, "The President will see you in a few minutes," then motioned us to follow him into the Oval Office.

The room was empty. The Secretary and I stood together admiring a

handsome painting of a Revolutionary War naval battle. Glancing around the room, my eye fell on the President's desk. On the forward edge stood a small mahogany rectangle. "The Buck Stops Here" read the inscription. Carter had prevailed on the Truman family to lend him Harry Truman's famous desk plaque, a tangible symbol of resolute decisiveness. I swallowed the irony silently.

The President cleared his throat behind us and we spun to face him. Jimmy Carter was smoothing a wide paisley tie inside his crisp blue sportcoat. I had the unmistakable impression the President had dressed quickly to receive us, which probably accounted for the delay. This too was ironic. He had apparently intended to relieve a senior Army officer dressed in slacks and a polo shirt, then thought the situation merited at least a coat and tie.

As the President approached, I was disconcerted by his relentless jack-o'-lantern grin. He continued to smile widely as we were seated at a coffee table. I waited tensely for him to speak.

"You know, General Singlaub," the President said, still grinning, "I am accustomed to making difficult decisions. After all, I served in the Navy for eight years."

He leaned toward me, as if expecting some comment. I remained silent. Carter's campaign statements that he had been a "nuclear physicist" in the Navy had rankled many senior Navy officers. President Carter had actually served just less than eight years after graduating from Annapolis in 1946. His highest rank had been lieutenant. And I knew junior officers were rarely burdened with difficult decisions.

"And I also had to make a lot of tough decisions as governor of Georgia," the President continued. "Before I even became the official presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, my military advisers recommended we withdraw our combat forces from Korea." He leaned toward Harold Brown, evoking confirmation.

Secretary Brown remained silent, his face expressionless.

Now the President turned his grin back toward me. "Since taking this office, General," he continued, "this policy has been endorsed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

I had to restrain myself from speaking. The Joint Chiefs had been given a *fait-accompli* policy to rubber-stamp, but they declared that all three withdrawal-schedule options were unsatisfactory. They stressed that even the slowest troop withdrawal would entail "grave risks." That was hardly endorsement. I looked pointedly at Harold Brown. But he still remained silent, staring out toward the Rose Garden.

"General Singlaub," Carter continued, "your boss, General John Vessey, sat right where you're sitting today and presented his case, and I considered his arguments very carefully before reaching my decision."

Again, I had to restrain myself. The President was ignoring the promise

he'd made to General Vessey not to reach a decision without further consultation.

"General," the President concluded, "I've lost confidence in your ability to carry out my instructions. So I've asked the Secretary of Defense to have you reassigned."

The President nodded, indicating I could reply.

"Sir," I began, "it certainly was not my intention to embarrass you in any way by my statements. As I told that reporter, once the decision is made, I'm prepared to carry out that decision in a very professional manner." I looked at him intently, but he would not stop grinning. "But in the meantime, sir, I felt obliged to make sure all the decision-makers benefited from the best military advice possible. Those of us responsible for the defense of the Republic of Korea believe that withdrawing U.S. troops would send the wrong signal to the North Koreans, in view of their current massive buildup, just as our withdrawal did in 1949."

"General," Carter said, "as I indicated, I'm used to making hard decisions. I have already directed the Secretary of Defense to have you reassigned."

"Sir," I persisted, "I wish you would reconsider. There's been a very high turnover of general officers in Korea this year. Most of the replacements have had no previous experience in Northeast Asia. General Vessey needs someone experienced to run the UNC staff, especially if we are going to withdraw forces. I believe that my experience in the area and my knowledge of the geography and people can be a big help to him at this time."

Jimmy Carter shook his head. "No, you will be reassigned. I have decided, however, not to have you disciplined."

I stared silently back at him. I'd already learned that Carter had, indeed, wanted to have me court-martialed and reduced a grade in rank. But I was a permanent major general and that was not possible without an act of Congress. So much for yet another firm, sincere presidential decision.

We shook hands quickly and Brown led the way out of the Oval Office. Driving back to the Pentagon, the Secretary told me to consult very closely with his public affairs advisers on my congressional testimony. Like Bernie Rogers, he didn't come flat out and say my future assignment depended on good behavior up on the Hill, but the message was obvious.

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THE next morning, the front page of the *Washington Post* led with a banner headline, "President Fires Gen. Singlaub as Korea Staff Chief." The story quoted Secretary Brown as stating that "public statements by General Singlaub inconsistent with announced national security policy" made it difficult for me to carry out my duties in Korea. As I read the story, I realized that

I could do nothing at this point to correct the White House distortion that my statements had been public and that the withdrawal plans were firm national security policy. Once again, the President intended to use me to bolster his image as a decisive leader. And the *Post* rose to this bait by noting the President's action was the "first such disciplining of an American general since President Truman recalled and fired General Douglas MacArthur." The article also noted that Carter had originally been angry enough to have me face "stronger action," but that the remorse I showed during our meeting had evoked the President's "sympathy."²³

This was a firsthand lesson in Washington political intrigue. Many in the Pentagon knew that Carter had wanted me court-martialed, and now he was pandering after public support by showing the benevolent side of his decisive personality.

