

Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Michael D. Milligan

Oral History Candidate: Jack Sparn, Class of '63, Glendora Campus

May 18, 2011, San Diego, CA, Bi-Annual Reunion

I'm conducting the oral history of Brown Military School-excuse me, Brown Military Academy, Palm Springs, reunion 2011.

I am Jack Michael Sparn, S-P-A-R-N. I graduated in the class of 1963 in Glendora, and I currently live in Tampa, Florida.

Jack, what brought you to Brown Military Academy? Using after that question my father said, 'or bust', and what took you to-?

Sure, it was a situation where I'm a native of Colorado and my parents relocated to Las Angeles in 1956; I had to have been at the age of 6th grade at the time, and so when they relocated to Las Angeles, they felt that-cause I'd been going to public schools up until then, and there wasn't anything special about me in that sense. They thought it would be good if I would go to a private school or some school outside of the Las Angeles school district, so one day we went down and visited one academy called Elsnor Military School, in Lake Elsnor and looked at that campus and talked to a couple of people there and then that same day, we drove down to San Diego off of Garnet Street and Mission Bay and was shown around the campus there at Browns by a Major Bitterman and it was of course, very military, very structured and for whatever reason, I really thought that that would be a really great place and my mother turned to me and said, well which one do you like? And Browns certainly seemed by far superior to anything and not only that, it did have clear through the time of junior college. I was in 6th grade; it was honor ROTC and had really a great reputation and I think a lot of things about the school besides just being a boarding school for kids-male kids-it also seemed to have a lot of Christian upbringing, a lot of values, you know, sort of the phrase, duty and honor seemed to just sort of reek from the place. West Point of the west is the term that was used, so anyway, I started Brown Military Academy then in 1956, in 6th grade and stayed at Browns then through until I graduated in 12th grade in 1963.

Wow.

So I was there 7 years.

So at 6th-when you were 12 years old, what you said, I can't believe you were thinking that when you were 12 years old. You probably, I mean it was-it had deep tradition when you walked onto campus, didn't it?

It did, and it was really shocking. I mean, in a way, it was sort of like drinking from a fire hose, that I went in from a very unstructured, loving home environment that, you know, any 12-year-old would preferably have, a fairly good family and whatever, I mean, they took care of me, and then suddenly, I'm in an environment in which you're told to stand at attention; you're told to speak unless you're spoken to; you're told to make your bed in just a perfect way every morning; you have to polish your shoes each day; you had to eat what we called square meals, sitting on the edge of your chair and not looking around and not talking, you know a lot of very rigid structures things, that were typically really only known at the honor academies, like West Point or something, where you saw that kind of behavior, but for whatever reason, I adapted to it and embraced it, and sort of found it to be something I could excel

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in or something I felt that I had an opportunity to excel. I wasn't necessarily the smartest or the brightest or the best by any means, but I-the environment was one in which you always had an opportunity to be the smartest and the brightest and the best.

Mmm-hmm. It's interesting that you're one of the few people that I've talked to that started out in elementary school and continued on, so did you have to do part of that plebe stuff when you got to high school or did you do it when you were-I think you had to be in high school, right?

I actually did it twice. I was one of the few, because we had what we called lower school and so on because that was my first year, you're treated by-even in 6th grade-and lower school was 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. We would call it middle school sort of nowadays or junior high. If you were in 6th grade at middle school or in lower school, you were considered the lowest of the low and you weren't allowed any privileges whatsoever, privileges in the sense of going off-campus on weekends or doing special stuff. Now it's true that in lower school, I'll call it the physical roughness that we would have to go through was not nearly what we were experiencing in 9th grade, but still, it was one of you know, push-ups. We had a demerit system. If you screwed up about anything-you had dust on your footlocker, you maybe would get two or three demerits and the way you worked off demerits, you either had to walk extra hours around the quadrangle with a rifle, or you could work them off faster, which we sometimes tended to do, that the lower school commandant would basically spank you. He would bend over his desk, he would take out his 18" ruler, big wooden ruler, heavy one-they don't make them that way nowadays and you would get a half hour off or an equivalent, a demerit off per whack. So if you had five demerits, you could get ten whacks, and he hit you as hard as he could.

This is scary. Was that at San Diego?

This was at San Diego, 6th grade and 7th grade, so-

Oh my gosh.

Yeah, so there was I guess you could call it-

But you had the option, you could have walked the triangle.

I could have walked the triangle, yes.

You made the decision; the decision that you could work it off faster by doing this or, okay-I want to make that clear, it just wasn't you're going to get whacked and that's just the way it is.

Yeah, no. I really wasn't and there were only a few incidents that I can recall that someone got physically-I'll just say hit or struck by a senior-level leader, or another cadet due to some misbehavior or whatever, but that will occur in any school. But it definitely was a situation where you knew that if you didn't follow the rules, you were going to get punished, and whether the punishment was in the form of demerits or restriction, or you couldn't do something that you really wanted to do that the other kids could do, you learned very, very quickly and so it was one of those, I guess and this would be all the way

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through, you know, even your senior year in high school, is that it was very obvious and very specific what was right and what was wrong. And you always had a choice to choose one or the other. Certain things that were not tolerated whatsoever-again, no matter what year of school you were in, was lying and cheating. That was sort of like the worst of the worst.

