

Oral Transcript

Interviewer: Sharon Milligan

Oral History Candidate: Dana Waller, Class of '58

June 4, 2011 in Palm Springs, CA, Bi-Annual Reunion

*I'm Sharon Milligan and we're at Brown Military Academy Alumni Reunion in Palm Springs and it's June 4<sup>th</sup>. Could you tell me your name, class year?*

Dana Waller, D-A-N-A Waller, Class of 1958 and I was in Pacific Beach.

*And what's your address?*

21429 Lighthill Drive, Topanga, California

*What's your age?*

71.

*How did you get to Brown Military Academy and why did you end up there?*

It was right after the Korean conflict. My father was a major in the military and decided that I needed some discipline, so I went there in the summer of '56 and I spent 1956, '57 and '58. I spent my plebe year as a private, my second year as a corporal, then my senior year, in 1958, I came back as a first sergeant and graduated as the company commander of B-Company.

*What was your plebe year like?*

It was absolutely horrible. There was a lot of physical hazing, a lot of mental torment. There was a lot of fear. There was an individual there that normally attends all of these. His name was Jose Lachinco and he was a graduate of another military school and he ended years later as we understand it, running the West Point of the Philippines. This man was very intelligent. He is now a lawyer in Las Angeles. But I've never feared anybody that I've feared him. He used to have white glove inspections. He'd come into your room with a white glove and check every corner, the pipes under your sink, anything and there were some other things that people really don't want to talk about.

*Did you have a choice to not go back the next year because of this, or was that not an option?*

I didn't have to go back, or didn't have to stay. I sort of relished it; that's why I stayed and became what I did. I thought it was great; I liked the military training. We had an army captain and four master sergeants on active duty as our ROTC group because we attained such high standards in the school that the U.S. government supported us with these people and with rifles and mortars and everything there was to go with it. I liked it; I liked the comradeship.

*What's it like transitioning into Year Two? If Year One's so difficult, what's Year Two like?*

Year Two is a blessing, because you're an upper-classman and you don't have to walk on the concrete sides of the hallway, the eight inches of concrete with linoleum in the middle, which we were never allowed to step on that linoleum while we were in that school, I mean, in that plebe year. There's so many things. You don't have to stand at attention all the time. You're sitting at the table, we had our milk in large, metal pitchers and if you wanted some milk or somebody drank all the milk, you hold that

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pitcher out there until your arm started shaking, until perspiration came down your forehead and then somebody, an upper-classman would reach into the table; one of them might recognize you after five minutes, which is a long time and say, 'what do you want, plebe dumb John', and you say 'we need some milk, sir' and he'd say, 'then go.' All our meals were eaten square; you bring your fork up, bring it straight to your mouth and back, everything; they call those square meals. We went strictly by the West Point plebe system. We needed to know all the sayings, recite from memory *How is the Cow* and there's just all these sayings that you couldn't go on past unless you knew how to recite them.

*Do you still say them in your sleep?*

I still say them in my sleep and one of the things just came up tonight when I first met up with some of these people was about the description, the full-page description of the M1 rifle that we carried and I recited, this one individual was saying about officers and they didn't know this or that and they said our guys were pretty smart and I recited the whole thing, word-for-word, a whole page of the complete nomenclature of the M1 rifle, delivering large volumes of fire on individuals and everybody was pleased that I still remembered at 71.

*How did your rise in rank occur? Not everybody moved up, so what is it about you that you ended up in the position...*

This is not something that I'm proud of, but I was a pretty bad guy physically.

*Bad-ass or...?*

Bad-ass. I was probably gutsy, at 175 pounds, I was probably one of the gutsiest guys in school. I would fight anybody. The school had to respect that to a degree and the Military Science and Tactics, the ROTC group had to too because it's hard to take a leadership role when you're 17 and you've got all these hundred and some children-a lot of them were children-you know, I mean they were 13, 12-13 years old, you know, just going into high school age, so...

[Stranger comes by] Waller: Got it, thanks for your help. Stranger: *I was going to offer you guys; I've got a spare bedroom.* Waller: Oh thank you, thanks!

Well anyway, that was one of the factors. I guess some of them respected the fact that after the Korean conflict, my father was the province marshal, the head of military police for the 40<sup>th</sup> Division, who had fought in Korea. They went, he was too old to go, so they made him an instructor and put him in charge. He used to come to the school. You know, a lot of things, but I think that was more it and I wasn't really a dummy.

*What was your rank in your second year there?*

My second rank, I think I only ended up being a sergeant.

*And then the third year?*

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Third year I came back as the first sergeant and I became a lieutenant and then I became the company commander.