Over the next several days, the true nature of President Carter's leniency was revealed. The White House had ordered that I not be allowed to return to Korea to close my office, prepare my staff for the new man, and help Mary pack up the house. But Jack Vessey put his foot down, insisting that I be allowed to return to Seoul. The White House gave in, but demanded I take military transport to avoid any further encounters with reporters. This posed a problem as our daughter Mary Ann, who had just graduated from the University of Colorado, wanted to join us in Korea and we'd already bought her a ticket to coincide with my travel by commercial airline. The Army Vice Chief of Staff, General Dutch Kerwin, understood and directed the transportation people to issue an invitational travel order which allowed Mary Ann to fly with me on a military plane after my congressional testimony.

As I prepared the opening statement of my congressional testimony, the Pentagon public affairs people carefully reviewed my draft comments. Above all, they said, I must leave no impression of disrespect toward the President or military insubordination to civilian leadership.

Meanwhile, both the Pentagon and the White House were engaged in a damage-control operation through the news media. Word came down that Army Chief of Staff General Bernie Rogers's official position was now that he had explained President Carter's decision to top American generals in Seoul, including me, during his April visit. This was nonsense. Casual conversation at the Ambassador's lunch table, at which General Vessey was not present, was hardly official notification of a major policy change. The Defense Department used formal, detailed documents to make such announcements. But in the bizarre world of Washington politics, perception, not reality, prevailed. And apparently General Rogers had manipulated plausible perception to cover himself.²⁴

There was a major flaw in General Rogers's maneuver, however. By

insisting that he had told me of the President's "decision" during the Seoul luncheon in late April, Rogers inadvertently focused congressional scrutiny on exactly when that formal decision had been made. The ostensibly open Carter White House stonewalled, refusing to reveal the date. But eventually congressional investigators uncovered the paper trail of the inept and abortive policy-decision process. Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 13 of January 26, 1977, was the basic decision document. It requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to comment on the best schedule for a possible troop withdrawal. On March 7, 1977, the Joint Chiefs sent Secretary Brown their recommendation that any withdrawal be limited to a total of 7,000 troops over a five-year period and that these troops not include certain critical combat units of the 2nd Infantry Division. An interagency Policy Review Committee considered PRM-13 on April 27, 1977, and the Joint Chiefs' views went forward unchanged. Later that day, President Carter met with the National Security Council and heard arguments pro and con. On May 5, 1977 (eight days *after* the Seoul luncheon), Carter signed a Presidential Decision on the U.S. troop withdrawal. He rejected the Joint Chiefs' recommendation.²⁵ Although he had finally formalized his decision, Carter failed to implement it in a formal manner by instructing America's diplomatic and military leaders in Korea. Indeed, the instructions we received on preparing the South Korean military and government for the consultation team were downright duplicitous.

Carter was no doubt embarrassed by the troop-withdrawal fiasco. In fact the scandalous episode is not even mentioned in his official memoir. In *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, the only thing the reader learns about Korea is that President Park Chung Hee had a bad human rights record. I am not mentioned in the book; neither is General Vessey.²⁶ Jimmy Carter promised the American people that he would never lie to them. But he apparently didn't promise that he would tell the complete truth.

By the time I testified, many members of Congress, including influential Democrats, were openly critical of Carter's withdrawal scheme. And White House attempts to cast my recall in the heroic light of the Truman-MacArthur confrontation were beginning to evoke ridicule. The *Washington Post* itself lampooned this "high White House drama" in an editorial, which also criticized Carter's assertion that my statements could have provoked North Korea to invade the South. The matter would have been much better handled quietly within the Pentagon, the *Post* concluded.²⁷

Across the country, columnists and editorial writers were beginning to give Carter's ill-advised troop-withdrawal plans the close scrutiny they deserved. Political cartoonists had a field day. Although it certainly had not been my intention to become a lightning rod on this issue, my very public recall, and the White House's own clumsy damage-control efforts, made

this inevitable. There were even members of the intelligence community who speculated that my session with John Saar had been contrived to bring the issue to a head. This scenario held that Jack Vessey and I had flipped coins, and I had lost, so it would be my career that was sacrificed to expose Carter's flawed policy.²⁸

For the next two days, the Pentagon made sure I was insulated from the press. On Wednesday, May 25, I went with a legislative affairs escort to the Rayburn House Office Building to testify before Congressman Sam Stratton's Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. This fourteen-man subcommittee was basically a friendly panel, being composed for the most part of moderate and conservative Democrats and Republicans. There were a couple of liberals, however, and one outright radical, Ronald Dellums, whose California district included Oakland and Berkeley. He was an outspoken critic of the military.

Congressman Stratton prepared the ground for my testimony in his opening remarks. He noted that the President's withdrawal plan had been an ill-defined "proposal" that had been widely reported in the press. But, he added, Congress "has never been officially advised of that plan, nor has it ever considered or debated it."²⁹ Stratton said that the proposed withdrawal involved a grave risk of war, and that I would therefore be required to testify in both public and closed session, so that I could share with the members the most recent classified intelligence estimates of North Korean strength and intentions. He reiterated that Pentagon policy allowed me to state my personal views on policy without fear of retribution. And he hoped that I would do so sincerely.

