

WH6602-06-9650-9651_scroller

Date: 1966-02-21

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Henry Luce

Start Time: 09:35

Place: Mansion

SCROLLER TITLE: "He Is a Master Strategist"

SCENE SETTER: Speaking with Time-Life founder Henry Luce, President Johnson assessed the capabilities and character of General William C. Westmoreland, who headed the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) from 1964 to 1968.

President Johnson: I spent a lot of time with [William C.] Westmoreland, because this thing was worrying me, and I needed to know him pretty well. And I came away feeling very good, so far as he's concerned. He is a master strategist, and he has a social consciousness that makes him worthy of the highest responsibilities. And I think he's doing a rather exceptional job, if we can do as good a job here.

Henry Luce: Yeah.

End of excerpt 1.

President Johnson: We—Westmoreland feels, and we don't dare mention his optimism, because we've been burnt by some of [Robert S. "Bob"] McNamara's previous optimism.

Luce: Right.

President Johnson: But Westmoreland thinks that he is getting on of top of it. And he killed, from January the 10th through February the 12th, when we were out there, he killed 5,800. He wounded about 15,000 more.

Luce: Yeah.

President Johnson: He doesn't think that they can take many months at 20,000 a month.

Luce: Yeah.

President Johnson: But these folks here are wanting to pass some kind of a resolution. They're making speeches implying they want to put on some amendment to say that, "Well, we are for what you've done but don't escalate." Well, now, when Westmoreland asks me for additional men to come in a hurry, I have to give him what I think is prudent and what I can. And, of course, that does involve escalation.

Luce: Yeah.

President Johnson: And I've got the snipers all over the place, and they don't really understand it, but they're giving us the devil.

Luce: Yeah, I can see that. Well, I should think that the right answer to that is—one is that you have a . . . since you're not going to just hand over the territory to the guerrillas, and so on, the most economical way of doing it in line is to do it as fast as possible.

President Johnson: That's what we're doing.

Luce: Yeah. And that means more firepower. The shorter time is more economical than extending the firepower over a much longer period. See what I mean?

President Johnson: I sure do. That's his theory.

Luce: Well, I think that's the kind of—I think that's right in almost any kind of . . . a human situation.

President Johnson: Well, Henry, we just moved—

Luce: If [*unclear*] going to do something, then we may as well go—really go at it instead of fiddling around.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: Conversation WH6602-06-9650-9651, 21 February 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.