*So describe company commander.*

Company commander is-the only great advantage to it was that on each floor of the barracks, they had a faculty room that had their own bathroom and each company commander had a faculty room, so I was in charge of the whole barracks. I had all four floors and everybody there, I had a first sergeant, three lieutenants and 12-15 sergeants and a hundred and some cadets that I was responsible for.

*A lot of people.*

Yeah. I was very cocky in those days, and that's why I came back when I said I wanted to be the first sergeant because I said I wanted to mold this company because someday I would be the company commander, so I guess when you've got ambition and you're cocky, I guess that helped too in getting me promoted. But it wasn't all that easy for a lot of guys. I don't know if some of them couldn't get promoted based on the fact that there was all the extra expenses, with uniforms, with the shekels that we wore, the West Point shekels we had to buy, the plumes, you had to buy a sword for the officers and even the gold stripes and things so there were added expenses but my parents were able to come up with it, so that helped too, but the A-Company commander, who was my rival, went on to become a Colonel in the air force and unfortunately we learned several years ago that after he retired, he committed suicide. Jim Brooks. So, it just goes to show you. And then the individual who was in charge of the band company was very active in this association for years and all of a sudden dropped out, so we don't know what the situation was there. I mean, he was selling cars and all of a sudden, boom, nobody ever saw or heard from him again. Those are the three of us from that era. But that's it, as far as the rank goes. And I did get suspended on a number of occasions. I mean, not the smartest person in the world when we are going to go across the street and confront 30 San Diego teenagers to make the plans right under the chaplain's window. When they called me in there after we had put a couple in the hospital and the police showed up and we all ran back onto campus, they called me in the next day and said we're not gonna bust you, we're going to suspend you because-I was first sergeant then-and you're not the smartest person, sharpest tack that we've got down here-you know not good planning when you do it and the chaplain is standing at the window, listening to you do it-

*Could people lose rank and then go back up?*

Yeah. Anybody that had leadership potential or [whispers] *was a bad ass*, they would get promoted back. I mean, I got suspended. I had to wear tape across my stripes, I had to march behind my company and that was for like two months, but about one month later they promoted me to lieutenant and then couple months later they promoted me to captain.

*Any really significant thing you can think of that happened there while you were there? Any historical thing or military thing that you witnessed or were a part of?*

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Other than the inspections that they sent the group, the colonel and the lieutenant-colonel and a couple captains and master sergeant from Washington D.C. every year to inspect us and watch us train and we would train for them, and then they would say, are we going to let this captain and these four master sergeants stay there and is the U.S. government—that's a lot of wages that they're putting out there, plus all the arms and everything. We used to go up to, what's the marine base, Penaltion and fire our weapons. We used 22's then; we didn't fire the M1's that we had. We used to march up above the school, up in the hills and we would be marching up there and the marines would be marching down in their exercises and we'd march through the middle of them and it was things like that. There were a lot of good times. They did have in the year I wanted to quit-'57-they had what they called the milk riots. We used to get all the milk we wanted. They cut us back to cartons of milk. Everybody went, they kicked out about 5 or 6 of the top people in the school, top cadets. Santena and a lot of these guys that everyone respected the most. There's one individual, he usually comes here: Joe Mobe. He was probably the greatest inspiration that any of us had. There were people that just were, you know, you'd almost die for. You were in this isolated thing. The only women were the chaplain's wife and couple servers in the mess hall. So you looked to other people to respect and there were a few people like that, obviously. Eson Onadare, he was another one.

*Niko?*

Niko Siles was another one that everybody respected and to this day, you can see it in him, where he's very laid back. There's just something, he's got charisma.

*Did you end up serving in the military after?*

I joined the army in 1959. I went to live in Hawaii for a year and then I joined the army and I stayed in 5 years. In the military police, I was a sergeant, a young sergeant in the military police. I served almost four years in Germany.

*What base in Germany?*

I was in the northern sector. I was part of a unit that was stationed in Heidelberg. There were 60 of us in all of Europe, and we were assigned to the German government. My base was in Brammerhowen, Bramen, Hamburg and all the northern ports and we were customs inspectors. And we were there from after the 1949, and then the Germans got their constitution back, they that we need help in processing people at the borders, so the U.S. government established this unit and mostly officers and all the rest were sergeants. One of the gentlemen that is here, he may come back, he and I met in military school, became friends, went in the army together, we both went to the same unit in Germany. We were 500 miles apart. He was at the airport in Frankfurt and I was in northern...and we're still friends to this day; we're both 71.

*What was the transition like into military life after Brown?*

Well, I had spent a year living in Hawaii and bumming around.