As I sat staring up at the rostrum, I understood fully for the first time that the probable sacrifice of my military career would not be in vain. The President's impulsive action the previous Thursday had not only jerked me into the limelight, it had exposed his muddled policy to the full glare of congressional scrutiny. I saw that Congress intended to investigate the North Korean buildup and to act on the evidence our intelligence community had assembled. In so doing, I was sure, they would probably make it politically impossible for Carter to complete the withdrawal.

In my opening statement I told the panel that I was a professional soldier who firmly believed in following orders and supporting my civilian superiors' policy no matter how hard I had previously argued against that policy. I outlined my encounter with Saar and emphasized that my remarks concerned the attitudes of my South Korean colleagues. Finally, I stated that the U.N. Command and U.S. Forces Korea Command "accept and support the President's decision to withdraw ground combat forces from Korea." There was nothing else I could say; Carter's ill-defined proposal had been elevated by default into a national policy.

Congressman Stratton's questioning was friendly and supportive. He allowed me to reiterate publicly that U.S. Forces, Korea, had been ordered to inform the South Koreans that a final decision on the withdrawal would not be made until after consultations, which were taking place in Seoul that very week. I was also able to review the absolutely vital role of the 2nd Infantry Division as a deterrent to North Korean aggression.

As the questioning proceeded, I managed to enter into the public record the key aspects of the North Korean military buildup, including the fact that they had increased their inventory of tanks from 500 to 2,000 in the previous five years, and that they had deployed their forces well forward in an offensive posture. The congressmen were obviously eager to hear more of this, and I promised to go into detail in executive session.

Most of the questioning, from both Democrats and Republicans, was friendly. Clearly, they were displeased with the Carter White House, not just for its muddled policy, but for the administration's stubborn refusal to consult with Congress on such vital issues. But Congressman Ron Dellums was anything but friendly. He accused me of intentionally sabotaging the President's policy and belittled my supposition that the President might not have access to the most recent intelligence estimates of North Korean strength. And Dellums added, echoing his radical beliefs, that somehow the military was using vague estimates of a North Korean buildup to justify the wasteful deployment of 40,000 American troops in Korea. Dellums concluded by lambasting the subcommittee for holding these hearings, which, he said, were an "untimely and wholly inappropriate public spectacle" that could only further embarrass the President.

Colorado congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, although not a member of the subcommittee, dropped in to lambaste me for conducting a "kangaroo court" on Jimmy Carter. Then, much to Chairman Stratton's displeasure, she left without giving me an opportunity to respond.³⁰

After two more hours of questioning, the room was cleared and we went into executive session. Several members of the full House Armed Services Committee joined us. Now the gloves were off, and I could reveal the shocking details of the North Korean buildup.

I elaborated on the findings of the new intelligence estimates, which proved that North Korea had deployed its tactical air power forward in underground hangars and had shifted the bulk of its artillery into similar reinforced underground positions just above the DMZ. I then noted that recent war games conducted by Lieutenant General John Cushman, our I Corps group commander in Korea, revealed a "very, very depressing" estimate of ROK defense capabilities, even given the presence of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division. In March, I added, General Cushman had specifically briefed the Secretary of Defense on these findings and emphasized that the

North Koreans had the ability to overrun Seoul within one day of an invasion. Clearly, I stressed, the only true deterrent on the Korean peninsula was in the tactical nuclear weapons of American ground and air forces. If we removed the ground component of these weapons, I said, our deterrent was no longer credible.

Congressman Stratton pressed me to clarify that the worst-case scenario of our March war games included the assumption that the 2nd Infantry Division was still in place.

"That is correct, yes, sir."

"My God!" Stratton said, noting that the administration had never bothered to share this information with the House Armed Services Committee.

By the time the executive session ended around five-thirty that afternoon, I had been testifying for almost seven straight hours. It was obvious that the key members of the House Armed Services Committee were shocked by my statements. Congressman Stratton made it clear that the President's obstinate decision to continue with the Korean troop withdrawal—despite overwhelming evidence of North Korean military superiority and offensive intent in the new intelligence estimates—would not go unchallenged by Congress.³¹

The next morning's *Washington Post* ran a large front-page story announcing a "frontal assault" on Carter's Korea policy. Congressman Stratton was quoted as saying that his subcommittee would conduct intensive follow-up hearings and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would be the next to testify.

The White House was quick to counterattack. While I'd been testifying, Defense Secretary Harold Brown told the National Press Club that Army Chief of Staff Bernie Rogers had "informed" me about Carter's decision before I briefed John Saar. This, Brown said, was the reason for my recall.³²

I was under formal orders not to talk to the press about any aspect of the Korean troop policy. By late Wednesday afternoon, no one had informed me what my new assignment would be. General Rogers was out of town, but General Dutch Kerwin, the Vice Chief of Staff, said General Rogers would contact me that evening. I was due to fly back to Korea the next morning, stopping at a military air base in Colorado to pick up Mary Ann. So I left word that General Rogers could reach me at my son's Arlington apartment. Late that night, Bernie Rogers called.

"Jack," he said, "has anyone told you about your new assignment?"

"No, sir, they haven't."

"Well," Rogers said, "I'm down in Atlanta with Fritz Kroesen. He's agreed to take you as FORSCOM chief of staff."