You know it was funny, I was talking to some guys downstairs; they were saying that they cheated because the chemistry teacher would write the questions on the blackboard, then pull the thing down and they'd sneak in and pick up the thing, write the questions down and go get the answers. I said to me that's not cheating because you had to go look those answers up. You had to figure out what the answers were for the question. To me, cheating was, you're in class and you copy off your fellow guys' paper. That was cheating. Technically what they did was cheating, but they were never caught. I can't believe that they were never caught. I can't believe that I'm-everything you guys did, never went unnoticed.

That's a good point, because it really didn't, and then instructors, the teachers, three-quarters of them were military themselves, majors, colonels-

-Regular army, right?

Regular army or air force, whatever, but they had a strong military background besides their teacher degree, so they understood the routine, but I would say this, even in your example of I'll just say subtle-I'll just say cutting corners-

-Right, cutting corners.

-And not doing precisely what was really expected of you. If you were caught, you could always expect some sort of a negative outcome, even if it was little. So, for example, if you were caught talking in class when you were told not to talk-just a misbehavior, it was not tolerated, and the teacher would act and have you do something, like sit still, or stay an extra hour or get demerits and you had to work that Sunday or that Saturday. You had to do things if you were caught and there was also going to be some outcome. Now the reverse of that though, this is where it's the carrot and the stick, where, if you did well and did what you were supposed to do and you really worked hard and achieved, you got recognition. So another really great thing about that school and its history was that you got recognized for what you did bad and you got recognized for what you did good, as opposed to just being a member of the crowd.

-Mediocre, right.

And so what I think is sad about Brown not being around, or that kind of vision not being around, it I do think a lot of schools, certainly the colleges nowadays, you can almost just sort of go through college if you just show up. There isn't necessarily recognition or there isn't necessarily any punishment if you don't go to class or you fail a course, you just take it over. You know, it'd as you said, a form of mediocrity and laziness or lack of achievement and at Browns, you could not be average and do well.

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You would explode. And in fact, with the system is the more senior-level kids in the school, say the NCOs and officers would actually go after and really-I'll call it pick on them-and really cruelly go after the kids who were trying to just get by and were trying to just to a little, and not necessarily to bully them by any means; it was to encourage them to do better and to quick doing whatever it is that they were doing wrong.

The last guy I just interviewed, he came from Colexico, and he was talking about how the sergeant was standing behind him, he was being corporal for the first time, he's a kind of introvert, he's standing before the platoon to get them ready, the sergeant stands behind him and pushes him, you need, you know, your mother paid a lot of money for this, you need to do this, you need to push harder, you need to find a second-lieutenant, so I mean he said that was the most-the way in which they encouraged you was, for him was just unbelievable.

That's a good point and another interesting things, which I probably became a part of the machine over those years, is that believe it or not, the cadets ran the school, if not as much as, more than the adult commandants and leaders. And what I mean by that is we were given authority to-I'll call it manage-the undergraduates, to manage the people below us. We were given instructions on what to do and how to do it, but they turned it over to us. So in a way, it was really, we had these military, very structured adults watching, overseeing, guiding what we would do daily or weekly or more of the full year, but they allowed and trained the kids to do it, so as an example, I certainly did not have any military experience whatsoever. I don't even think I'd ever picked up a rifle other than a BB-gun before I was in 6th grade, but suddenly when I was in 6th grade, I then had to carry an M1 rifle, without any rounds in it, but it was real rifle.

It probably weighed as much as you did.

It did, yeah, nine and a half pounds. It was a big changed there and we had to dress in our military uniforms, but what had happened is I also became a part of that and when I was in 8th grade, I became the most senior officer in my lower school, called company commander, I was a captain. So here in three years, I'd gone from private, then guy that, you know, was getting demerits and getting whacked when I didn't follow the cues or whatever, to where I was in charge, running say 50 other cadets that had to salute me, obey me or drop and give me 20 push-ups kind of attention, but also with that, even at that quite young age, a sense of responsibility for them that you didn't abuse that power. In fact, if the military officers, and commandants and teachers would see any form of abuse, I would have been a captain for about two hours and that would have gone down. Because you are expected to even be at a higher level of performance and to truly be-I'll call it-the teacher-advocate of whatever the tradition is. The higher your rank is.

So when you transferred from 8th grade into high school, what changed?

