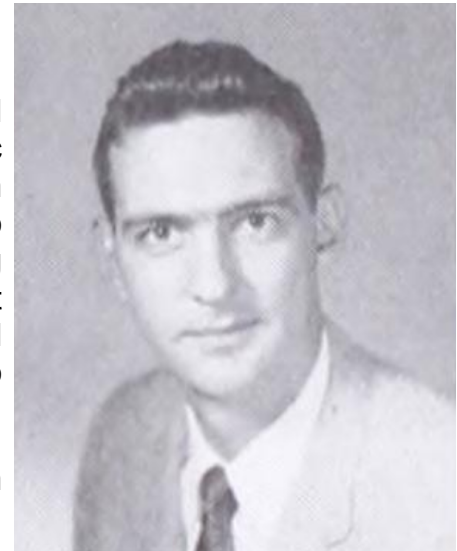


## Victim of Tet

By the fall of 1967, President Lyndon Johnson had become concerned by the declining levels of public support for his administration's prosecution of the war in Vietnam. More and more Americans were beginning to think that the United States had erred in becoming involved in a struggle that seemed to have little direct impact on national interests. A November opinion poll revealed that a majority of Americans either wanted to win or get out.



The president summoned General William Westmoreland to Washington for consultations. Westmoreland, the commander of American forces in Vietnam, was emphatic that the US, along with its South Vietnamese and other allies, was winning the war. During an interview, Westmoreland dared his communist adversaries to launch an attack telling *Time* magazine, "I hope they try something because we are looking for a fight." Be careful what you wish for.

One of the members of Westmoreland's logistics staff at his headquarters in Saigon was Major Charles Lollis, Clemson College Class of 1963. Lollis's job included ensuring the supply of weapons to allied troops from the Republic of Korea, a duty that frequently took him into contested areas.

Charles Lollis was already an Army veteran by the time he enrolled at Clemson. Dick Mattox, Class of 1951, returned to Fort Jackson in the summer of 1953 following his service in the Korea War. He was assigned as a company commander, guiding young men through their basic training. Based on the recommendation of his first sergeant, Mattox assigned Lollis as an acting platoon sergeant based on the fact that Lollis had completed a year of college—at Bob Jones University—and had spent some time with an Army Reserve outfit. Lollis made such an impression that six years later, when Mattox was working in the admissions office at Clemson, Mattox immediately recognized Lollis's name when it appeared on an admissions application. "I contacted him shortly after his arrival and indeed he was the same man," Mattox recalled. Mattox recruited Lollis to join his Army Reserve battalion headquartered in Clemson. "I again had the opportunity to serve with this good man."



Lollis, from nearby Liberty, enrolled at Clemson as an electrical engineering major for only one academic year. He then worked as a bowling alley manager and became involved in construction work. In 1961, he accepted a position with Sangamo Company

living in Illinois for six months. By then, he and his wife Jean had four children, two boys and two girls. In January 1963, Lollis, now a captain, returned to active duty and was assigned to Fort Gordon, Georgia. Assignments in Alaska and New Jersey followed. While in Alaska, Lollis was promoted to major. After completing a Signal Corps school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, Lollis was ordered to Vietnam.

On January 30, 1968, Westmoreland got his wish. The “something” the enemy tried came to be known as the Tet Offensive, the largest attack of the war, in which more than 80,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops attacked targets all over South Vietnam, including its capital Saigon.

On February 6, Major Lollis was killed when the military vehicle he was riding in was ambushed by enemy forces. The fighting in Saigon would last into the middle of February. The North Vietnamese would lose between 32,000 and 45,000 killed during their offensive. More than 1,500 American and other allied personnel would be killed, but the shock of the attack had an even greater impact.

After Tet, American public opinion turned sharply against the war. In March, President Johnson announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection.

Lollis was survived by his widow Jean and their children Charles, David, Janice and Sandra. He was awarded the Legion of Merit (posthumously), Purple Heart and Army Commendation Medal. Major Lollis is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