I was astonished. U.S. Forces Command (FORSCOM) at Fort McPherson, Georgia, in Atlanta, was the largest of the Army's twelve commands and had control over all the active-duty and reserve components in

the continental United States, including the major combat divisions. The headquarters staff was over 2,000 strong. General Fritz Kroesen, an old friend from days on the Army general staff, was now FORSCOM commander. Instead of being relegated to a backwater, Fritz and the Army had shown their faith in me—at the risk of further antagonizing President Carter—by offering this prized assignment.

“Sir,” I said, “I’d completely ruled out that job. I don’t imagine President Carter will be that pleased to have me in his backyard.”

“Well,” Rogers said, “you got the job.”

I was just telling my son and his wife, Melitta, the good news when the phone rang again. It was Bernie Rogers. “Singlaub,” he said harshly, “you’re damn lucky to get this assignment and I don’t appreciate the wisecrack about the President’s backyard.”

“Sir,” I said, as earnestly as I could, “I understand just how fortunate I am and it wasn’t my intention to be sarcastic.”

“Well, dammit, General,” Rogers grunted, “you’d better learn to keep your comments about the President to yourself.”

“That is exactly my intention, sir.”³³

But the White House itself insisted on keeping the issue alive. While I was en route back to pack up in Seoul, President Carter called a news conference to defend what had now become official U.S. policy. He said I had committed a “very serious breach” of discipline by publicly criticizing his troop withdrawal. And he proceeded to reiterate the unlikely assertion that somehow my warning of North Korea’s offensive intentions would encourage Kim Il-Sung to invade South Korea and was “an invitation to the world to expect an inevitable war.”³⁴ Carter alluded to South Korea’s poor human rights record, but made no mention of North Korea’s ruthless totalitarian repression. It was well known by now in Washington that Jimmy Carter found several allied governments headed by former military leaders morally repugnant. And this sense of outraged morality seemed to prevent him from allowing the Korean blunder to disappear from the public eye. Rather than letting the issue cool off during the upcoming Memorial Day congressional recess, the front-page coverage of Carter’s nationally televised news conference gave his critics in the House and Senate more ammunition.

I was glad to be aboard the noisy C-141 with my daughter while this storm raged in Washington.

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I took leave en route back to the States that summer, and Mary and I had a chance to visit other parts of Asia, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand. I was heartened by the reception given me by Chinese and Thai

civilian officials and military officers. To them, Kim Il-Sung was one of the most dangerous men in Asia. The net result of my recall had been to focus increased American scrutiny on the North Koreans. And my Asian colleagues were certain America would reverse its policy when Kim's true intentions were revealed.

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THE brouhaha over Carter's Korea policy continued unabated that summer.³⁵ In July, General Rogers testified to the full House Armed Services Committee that the JCS had recommended against the withdrawal of our ground forces on March 17, while PRM-13 was still under consideration. Subsequent testimony revealed that President Carter had not signed a Decision Memorandum on the withdrawal until May 5. Congressman Sam Stratton announced that his committee had been unable to obtain any record of the President's decision and that it was uncertain who if anyone in the Army chain of command had been informed of that decision. Rogers made public that the Joint Chiefs had offered their own compromise withdrawal of 7,000 Army spaces in Korea, mainly through normal rotation, without the pullout of any particular unit. And he added that the Chiefs had stressed the "risks" involved in any withdrawal. This was the clearest public indication to date that Carter had overruled his military advisers.³⁶

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FORT McPherson was a stately old post dating from just after the Civil War. The senior officers' quarters were handsome, well-shaded brick houses facing a wide green parade ground. I got down to work on my new assignment, reassured that I had survived my first real scrape with politics. My main concern now was no longer Communist divisions poised above the DMZ, but the readiness of the underfunded volunteer Army. Unfortunately, my duties soon put me on another collision course with the Carter administration.

Candidate Jimmy Carter had campaigned for a quick resolution to the stalled negotiations on a new Panama Canal treaty. As president, one of his first actions had been to issue Presidential Review Memorandum 1, which ordered Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to speed up the negotiation process "with regard to concluding new Canal treaties with Panama." As veteran journalist John Dinges correctly noted, "Perhaps it took a president with Jimmy Carter's quixotic tendencies to place Panama finally at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda."³⁷ Once more, Carter was mixing his personal (and selective) sense of morality with vital policy issues.

Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal was the key issue at dispute. Many American congressional leaders, including Senators James Eastland and Jesse Helms and Congressman Daniel Flood, held that Panama had no claim whatsoever on the Canal Zone because the country itself had gained its independence from Colombia in 1903 in a U.S.-backed and -financed coup, specifically launched to give America "perpetual" control of the land through which the Canal would be built. Issues such as greater Panamanian control over the administration of the waterway and higher royalties might be negotiable, these congressmen stressed, but sovereignty was not.

The Nixon administration had negotiated with General Omar Torrijos off and on for years over Panamanian sovereignty and the delicate issue of America's right to defend the Canal militarily. As elsewhere in Latin America, money carried a lot more weight than patriotic rhetoric and the short-lived Ford administration had reached the point of serious horse trading with Torrijos.

One of the main stumbling blocks, however, was the criminal activity of the Torrijos government, which was known to be involved in narcotics and arms trafficking. Torrijos's trusted ally and key operative in these criminal enterprises was Colonel Manuel Noriega, the General's chief of intelligence (G-2).³⁸ Noriega was thoroughly corrupt and viewed by many to be the real power behind Torrijos.

