

Westmoreland still defending Vietnam War

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

More than a dozen years after the last troop withdrawal, Vietnam can still muster controversy.

A small contingent of students quietly demonstrated outside an auditorium Wednesday on the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus where former commander of troops in Vietnam, Gen. William Westmoreland, spoke about the history of U.S. involvement in southeast Asia.

"America's traumatic experience could be a blessing in disguise," Westmoreland said. "Our timely commitment saved other Asian countries. It gave them a 10-year breather spell from communist aggression."

Vietnam veterans, students and members of the community heard Westmoreland conclude that the unpopular war was lost not on the battlefields, but in the U.S. political arena.

WESTMORELAND WAS invited to campus as part of a distinguished speaker series.

Westmoreland, who worked on 17 battle campaigns in three wars, seemed particularly bitter about the public image of Vietnam veterans. He attacked some myths and attributed his figures to nationally conducted surveys.

"There is no difference in drug use between veterans and non-veterans," he said. "Less than one half of 1 percent (of all Vietnam vets) has been in jail for committing a crime. Eighty-six percent (of the U.S. soldiers) who died in Vietnam were Caucasian. Ninety-seven percent received honorable discharge."

"The average age of the man who fought in Vietnam was under 19," Westmoreland said. "The average age of the World War II fighter was 26. The young soldier in Vietnam realized he didn't have public support and that was a ter-

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—Gen. William Westmoreland, Ret.

rible burden to carry.

"FEW PEOPLE in the 1940s and '50s would believe men would be sent to war and stage a welcome home in honor of themselves. This is what happened in Washington in 1982. We built a monument to ourselves through private donations."

Westmoreland spent 4½ years of his 36 years of military service in Vietnam. In 1965 he was named Time magazine's Man of the Year. More recently Westmoreland was embroiled in con-

siderable profile segment in which he was featured. Westmoreland dropped a slander/misrepresentation lawsuit against the network last year.

In a lull that followed the retired general's speech, Westmoreland quipped to the audience: "Go ahead, ask me anything. I guarantee you can't embarrass me." The crowd responded with a barrage of questions.

In a brief political history, Westmoreland outlined the path of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

"POST-WORLD War II the commu-

nists were trying to dominate every piece of real estate they could get their hands on," Westmoreland said. "In 1947, President Truman pledged support to the free people of the world."

Westmoreland squarely lays responsibility for U.S. involvement in Vietnam on President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy believed southeast Asia was the cornerstone of the free world, Westmoreland said. As president, Kennedy increased the size of the Army, sponsored the Green Berets, and encouraged nuclear parity with the Soviets.

"Kennedy greatly increased our involvement in Vietnam by sending military advisors and assenting to the overthrow of the South Vietnamese president," Westmoreland said. "This morally locked us into Vietnam. There was no one competent to run the country after the death of the president."

"Vietnam had been dominated by the Chinese for 1,000 years and the French for 100 years. They didn't know how to

govern themselves."

PRESIDENT JOHNSON inherited the problem and increased the national debt to increase U.S. involvement there, Westmoreland said.

"The obsession with Vietnam was emotional, not strategic," he said. "The war was allowed to drag on and on, influenced by daily television reports."

Westmoreland believes a theoretically workable solution was reached in the 1972 Paris Peace Accord, but that it was destroyed by the Case-Church Amendment of 1974.

"Congress disallowed any funds be spent in that part of the world," Westmoreland said. "The amendment nixed support for the South Vietnamese government. The U.S. had paralyzed itself."

"The accord was broken in 1975. The American military was not defeated in South Vietnam. The troops had been gone almost two years. The war was lost by politicians in Washington. We defaulted."

Gasoline costs keep dropping — AAA survey

AAA of Michigan said its bi-weekly gasoline price survey showed the biggest drop in prices since AAA began keeping records on a bi-weekly basis in June 1984.

The decline brings the average cost of self-serve gasoline to the lowest level since April 1985.

AAA also said the state average annual cost of self-serve, no-lead gasoline — the most popular fuel purchased — last year was \$1.236 per gallon, the lowest average in five years.

The figure was 16.1 cents below the 1981 average of \$1.397 per gallon, the highest-ever yearly average price.

AAA began tracking the cost of no-lead fuels in May 1979.

In the metropolitan area, self-serve no-lead averaged \$1.20 per gallon last year, the lowest average since 1981's record level of \$1.372.

Service station officials attribute the decreases to the world oil glut and strong competition.

AAA surveys 100 stations in metropolitan Detroit to garner prices.

The survey showed regular gasoline dropped 4.1 cents in two weeks to average \$1.114 per gallon, 32.6 cents below the full-serve price.

Self-serve no-lead dropped 5.6 cents to average \$1.195 per gallon, 31.3 cents below full-serve. The range was \$1.079 to \$1.339.

At full-serve pumps, no-lead decreased 0.9 cent to average \$1.508 per gallon. Full-serve regular dipped 1.3 cents to an average \$1.44 per gallon.

A check of 300 stations along major Michigan roads shows self-serve no-lead decreased 3.3 cents to average \$1.212 per gallon, 18.5 cents below the full-serve price.

Self-serve regular dropped 2.8 cents to average \$1.144 per gallon, 18.2 cents below full-serve.

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