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*So what was it like bumming around and going back?*

I was sort of hard. I see...of the armed force and police in Hawaii because I looked so military; I had a short hair cut. But besides that, going into the military, we did well. We were both squad leaders in basic training, acting squad leaders. We went to Fort Hood, Texas, then to the M Peace Corps in Georgia. Then we flew to Germany and I reenlisted one time after 2 years, so I stayed a total of 5 years and came back and spent my last part of my tour at the Persidio in San Francisco, as a patrol supervisor and it was very exciting. I applied for officer school and I qualified for it on my tests, but in the end, it was such a hassle, because of all the paperwork and paperwork going back and forth from my parents day in and day out, trying to get security checks and FBI check and everything, you know they do all these things and I finally really gave up because I was already a young sergeant. I don't think I had any bearing on the fact that I got out of the service because I was planning on getting out because I was planning on going into law enforcement, which I didn't end up doing, but it's hard to say.

*You have a lovely woman sitting next to you. Do you want to introduce us to her and tell us how you met and then we're going to ask you just a couple questions and we'll let you go.*

This is Suzette and she and I, we both worked for the telephone company; we were in management and we met, we worked in the same office. I had worked in the field for years and years and didn't think they ran things good in the office, so they asked me to come in and do my thing and then they promoted me. And we met and we started dating, and we didn't find out for some time that she was from San Diego and lived two doors from Brown Military Academy. Course, she's a youngster, so she was about nine years younger than I was when I graduated from there, but anyway, that's how we met.

*So it's pretty fascinating to think that we're actually sitting with someone who lived across the street from the academy. My mind is just like, tell me what that looked like; tell if you recall seeing it, what experiences did you have; what's your memory of that institution being so close to you?*

What I remember at that age was I looked across the street and I saw all these old buildings but I do remember a trickle of young boys coming over to Henry's Hamburger Stand and but not really paying that much attention to it. I was really young; I was like nine years old and so it wasn't the first attention that I had.

*But it's a memory that you think back?*

Yeah, I can think back and remember seeing, like I said, very old buildings and very structured.

*Did your family ever, I mean you were young, did your family ever warn you to be aware?*

Oh no. We lived in Pacific Beach for about 6 months and then we moved to another area and by that time they had the last class there at Brown and they were starting to tear it down. So it was one of those distant memories, but you just never know what's going to happen, because years later...

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*Where were you guys when you started talking about, what kind of event was going on when you started recalling these memories and started connecting the dots?*

(Dana) I think we were going down to see her dad, to meet her dad in San Diego and we were talking about, oh there's Pacific Beach because I had never talked about the military school and I said, oh I went to military school there and she said I used to live there, and I said, well that's only two blocks away and yeah, yeah, yeah and then we talked about the restaurant, obviously, where the, the hamburger stand, where we got our ten cent hamburgers and things. In the evenings, we used to send some of the underclassmen, if you were a Senior or an upperclassman, we could send a younger guy across the street to get hamburgers and stuff for the Seniors or upperclassmen and that's how some of the problems came about, because of the fact that the guys would harass them and that their caps, because we had to wear uniforms the whole time we weren't allowed to have civilian clothes.

*Did you see people in town in uniforms? Do you recall that at all?*

(Suzette) Not really, no, I guess I was really too young. [Dana whispers something]

*What did you think of that uniform, just out of curiosity, since you had to wear it all the time in public? What was it like? Did you like it in general, and then how did it feel?*

I liked it, I did. I thought it was neat. I guess in my plebe year I didn't because we didn't have the clout that we had in the Senior year, but in my Junior year, it got better and then as far as my Senior year went, we got a lot more respect from the people in town and stuff like that and from the young male individuals gave us more respect so we didn't mind going into town.

*So in closing, what would be a final thought of maybe something that's lasted you your life, a value or an ideal or something significant that is a part of who you are today because of Brown?*

Probably with the kids, our kids, that you've got to tread lightly and not carry the big stick. I think I really treated the kids well, the fact that knowing how brutal things could be and like we said, plebe year was brutal. It was, there were kids that broke. It wasn't good. They changed those policies later...

*Around when? When do you think?*

'57, '58? By the time I was a Senior, they had...

*So this would have gone on in maybe the 30s or 40s?*

No, it was going on in 1956. Not knocking him, but when Jose Lachinco was there and these upperclassmen, and we had Junior college there and being that we had junior college, we had older guys there and it was different; they were more mature. Some of them may have been more brutal, or whatever you want to call it. '56, '57, '58 and then I knew people, a lot of people that went to the other school when they moved up north and I know things really leveled off then.

*Which was for the good, that was for the better.*

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Oh yes, it was. At the time, when I became a Junior, I thought this is great, you know, I went through hell and now we're going to bring hell upon them, but even by the time I became a Senior, we had really changed, I guess we had become more mature and maybe some of the less sadistic people or more sadistic people had left.

*Thank you for your time; I really appreciate it.*