The Panamanian leader sought support from Cuba's Communist dictator, Fidel Castro, who was eager to help in this popular anti-imperialist struggle. Castro dispatched civil and military advisers to Panama to aid Torrijos and Noriega in psychological and sabotage operations against American interests there. This was the situation when President Carter decided to accelerate the treaty negotiations to a rapid conclusion that would demonstrate American morality and benevolence. Carter apparently did not stop to consider that such concepts were alien to Torrijos and Noriega.

That summer I was sent to Panama by the Department of the Army to assess the actual cost to the U.S. government of transferring military assets in the Canal Zone to the Panamanian government under the terms of the draft treaties then nearing completion. One treaty covered the future role of the U.S. military in Panama and had a provision for turning over to Panama hundreds of large and small American buildings and installations in the Zone. Jimmy Carter had assured the American people that the treaties would not cost taxpayers a cent. I discovered that that was a ridiculous claim. Panama insisted that all the assets we gave them be upgraded to working condition. Some of the small airstrips, barracks, and fortifications hadn't been used since World War II and had reverted to the jungle.

As I discussed these matters with my colleagues in Southern Command, high atop Ancon Hill overlooking the wide blue Pacific Canal entrance, it

became clear that Torrijos and Noriega were taking America for a ride. Several officers hinted darkly that there was much more to Noriega than the public knew. If I wanted to assess the true cost to America of eventually transferring the Canal to Panama, I should get an intelligence briefing on Noriega's criminal activities.

The next afternoon I went down to Fort Amador, the stately old military post on the narrow peninsula beside the Canal entrance. The 470th Military Intelligence Group was situated in a separate fenced compound, surrounded by graceful coconut palms and mango trees. The young Hispanic officer who briefed me got right to the point. Noriega, he said, was a man of many talents. He had been on the payroll of the CIA and Army Intelligence for several years, but many of his reports on Torrijos's Cuban connections had proven to be disinformation. Noriega's criminal activities were growing.

The officer went to a large wall map of the Caribbean and read from a Classified report. Over the previous six months, several American yachts had been hijacked in the Gulf of Mexico. Their crews, including families with young children, had been murdered by the hijackers. Then the boats were loaded with bales of marijuana and boldly sailed back to their home marinas in Texas and Louisiana.

"Sir," the officer said, "we have proof that this operation is conducted by Noriega's men."

I held back my anger. "With his knowledge?"

"On his orders, sir."

"Does General Torrijos know about this?"

"Sir," the officer said, "General Torrijos gives Tony Noriega a free rein as long as the Colonel provides a steady flow of cash."³⁹

In other words, the Carter administration was hell-bent on turning over the Canal to a government headed by murderous thugs. I could certainly see no morality in this. The next day, at a luncheon hosted by the faculty of the School of the Americas, a military school in the Canal Zone run by the U.S. Army for Latin American officers, I was questioned by a South American major general seated across from me.

"Sir," he said, speaking for his colleagues, "we cannot understand how the United States can justify giving the *most* strategic facility in the entire hemisphere to Panama." He looked around the room, making sure that no Panama Defense Force officers were nearby. "This government has the *least* effective and professional armed forces in the hemisphere."

I had learned that this general's own president planned to attend the treaty-signing ceremony in Washington in a few weeks. "General," I said, "if these treaties are so bad, why is your president supporting them?"

The man smiled, revealing a nice array of gold teeth, then rubbed his

thumb and forefinger together in the universal Latin gesture for bribery. "General Singlaub," he said, "my president is willing to go anywhere and say anything if your president gives him eight helicopters." Other officers at the table chimed in. It seemed the upcoming show of hemispheric solidarity in Washington had been purchased through spreading costly military largess throughout Latin America, much of it among repressive governments that Carter publicly condemned for their human rights violations.

Carter's military pork barrel in South America was hardly moral, but it certainly was effective.

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IN JANUARY 1978, I attended a Department of the Army conference in Washington on the future role of women in the Army. The Carter administration advocated greatly expanding the number of Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) to include jobs in combat support units, and, it was rumored, eventually combat units themselves. I prepared for the conference by making a visit to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, which was one of our larger basic training centers. I wanted to see firsthand how well women recruits were doing.

Basic training was meant to be tough, but not anywhere near as difficult as more advanced combat training, such as Airborne Jump School or Ranger training. But the sergeants and young captains I talked to at Fort Jackson frankly admitted that they had to lower physical performance standards considerably to keep up the unofficial quotas of women soldiers they were required to train.

This in itself did not alarm me, because I'd known for years the volunteer Army would entail compromises. I knew there were plenty of jobs that didn't demand great strength, beyond traditional medical and clerical work, that women could fill just as well as men. In England during World War II, I'd encountered women military truck drivers, parachute riggers, train operators, and instructor pilots. By the late 1970s, the whole range of electronic warfare MOSs was open to women. But I personally drew the line at opening up combat support and combat assignments to women soldiers.

I knew there were a lot of *men* who were unsuited for these jobs, because they lacked the strength and temperament. And my experience in Korea during Operation PAUL BUNYAN had taught me that allowing women soldiers with small children in frontline support units could be a real disaster during times of alert, not to mention actual fighting.

