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# 'BEST I COULD GET,' GENERAL ASSERTS

## Westmoreland Says Outcome Was 'an Apology' by CBS

By PETER W. KAPLAN

"I figured it was the best I could get," Gen. William C. Westmoreland said yesterday of the out-of-court settlement of his libel suit against CBS. "It was in essence an apology. One does not have to use the word. One apologizes in other ways."

"If CBS had apologized in the first place," General Westmoreland said, "none of this would have happened."

### 'An Apology'

General Westmoreland characterized the statement that both he and the network's representatives signed as "an apology." He said it gave him the satisfaction he had been seeking since the beginning of the dispute with CBS that began with the broadcast in 1982 of a documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," and culminated with a joint statement yesterday stating the network's respect for the general's "long and faithful service to his country."

But General Westmoreland said he did not believe the settlement of the lawsuit had ended the dispute between himself and CBS.

"Is this my last battle?" he said yesterday as the late afternoon sun filled the hotel room in which he has lived during the trial that began in October. "It may be wishful thinking, but I hope so. But I know full well CBS may strike back."

The general's conversation ranged from assertions of betrayal by his former subordinates, to perceptions of himself as a victim of television, to a parallel with Mike Wallace, the CBS correspondent, whom General Westmoreland portrayed — like himself — as a man who paid less-than-necessary attention to the performance of his duties.

### 'Center Stage'

Sitting in shirtsleeves, his red tie loosened, General Westmoreland seemed relaxed but not exultant, satisfied but not glorying in a victory. He spoke of himself as a man who had been placed "center stage in one of the most unpopular conflicts in the history of the country" and who had been a fallible leader in his handling of the Vietnam War.

"I admit that some of my judgments were not the best, based on some of the decisions I made," he said, "but I was making decisions constantly. People were going in and out of my office. I was constantly on the rope and working seven days a week. And I just lived with my work."

But he said he was "truly shocked" by the CBS documentary. "Maybe it was my naiveté," he said, "but it just never occurred to me that they'd do that. I figured I was just an old soldier."

"The fact that we as a nation didn't win the war," he went on, "made a lot of people look for scapegoats. And some of the military did the same."

He pointed to the testimony against him by some of his former intelligence officers as an example, and he described the appearance of Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, who testified against him, as "inexplicable to me."

"McChristian was a very proud man," General Westmoreland said, "and a very ambitious person. He was awarded two Distinguished Service Medals, and I gave both of them to him."

I promoted him to major general. I gave him very good efficiency reports, I got him his own command. For some strange and fascinating reason, somewhere along the line, he developed a vendetta. And I can't explain it. I just can't explain it."

"If I had known about this," he said, referring to his subordinates' sense of suppressed dissent because of disagreement over troop estimates, "I would have jumped on this immediately. And what I probably would have done, is I would have gone to Gen. Creighton Abrams and said we've got an unhappy fellow here, he's unhappy with some of the decisions of his boss, would you dig into this and get back to me immediately."

### Empathy With Mike Wallace

General Westmoreland said that he felt victimized and that he empathized with Mike Wallace.

"I knew Mike Wallace and I thought well of him," he said. "I think Mike was a busy man. By his own admission he was working on a number of things. I guess, I think Mike was victim of circumstances as I was."

General Westmoreland said that when he saw the CBS documentary, he felt he had no choice but to take legal action.

"Maybe it was my sense of 'duty, honor, country' that made me pursue it," he said, citing the motto of the United States Military Academy, from which he graduated and whose Superintendent he was.

"It looked," he said, "like they were trying to make me out to be the second Benedict Arnold, and I felt I had to defend myself."

He said that he had received some first-hand evidence that the suit, he said, had already had an effect on television itself.

"Senior officials at CBS, and at other networks," he said, "have approached me and said: 'You have contributed a service. We have been more truthful, more careful because of what you have done.'"

General Westmoreland declined to give the names of the network officials who had congratulated him.

### He's Happy It's Over

Yesterday, sitting with a glass of Coca Cola in his hotel room, General Westmoreland said, "At the age of 71, maybe I can start living and close the door on this thing. My wife thinks not, but I am not going to be party to starting it up again."

"I am going to enjoy what may be the last few years I have," he said, standing up. "unless CBS decides to be my perpetual tormentor."

His wife, Kitsy, walked into the room and told the general that it was time he take a bath.

"You have to take a bath," she said, "and a nap. You're going on television."

"Well, I'm not taking a bath until tonight," he said.

"You'll want to take a bath so you can think clearly," Mrs. Westmoreland.

"A bath," General Westmoreland said, "is not going to help me to think clearly."

"You're going on television, Westy," Mrs. Westmoreland said. "You'll want to think clearly."

General Westmoreland laughed.