Big change. We moved to Glendora, my 8th grade school year, and so it was my 8th grade year that I was the company commander of lower school-Company C it was called. And we had band-band headquarters A, B, C were the thing and then there were the day cadets I'll call them, but anyway, all of

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the kids in the school, when you graduate from lower school, regardless of what your rank was, you went back down to private and plebe and so then in 9th grade, even though I had been there in the school now for my fourth year, I'm suddenly a private, you know, doing push-ups for some sergeant that'd maybe only been there for a year and a half. And so you have to be careful, the ego's there, but I was just a plebe again. And so you're stripped of your rank, stripped of your title, no respect, you instantly are taking orders as opposed to giving them, day-in and day-out and you have to toe the line. And so what I did then during my freshman-sophomore-junior-senior years is worked my way back up, ultimately being battalion commander, a cadet, lieutenant, colonel for the whole school as I did in lower school, but it was retracing and re-feeding that, but I think in a much more mature way, because you do learn and you get better.

Listening to you, the thing that I would really see a change in is that you know, you were giving orders, now you're back down to receiving orders, and again you're probably looking at the cadets that are above you and they're modeling to you the way in which to go about it. You've experienced this leadership, now you're taking it away again, so now you're given more leadership, you're getting more experience and back down here again, I know how it feels. I know what is required of me and hopefully the guys above you are modeling the proper kind of thing.

They are, and that is true, I think of anything in life. I think it does carry on the way that you say. I'll call it empathy or whatever, until-even in life when you're successful in a job and maybe you're fired, so you have to start over or you lose your family or whatever, when you go back into those lows and you come back out of that, you're a better person for having gone through that and it's painful and you don't want to ever do it again, but you learn a lot of value; you certainly become a more humble, and in a way maybe become more self-reliant and stronger yourself because you've gone through maybe an experience and I would think at Browns, that same thing occurred, that if you did well, like I say, you would get recognition; if you didn't do well, you wouldn't, but whatever you went through that period of punishment or in this case demotion back down to be the lowest most junior plebes, you then had to- you felt what you yourself were doing to others as a senior person, you now know what it's like to be a private. And I might mention, years later, I was drafted into the United States army, very similar situation, suddenly I'm Fort Ord California, I'm private in amongst a bunch of other people, when I had been in mind through four years of ROTC, and what I'll call an honor cadet, that-anyway, that I knew all of these things that the drill sergeants were telling me at Fort Ord, I felt I knew as much as the drill sergeant.

Well, what's interesting, everybody I've talked to except for Len, went in as an officer. Why is that? You guys had all this ROTC training, I would expect that they would realize that oh hey, they went to the West Point of the west, or they went to the citadel or-they should be you know OCFs.

In World War II, that was the case, and I think it was a lot different, because just the military in and of itself. Now a lot of people, when they went into the military, like I did; I was drafted though; I didn't volunteer, because I was going to college part-time, but at any rate, I think what happened to a lot of them was the second you go in, most of them became a non-commission officer pretty quick-like a-they

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call it an E5-sergeant because they'd had that four years and whatever military unit you were in, once you learned your basic training-cause you don't learn how to drive a tank or anything about artillery in Browns, but you did go through the ROTC, which was tactics. Everything that you studied-weapons, you knew all of this stuff, just like the real guys. ROTC at Browns was basically identical to ROTC at a college. Same class, the same textbooks. The only difference is, in the summer, they would go for a couple weeks to camp; we didn't have that summer camp scenario.

Interesting, Len did. When he started at Brown; they did do that during the summer. They went up to Fort Ord, and it's really-and I'm finding that it probably took place prior to World War II, then after World War II, they stopped that. And that's what I'm trying to just talk to-

And that was probably the behavior at the time, because when they-you know-as an adult looking back on all this, any cadet that had graduated from Browns, I would say, other than-I'll just say a week of extra training-knows everything that someone graduates from basic training, easily, and in some cases advanced individual training: AIT.

Yeah, one guy mentioned that he fell asleep during the officer's description of the M1 rifle, because he knew everything and so he says he's falling asleep and his buddy's trying-the commander's talking to you, you gotta wake up; wake up! He goes yeah, he goes, what about, he just said-he blew me away-the M1 rifle's the g-blah, blah, dah, dah, dah and goes all off and the lieutenant just said, sit down; well the company commander happened to be in the audience and asked him to go up here and repeat what he told him. They made him staff sergeant. I'm going, holy cow.

Yeah, that kind of stuff did happen and I think that was the case and at any rate, I think some of the interesting things that were going on was that-and I don't want to imply that every single cadet that graduated from Browns suddenly was super-man and successful and everything-no, but I will say that everyone that did spend some time at Browns, even if it was just a couple years, at least had a foundation of some experiences and some foundation of some knowledge of how you could really succeed in life if you applied some of that. Whether they chose to or not, I don't know. Now I know that the group that graduated with me and my class, particularly some of the officers and some of the ones that had been there three or four years, similar to me, every one of them I felt I could trust, even to this day, even though I haven't seen many of them for years and years, I feel very comfortable, I could call any one of them and say hey, I'm Jack Sparn, I'm in trouble, can you help me and I feel very comfortable and very confident they would do whatever they could. It's a weird brotherly kind of thing.

I tell you what; Arnie Kachok said it's a fraternity-

It is.