So, armed with this experience and these convictions, I flew to Washington. Unfortunately the President's advocates, led by a senior Department of the Army lawyer and several other outspoken feminists, arrived armed for bear themselves. We quickly clashed.

"General," the lawyer said, glaring at me across the conference table, "you are nothing but a male chauvinist." She was tactful enough to leave the epithet "pig" unspoken.

I stated my case as best I could, granting the need for a greatly increased number of MOSs open to women soldiers. But I added, "Putting a woman into a combat support or combat MOS is insane."

One of the lawyer's feminist colleagues counterattacked. "The Soviet army used women in combat to great advantage in World War II, General," she said. "You should read your history more closely."

I was taken aback by her vituperation. "I served in combat in two theaters in that war, ma'am," I answered. "I believe I'm adequately familiar with its history."

"The Israeli army has women in all its combat units," the lawyer persisted. "I see no good reason why we shouldn't either."

They had a point to make, but I couldn't accept their arguments. Traditionally, high rank in the Army came to those who had successfully commanded troops in combat. But there were many exceptions to this tradition. General Eisenhower had never commanded troops in a frontline unit, nor had General Earle Wheeler. And I recognized the need to open senior rank to women career officers. But I simply could not accept a ground combat role for women.

When the conference adjourned, I decided to do some research of my own. My friend William Craig had written one of the best histories of the Soviet army in World War II, focused on the battle of Stalingrad. I contacted him to find out more about Soviet women in combat.

"It was a disaster, Jack," he said. "Men soldiers' loyalties were badly divided between their duty to their commander and loyalty to their paramours. The Red Army learned a lesson. Today, there are absolutely no Soviet women in combat assignments. In fact, they've got a smaller percentage of women soldiers than we do."

I next called the defense attaché at the Israeli embassy to ask about women combat soldiers in his country.

"Never, General," he said. "We would never put our women in a position where they could be captured by the enemy."

I explained the lawyer's insistence that women soldiers served in every Israeli combat unit.

"They hold administrative and signal positions in these units," the Israeli brigadier explained. "But whenever the unit goes on alert they are replaced by a male reservist, who is also trained for that position."

I tried to present this information on the final day of the conference, but my views were dismissed as irrelevant. I got the distinct impression that some civilians in the Department of the Army saw my effort as another criticism of the President's announced policies.

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ON APRIL 27, 1978, I was invited to address ROTC cadets at Georgia Tech as part of an ongoing Perspective Building Series. These lectures were meant to bring the cadets in contact with senior civilian officials and military officers for frank and open exchanges, in order to widen the young people's frame of reference. As busy as I was in the FORSCOM chief-of-staff job, I relished the opportunity to address the cadets. I was a product of the ROTC myself, and I saw the corps as a vital component of the new volunteer Army.

So I fine-tuned my standard talk on integrity and discipline and sent the revised text for approval to my public affairs officer. At the auditorium on the day of the lecture, I was surprised to find microphones on the podium and a TV camera nearby, because the organizers had assured me that the question-and-answer period following my talk would be off the record, in order to allow both me and the cadets to speak frankly. But my escort officer told me the mikes and camera were simply part of the Georgia Tech audio-visual group that regularly recorded these lectures.

The talk went well and I enjoyed the question period. Not all of the cadets were in uniform. In fact, many were in civilian clothes, so I couldn't tell which were Navy, Air Force, or Army. But Georgia Tech attracted sharp young men and women and I wasn't surprised by the relevance of their questions.

When the question period began, I emphasized that my answers were my personal views only and did not reflect official FORSCOM policy.

During the course of the long and thought-provoking question-and-answer period, there were four questions, of the twenty or so asked, which dealt with policy decisions already made by the Carter administration. The first of these requested my personal views concerning the cancellation of the B-1 bomber. I stated that I thought it was not in the best interests of the security of the United States to unilaterally cancel such an important strategic weapons system without getting any compensating concessions from the Soviets.

Another young man asked me about the recent decision to cancel development of the so-called neutron bomb, which was actually meant to be an enhanced-radiation short-range missile warhead or artillery shell. The warhead's only role was as an anti-tank weapon designed to kill Soviet or Chinese tank crews as they massed for an offensive. But the news media, responding to Soviet disinformation, had portrayed this tactical nuclear weapon as a diabolical capitalist invention designed to kill people and leave property intact. This was hogwash. The neutron warhead was meant to penetrate the hulls of enemy tanks, which standard battlefield nuclear weapons could not do.

I explained this and noted that from a military point of view, again, the cancellation had been a mistake. Above all, I said, it was illogical to give up such a trump card without demanding a reciprocal concession from the Soviets.

The third critical question concerned my views on the Panama Canal treaties. I stated frankly that giving the Canal to an unpredictable Panamanian government might mean that one day we would have to fight to have access to it. And I added that there probably had been ways to satisfy the aspirations of the Panamanian people for sovereignty over the Canal without giving away the valuable asset as we had.

A final question concerned the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) then under way. I stated frankly that I thought our chief U.S. delegate, Paul Warnke, was a poor choice, because he had a long tradition of advocating what I considered to be unilateral American nuclear disarmament. I suggested it might be better to send a tough American labor leader such as George Meany to the SALT talks, someone who had bare-knuckle negotiation experience.