-because it's exactly like a fraternity in a university; they're your brothers for life. You've got this bond, you have this camaraderie, you have this sweet accord that you guys are familiar with. You went to San Diego or Glendora, you had this. The question is, what difference did you see in the move from San Diego to Glendora? Was there a-?

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There was a big difference. First of all, the San Diego campus was just a classic military school: the layout, the buildings and it had been there for years and years, so there were-

1918.

-there were monuments, there were cannons, there were things that you know, some senior class of 1945 did this and there were certain hallways and doors and names on buildings that were tradition-solid, solid tradition and so when we left that, just a museum of very, very respectful tradition and honor of those that have gone on before us, and went to Glendora, which was a much younger campus, but to us, it was a girl's school-like aw, man a girl's school. But what we did and I think right away, it happened, we-that came from San Diego-just overnight tried to instantly rebuild it, repaint it, restructure it so we and every graduating class that graduated from Glendora would contribute in some way to new monuments, new things, but also, we brought with us as much as we could from the old campus; the senior monument it was called, some other things and we repainted the rooms. They had drapes on the windows, you know we-no. All of this girly kind of stuff; all the beds, we had regular wooden kinds of beds, we had metal bunk beds, military kind of beds, so everything was changed that we possibly could, but I would say that the thing that gave it life as opposed to some physical fixtures and buildings-it had some salves-as soon as we filled that campus up with several hundred cadets, following exactly the same rules and structures and traditions, and even making up some new ones because we had a different kind of a campus, it suddenly became alive again; and I did observe that transformation.

There was some questions about, you mentioned in the senior stuff that you brought from-do you know what happened to that?

I know a lot of it was given to or transferred to San Diego-I'm sorry-Long Beach, SCMA and my understanding, it was all put in files or on display at SCMA; then what I was told-now this is years later, like in the 70s-that the SCMA stuff was then later transferred to Brown University, which you're saying you don't think is the case.

I asked them, and they have very, very little stuff. I had a few-the librarian found a few articles from the 30s to the 40s of the school newspaper; I'm going to ask her again if-cause I'm hearing from you guys-is this plaque here, is this thing here, is this stuff-?

Yeah, we had hundreds of awards and plaques and honor things.

You were one of the top award-winning academies on the west coast; from 1937-1967, 19 awards given to you by the-it was the war department for World War II when it became the department of defense afterwards.

Right, and we kept our honor military school, which was a requirement; we had to go through an IGA inspection every year, and we all participated in it, and if you didn't pass that with x-amount of credit credentials-these are drills and exercises, you weren't accredited; and being accredited meaning that

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you had an opportunity to send people to military academy. And also get funds to continue to run a professor of military science and tactics and the four staff officers.

In my research I've found so far is that there was a military school, military academy, military institution and pertaining to your ranking in terms of your accreditation, school would be the lowest, academy, then institution. Brown became an institution almost right off the bat, but because of tradition, they kept their name as a military academy and that in itself says a lot about the originators of Brown military came in-I think that they carried that West Point attitude that they instilled in you guys-I mean I'm just in awe of this education you had.

Yeah, we mimicked-that's another interesting point-we mimicked in a very proud kind of way that we were West Point of the west and anything that we thought West Point was doing or had done, we had to do that same things and it's-obviously the uniforms were identical, but even in our songs, our mottos, our behavior, what we did in the mess hall, what the glee club sang or anything, if it occurred in West Point, New York, it occurred in either San Diego or Glendora, California and there was enough of military, x-military or retired military teachers and instructors that had attended West Point, where we knew that what we're doing is what they did and the real guys did. And our societies that we had-and for example our officer's club or the honor club, for example, for a couple years, I was on the honor board. Well what that is, is if a cadet was caught stealing, let's just say-stole something, he would appear in front of the honor board. It would be equivalent of court martial board in the army days and we had the authority; there were four of us if I remember right, had the authority to recommend to the superintendant and the commandant that that person be kicked out of the school and I can remember one time we did kick someone out for stealing stuff-money; he had stole someone's wallet or whatever, so it's a pretty serious kind of deal; it wasn't just demerits and...so again, now we didn't have the authority to kick the kid out-

It was a recommendation.

It was a recommendation that this person broke our honor code and was not deserving to be a cadet. There were situations where, in fact someone who was a friend of mine, and he was a lieutenant and it was his senior year, just in a senior year wild moment, he took some chemicals out of the chemistry lab, put them in one of the commodes, flushed it and blew the commode off the bottle. He suddenly became a private, you know a few hours later and almost-they did let him graduate, but he came really close to not even graduating; he had been there four years, and a good kid otherwise, but I mean he just had one of those hey let's got out and mess around-

-One of those teenage prank things.

And there were teenage prank things all the time, but this is one of them that was destructive and dangerous on top of that, but he-the amo was a couple firecrackers-

Do you remember-you went to San Diego before it closed, the protest over the milk?