I left the lecture hall to attend a private luncheon with faculty and student leaders, where, I'd been told, there'd be another off-the-record question period. I asked my military host, Lieutenant Colonel Wayne B. Davis, the head of the Military Science department, about the ground rules for this luncheon. I wanted to make sure we'd still be off the record. After all, the theme of my address had been the integrity of a professional officer and I hated to have to start hedging my answers. Colonel Davis said he would double-check. A few minutes later, he returned looking troubled and confused. Apparently, he hadn't been well informed on the ground rules for my visit. No one had told the lecture audience that the question-and-answer period was off the record.

I didn't think too much of it at the time, however, because I'd prefaced all my answers by stating they were my "personal opinion," not official. But the slip-up was annoying; had I known the session was for attribution, I would have declined to answer questions about official policy. In the middle of the lunch I got a call from the FORSCOM public affairs officer, Colonel Harry Heath.

"General," Heath said, obviously shaken, "we've just seen a story on the AP wire saying you have again criticized President Carter's policies."

I shook my head. Once more, I'd been sideswiped by the press. Colonel Heath read me the pertinent parts of the story. The reporter made it sound like I had conducted a carefully prepared personal attack on the President, instead of answering cadets' questions. I could well imagine the reaction in Washington. I immediately called General Fritz Kroesen to explain the situation. He asked to be kept informed.

Before the lunch was over, I received another call, this one from my staff

relaying an order from General Rogers that I be at his office in the Pentagon at ten the next morning to explain my actions. Fritz Kroesen was flying up for a Pentagon meeting and offered me a ride in his plane.

I met with a grim General Bernie Rogers in the Chief of Staff Office on the E-ring precisely at 10 A.M., April 28, 1978. While I was explaining the circumstances behind the press story, Army Secretary Clifford Alexander came through the private door between the Chief's and the Secretary's offices. He was absolutely quivering with rage, gripping a sheaf of yellow teleprinter wire copy.

"Did you say canceling the B-1 bomber was a mistake?" He thumped the sheet with his open palm.

"Yes, sir," I said, "but you have to understand the context in which I answered the student's question. I—"

He wasn't about to hear my explanation. "Did you say that Paul Warnke is a disarmament advocate?" the Secretary demanded.

"Sir," I explained, "I was more specific than that. I said he was a *unilateral* disarmament advocate. But that was an answer to—"

Again he interrupted, his face swollen with anger. "And did you say canceling the neutron bomb is like throwing a trump card away?"

"Yes, sir, I did." I tried to explain the context of my remarks. "I'd been told the question period was off the record, and the topic of my lecture was integrity. So when they asked my personal opinions, I had no intention of lying to those cadets."

But Alexander shook his head. "How on earth could you say such things in *public*?" He seemed about to fly into a real frenzy.

I knew Secretary Alexander was under a lot of pressure, as was Bernie Rogers. President Carter's badly muddled Korea withdrawal policy had just been torpedoed in Congress. Two days before, the House Armed Services Committee, led by Democrats, had voted an amendment requiring Carter to keep at least 26,000 American ground combat troops in Korea until a true peace agreement was signed. In other words, the 2nd Infantry Division would be in place for the duration. Carter had lost his first major foreign policy initiative only four months into his presidency.⁴⁰ Obviously, my comments in Atlanta had come at a bad time.

"Mr. Secretary," I added, "I certainly had no intention of embarrassing the Army."

At this point, Bernie Rogers intervened. "Sir," he said, "I'd like to keep this within the Army chain of command. And I'd like to get General Kroesen's recommendation on this matter."

I went back to the Pentagon FORSCOM section where General Kroesen kept an office. After all my years in the Pentagon, I finally had the use of a room with adequate space. It was a lovely spring morning in Washington.

"Well, General," I said, "I really ripped my knickers this time. I think the only honorable thing I can do now is request voluntary retirement."

We both knew fighting for my rights was a no-win proposition. I had no friends among the Department of the Army's political appointee legal staff after the disastrous confrontations over women soldiers.

Fritz shook his head. "Well, Jack," he said, "I think I agree with you."

He went back to Rogers and the Secretary to recommend I be permitted to submit a request for voluntary retirement effective May 31, 1978. The Secretary considered the matter for about two seconds and said he wanted me out of the Army by the 30th of April, which was only two days away. Fritz reminded them that I couldn't be processed out over a weekend. The Secretary graciously conceded that I be permitted to close down my office over the next week, then complete my retirement physical exams and paperwork as quickly as possible.

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THE next Monday I formally submitted my retirement, citing the "inadvertent public disclosure of my personal opposition to some of the policies of the current administration."

When Fritz Kroesen and I discussed the actual mechanics of my retirement, we agreed the Army wanted me kept under wraps during my final three weeks in limbo. Normally, I would have been entitled to a key place on the reviewing stand in a monthly retirement parade to which all the officers retiring at the post on the same date could invite friends and colleagues. Soldiers are sentimental about such parades. It's the last time they wear their uniforms for an official function. But I told Fritz attending a parade would draw unwanted media scrutiny and spoil the day for the other men. I would be leaving the Army after thirty-five years with no parade and no regrets.

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DURING my final flight physical examination at the Eisenhower Medical Center at Fort Gordon, Georgia, the medical officer colonel conducting the exam seemed uncomfortable. I asked him what the problem was.

"Sir," he said, "you've obviously got a number of service-connected disabilities." He listed my shrapnel wound and several back injuries. He then reminded me that the Army was cracking down on granting official disability status to senior officers.

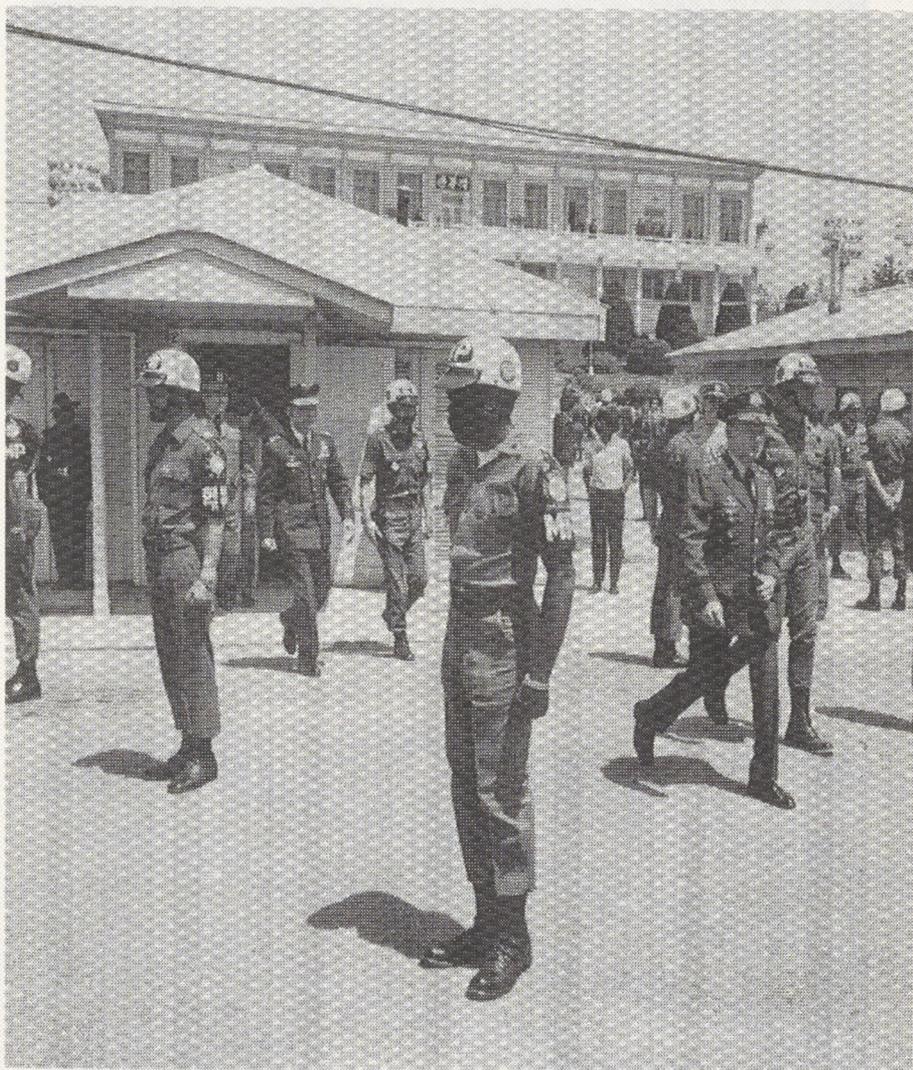
There had been a certain amount of abuse of disability status. A serviceman's pension became nontaxable in proportion to the percentage of his

disability on retirement. And the Colonel had been informed, he said, by the "highest authority," that I was to be released from the Army without disability.

The man looked away, embarrassed. Somebody in Washington was sending me a nasty retirement present.

Then the Colonel turned back to face me. "But, General," he added, "it's my duty to inform you that you are required to repeat this examination as soon as possible at a Veterans Administration hospital near your home. You may wish to know that they are authorized to grant disability status."

We grinned at each other, two old soldiers.



Panmunjom, Korea. Maj. Gen. Singlaub, senior United Nations Command representative, leads the other representatives leaving a meeting of the Armistice Commission.



Singlaub receives his second star from Dr. Wilbur (left) and Mary Singlaub (right).

Korea, 1976. Lt. Gen. John Cushman, commanding officer of the I Corps Group, briefs Maj. Gen. Singlaub on plans for Operation PAUL BUNYAN.





Cartoonist Bob Englehart's version of Gen. Singlaub's treatment by President Jimmy Carter.

Maj. Gen. Singlaub addresses the press at Fort McPherson, July 1977.





Fort McPherson, 1978. Maj. Gen. Singlaub accepts his army retirement certificate from Gen. Frederick Kroesen.

On the public speaking trail: Retired Generals Singlaub (left), George Patton III (center), and Daniel Graham (right).





Inside Nicaragua with Edén Pastora (second from left).

Las Vegas, Honduras, 1985. Singlaub with Col. Enrique Bermudez (center).





1985. Singlaub with Adolfo Calero (left) and Calero's brother Mario.

1986. Gen. Singlaub
with CIA director Bill
Casey.