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I know there was a riot kind-of deal, call it the equivalent of a fight and stuff, but I was not-that was the upper school guys; we did not do it in the lower schools, so I don't remember that. I do remember our mess hall, very distinctly though. Even when I was brand-new there in my 6th grade, it is was the equivalent of picnic tables, big long tables and chairs without arms and you sat on either side and you had to sit on the end three inches of your chair, your back perfectly straight, so you could almost-there was like 8-10 inches between you and the back of the chair. You had to sit there, literally like this, your feet underneath the table, knees together-

-90 degrees.

-And you had to eat like this, what they called a square meal, and if you had to touch the table-I remember because I did it once, was picking up a spoon or something and I happened to touch the table; at the end of your table, there's maybe six guys on either side of the table, something like that, there would be a cadet sergeant. In my case, if I was in 6th grade this would be an 8th grader sergeant at the end of the table; he saw you touch it, he would yell at you and tell you to attention. You would sit there; he would then have you put your hand on the table and he would take the knife with the handle, they were heavy knives, and hit you as hard as he could across your knuckles. I can remember, I couldn't even close my hand for a couple days, but that was the-again, intense, do what I say exactly or else.

My father tells me this story of this guy reaching for a roll and his hand being stuck to the table with a fork.

Now something like that could have happened-

That was in the upper, in the high school, they just-

Yup, that could have happened.

He always talks about the square meal, but he remembers one guy reaching across for a roll without-and then just BOOM, stuck it to the table. I'm going, are you kidding? Of course you couldn't do that today.

No, you couldn't; it'd be against the law, but no they would get physical.

You only did it once, didn't you?

Oh yeah, I never got my knuckles struck a second time and learned really quick and at the time, when that happened, I thought this sergeant was mean and nasty and rotten and the worst person in the world, but the further I moved away from that, you know, weeks, months later was he wasn't doing it out of vengeance or meanness, I don't think he got any zing out of it; he wasn't a masquist. This was a guy who's doing what he was instructed to do, and I'm sure it happened to him probably a couple years earlier in his life, that this is how you get everybody in line and you stayed in line.

Well Jack became the scapegoat for that day!

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The other thing is, obviously, lower school, we're younger kids and you do tend to want to play around like recess kind of thing, more than any of the upper school guys. But the upper school guys, they may put an automobile on the roof of the building where we would do something else, you know, throw a water balloon.

I actually interviewed one of the guys who did that, who-it was in '57 and they put the professor's-he had an MG or something like that, they took it apart and carried it up and put it back together on the roof.

Yup, they did. That kind of stuff went on, but a couple other things about the Brown campus in San Diego on Garnet Avenue, that the structure of the campus was so that all of the rooms-half of the rooms on the side with big porches and balconies all faced the quadrangle and the other half-anyway, quite often, you would sleep with your window open or something; we didn't have air-conditioning, we didn't need it. Anyway, every night at exactly the same time, they would play Taps and it was in the quadrangle and there was a big megaphone. Talented guys, but a guy that really knew how to play the clarinet got the bugle. They would play taps once facing A-Company, pivot the things on a pivot, play taps D-Company and play taps C-Company and it just echoed across those buildings and that, every time I hear taps, even now, which is a zillion years later, I still get goose bumps about that, because I remember we were in bed at the time; only if you were an officer and an upperclassman would you dare be walking in the hallways. When that song-just lights out and you're down. Now maybe you're up again 6:00 when you hear revelry and you got to be up in 15 minutes or whatever, but that period of rest, be quiet, whatever. Now what we would do is-because like on Friday nights we had to get ready for inspections on Saturdays, so after taps and after the officer of the day they would call him but he would be a cadet-upperclassman-would walk up and down the hallways, everybody's in bed, whatever, then you would sneak out, then you would have what we would call blanket parties, whatever, but we would wax our...concrete floors, wax our floors and pull people around on blankets to buff and then polish the shoes, clean everything up; we'd work until like one or two in the morning, then you would sleep quite often on the floor, not on your bed, because your bed had to be perfect. Then you'd get up in the morning, go and then there was an inspection I think around 9:00 in the morning. You'd stand at attention; inspection was over by about 10:30-11, then you'd go and have lunch, then you'd have the afternoon off for whatever other activity there was.

Go back to bed.

We had to-and you know there wasn't a fingerprint on any window or anything, you know, even though they were very old barracks, the fire extinguishers were polished, brass would just glare at you, just beautiful stuff.

Yeah, my father tells us this story once in terms of revelry. There...on the fourth floor and the guy's blowing revelry and you know doing the end or whatever, they fill a trash can full of water and they go to put it out the window but don't pour it, they drop it. They drop it with the water in it and it lands next to the guy. Water goes up and comes down on him. I thought, you guys were just crazy, cause if it would

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have hit him, it would have killed him, but they, I guess they figured it out and they-so this killed revelry.

My father was a wise-guy, so-

Well in Glendora, we had an interesting night-he was called a night commandant; he was a marine: Sergeant Moxan and he was the epitome of a marine master sergeant. I mean, if you've seen a Hollywood version of a marine master sergeant, Moxan was one of them. Well he was retired and he had a wooden leg and you could hear him clip-clop when he would go up and down the hallways at certain times and he carried a slacker stick and he'd whack you if he caught somebody doing something wrong. 'Course when we were officers, we were buddies with him, but when we were, you know, like in 9th grade, 10th grade, you had to be careful. Well anyway, we were always trying to do something to trick him up and-so for an example, kids would take a bucket of water, balance it on their door and then Moxan would open it up and then water come down. Now he dressed up in the sergeant-

Oh no.

Then suddenly the whole school had to go out and stand at 2 in the morning on the quadrangle until who did it, you know, that kind of stuff. Course we'd do it in a room where there wasn't anybody there, so he didn't know what cadet really did it. Things of that nature; there were a lot of other, those kinds of tricks.

You probably drove that poor guy crazy.

Oh we did, but he got his vengeance out on us really, really well and he was an undertaker-his day-job, he was an undertaker, so he was an interesting guy.

He'd get even one way or another, huh?

Yeah, he did. He was a really interesting kind of guy.

What about the terms-one of the complaints I've heard about Glendora is that you didn't have a flat area like you did in San Diego; it was really hilly.

Yeah, it was; it was tiered, and our quadrangle was really the equivalent of what I would call a parking lot. They paved-it was asphalt and in terms of-I'm guessing it was maybe 100-150 yards wide and maybe 40 yards deep, so it was just a big square, a rectangle and then it was tiered up and sort of shaped down. I could show you tonight on some of the albums that you'll see our annuals. Then there was the flag pole that was in the center. Our second year we got a cannon that we put there and so on, but you're right, it didn't have the quadrangle that was around the center or the flag. There wasn't really a center of the campus, a focus point-

-Because you were tucked up against those hills.

There were hills and then the barrack, the original barracks zig-zagged literally up the hill. You didn't- there was one barracks, but I'd say 15 floors that went up, right, left, up. It sort of fished up this hill and

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it was just like stair-steps and then on each one of these levels, there was maybe four or five rooms, you got to the end. But then our third year up there, I want to say about 1960, '59, I think it was '59 or '60, we got donations and finished what's called Eisenhower Hall and it was a legitimate, but concrete, very well-done cinderblock barracks, which you consider an army barracks. Centralized showers and individual rooms, two per room and it was two stories and so two whole companies could fit in there, pretty much, and so that made it a lot more structured for them, instead of these little rooms that were almost like this hotel, wound all around. Anyway, we tried to get Eisenhower to come and dedicate it; he could not come that year, him and Amy-Meme, and so what we had was Ronald Reagan, who was just then running for governor, Ronald Reagan came-this would be my junior year, Ronald Reagan came and dedicated Eisenhower Hall, which was really cool and then-and we would have movie stars and other celebrities and be the honor for us, so for example, I met Pat O'Brian; he gave me an award, I got an award from Steve Allen and then by doing that, Steve invited me to The Tonight Show and so myself and about three other guys-four other guys, we were guests on The Tonight Show, back and this is-Steve Allen, you know was a pre-Jack Paar-

Yeah, I know, Steve Allen, Jack Paar, Johnny Carson.

-Steve Allen and then Carson. But anyway, in Hollywood, so we did that.

I wish I could, we've got to find that.

Yeah, I don't know. We were in sort of the front row in the audience and they talked to us or whatever and he had goofy stuff and they would throw pies in the audience if you remember and all that junk and we were all dressed up in our full-dress uniforms and we were sort of stuffy and they were all having fun and whatever, but I remember that. But then I joined the Drill Team in 9th grade, not in lower school, in 9th grade, and then the second year I became the drill team leader, or commander and so then I kept the drill team all those years. We either came in 1st or 2nd just about every place we ever went, which would be a street parade, an indio-date festival, a brawly cattle call, all of the various stuff around-Long Beach Parade, all those and we did well, but then we also had just competitions against other schools, ROTC schools that drill teams. So yes, we did that. In the first two years, we had M1s, but then one of the ROTC sergeants was able somehow to get these Springfield rifles, 31-6s, which are great, because they're very easy to balance once they're full and anyway, we got a bunch of those, brand new ones and we were able to use those to twirl and spin and whatever and it was that second year or third year that we said okay, let's use blanks use them as part of the thing to scare people, whatever and we did that and over time, I had a member, I had a drill manual that was just sort of the weird kind of things that different patterns or things that you could do in a drill team kind of deal and I just adlibbed much more to it that would match more with the rifles and stuff. And so over time, we got to where it was pretty down-pat. And each year, we would add maybe three or four new cadets, would come on, but three or four maybe were seniors and went off, but you always had some back-ups and a group of guys of maybe, say 30 at the most, but probably more on average like 20 and we just sort of did everything in a military way, though. But we did come up with some pretty fancy things; now we did not-what we did

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not do that I always thought would be neat, but we couldn't get the school to let us have bayonets or anything, so we couldn't have some super-dangerous stuff, like you see the marines-

Let me ask you, did you guys ever knock anybody-each other out or something with those things?

Oh yeah, cause you will sometimes twirl it and throw it at a guy and he'll throw it to you at the same time, so you both got to catch, so yeah I've seen guys get hit in the head and whacked, whatever. Also, you could drop them on the ground and you could break a nice sock on a rifle and I've seen a couple of the stocks get broken, so yes, you are doing some pretty heavy stuff.

The M1s are like 9-10 pounds, you're throwing that sucker around, you better be paying attention or you're out cold.

You've got to and you could hurt yourself even, because you're walking while you're twirling and throwing and you could hit yourself in the head or the knee or the foot or whatever, so and then we had so special sort of uniform, we took our boots and we cross-laced them. There's sort of a way to cross-stitch them with white laces, only the drill team wore those, so we had white laces, then bloused, our white dress pants, then we had a blouse; we didn't have the-we didn't wear the coat-t that had the brass buttons, but the gray blouse that you see at West Point, but we wore helmets and we painted the helmets and then we had a purple fourragere which was just for the drill and a couple other little things-oh and white gloves, which, and white gloves were a pain, because they're slippery and so when you're trying to hold onto the rifle, you're twirling it, your gloves are cloth; it's not like rubber, so it was really hard to get used to managing your weapon with gloves, so it was sort of neat, but one of the things I would point out about that is it was another way to teach people, particularly people who weren't really coordinated, or bad eye-hand coordination, or maybe more the big football player star, how to really excel by just following some very practiced procedural structural things, learning a sequence of events.

-And also being part of a team.

Oh, very much of a team, and cause the way you're judged is if any one person screws up or is out of step, like in any of those competitions, the whole group gets demerited. So that's another excellent point there is that you always tried to help the slowest or the guy having the most trouble and I can't remember ever telling someone we don't want them on the team, in all those four years that I was on the team, even-and some of the kids that would come on would be all thumbs, even have a hard time just marching in a straight line. By the time-after a few months, and we practiced a couple times a week, every week, at least for an hour, each time, so there was two to four hours of very structured practice, and after a few months in any given year, everybody became quite, quite good, by working with each other. And then after your practice, if some cadet was having trouble, he would be taken off and hey you go practice on your own for a while, and we did a lot of dry practice, where you didn't have your rifle-you were practicing the foot maneuvers; then you would practice the with the rifle, then you would practice both combined, sort of...

What do you think killed the school?

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You know, I think it was society as much as it was the leaders in the school. Ever since-to my knowledge-when we had moved to Glendora, was in financial difficulty. In other words, they were having a lot of hard time getting funds, and because of the Browns in San Diego-and to my knowledge, the reason they sold the campus in San Diego is Browns wanted money. That land was worth many millions of dollars-

Oh yes.-

-And they weren't making money on the girls' school, for whatever reason; I don't know if it was mismanaged or it just wasn't popular anymore, but yet it was also prime property and so somebody in the organization said let's sell the old campus for x-millions, let's use some of that money to refurbish the girls' school into a boys academy and at the same time, move as many cadets as we can up there. Well down in San Diego, I think we were up to I don't know-5-600 cadets; I don't know.

Wow.

When we went to Glendora, it was more like 300, counting the day-cadets. Any year the graduating class between 30 and 40 was a big class, so when you multiplied it times four, that would be your upperclassmen, so-and-but, you'll have more in your freshman class than your senior, because they will fail or they'll just move and relocate. But at any rate, I think what really happened is it was the Vietnam War, military kind of stuff was not real super popular and, so parents that certainly were the people who would fund these kinds of things by sending their children there did not say I want my little Johnny to go to a military school and learn how to kill people, or whatever, you know. And that was not the case, but it was, you know, the persona on the outside looking in. So I really think there was no longer a waiting list of kids that wanted to get in and it was getting diminishing, diminishing, diminishing, and when you now the good and the bad-the good part of the school was, you know, a typical class would have 12 or 14 kids in a classroom; great time for one-on-one, very close, up-close and personal education, as opposed to 20 to 40. But the bad news is that in the cost per student hour is these teachers were getting paid like anybody, but no funding from the government; it was a private school, was very expensive. So I think it was finances that brought it down, but I think the reason the finances were down was I think society was not into let's raise young military people, prepare them for later on in life as a military person or an officer.

And I think it's a mis-and when you-talked to you guys; that's not what it's about. It was about the leadership, it was about the camaraderie, it was about taking responsibility for who you are and where you want to go. That's what it was about. It wasn't about shooting people or anything, but that's what they instilled in you guys, which if you don't go to West Point, if you don't go to Citadel, if you don't go to Virginia, if you don't go to a couple of those other academy schools that are still around, you'll never get it unless you join the military.

Yeah, that's true. And just about every one of us-back when I think of my class-everybody, either went into say the police force, secret service, army, air force, marines and it wasn't just because of Vietnam; I mean they end up going that route. I mentioned that I was drafted, but I certainly would have

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volunteered had I thought at the time that that was the appropriate thing to do. I was drafted in 1966; the school was still going. And then I later on-again-in fact I'm sure it wasn't mean, it was maybe what was instilled in me from Browns, when I was in the army, I said, well if I'm here, let's do the best I possibly can.

Where did you end up in the army? Did you end up overseas?

I went to OCS, Officer Candidate School, took a lot of tests, got awards, and because of Browns, I was able to pass those, go to OCS at Fort Bellworth, Virginia, because an engineer combat-combat engineer officer. I was number one in my OCS class, which means that I was able to at the time-and this would be 1967-

Uh-oh, Teddy Fenson is coming-

I was able to choose wherever there was a second-lieutenant opening in the United-or in the world to go and my first choice was Hawaii; there weren't any openings. My second choice was Alaska; there weren't any openings. My third choice was Germany and I was able to get it. The other three-quarters of my graduating class in OCS-which only about a third of the guys made it through OCS, I mean, huge failure rate, but anyway I was able to go to Germany, so I was in Germany for two years and then got promoted to first lieutenant and I was-the way the rules were at the time, I really just needed to be in the army that additional two years after I became commissioned. Well, I really enjoyed the army over there; I was in Germany and there happened to be an opening in -03 as a captain, -03 opening to be a commander of what they call an atomic demolition munitions platoon; there's only one of them in all of Europe and it was in Germany, and basically what it is, is they train you how to assemble an atomic bomb, atomic weapon and-but these were for blowing up-assuming World War III would start-the mission was-it was all secret at the time, but I can talk about it now-our mission was to blow up the tunnels between Germany and Switzerland if Russia was invading and all the major bridges across the Rhine River with these 5-kiloton and 10-kiloton atomic-

Then you were to survive, right?

Right. So I went to a one month class and we had to memorize everything, but how to assemble atomic weapons enormoramigal and I had to read up to do it-another year, and there's only one-the guy who was the captain, the commander of the 80M platoon that was there in Darkside, Germany at the time, he was going to be leaving in like 3-4 months, so I was, you know, they guy going to take his spot. Well someone in the Pentagon, some second-lieutenant I'm sure said oh, Lieutenant Sparn has re-upped, let's send him to Vietnam, not paying attention of hey they spent all that money, cause it was a pretty sophisticated class, teaching me how to assemble these atomic munitions, so sure enough, three weeks later, I'm in Cameron Bay in an airplane and then in a helicopter to a place called Guchee, so anyway, I ended up in Vietnam and then I was in a place called Cuchee for 6 months supporting the 21st infantry division as a combat engineer. And then, I went to a place called YK, supporting big red one, 1st infantry division for six months and I was company commander, captain. I was promoted to captain over there, so I was company commander and I had one of the larger companies in all of the place over there. Now

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this is 1969-70 and the reason I had it really unusual is I had a Vietnamese unit of Vietnamese to run a lumberyard, so had managed-I had about 100 guys in a lumberyard I was responsible for; I had sort of an upgraded company because we had all of these trucks and stuff that we were building highways to Laos and Cambodia and-

-Which we weren't in.

-That we weren't in. I built-my company built the road to Analock, which-

-That doesn't exist, but we won't go there.

Yeah, so anyway, so I was there exactly 365 days like everybody else, so when I left Vietnam-the bad news about Vietnam in my particular unit was 90% were all draftees and hated being there and we had a lot of incidences where they were killing civilians and you know, all the bad stuff. Fragging, the company commander in the unit right next to me got blown up by his own people; it was that kind of stuff. Anyway, when I came back, I got orders to be a battalion S3 officer, which is training officer in Fort Leavenworth, Missouri, and when I went into Procidio, it was two lines and it was all officers and you're lined and this line you're going to stay in; this line you're going to go out and I already had my orders and even the barracks I was supposed to stay in at Fort Leonard and I said, you know, I think I want to go back to school and do whatever, and I did. So I took that other turn. Even to this day, I still wonder what would have been different in my life had I taken the right turn and just stayed in and done whatever I would have done.

You'd have had guaranteed retirement, guaranteed benefits for life; that's what you'd have had.

-Yeah, or the experience of getting shot at some more, you know, wherever, Iraq or whatever.

My nephew, Milford, my nephew, he went in as army reserve and he never graduated from high school and he had a hard time getting into the military. His uncle, who was a pilot-helicopter pilot in the navy, navy turned him down; his uncle got him into the army. He's a, you know, he's a reserve and all of a sudden he becomes regular army. The last bit is they were detaining him to demonstrate he could hold the GED. So he goes to the coast of Ohe as an MP and he sees these coming onto the base in jeans and unshaved and he goes, who are those guys? They're special forces guys, well that's what I want. And my nephew's had a rough life, so he comes back and he joins the rangers. The rangers, he goes into the marine beret, from the marine beret he went into sniper school; thank God he flunked sniper school, but he made it into the marine beret special ops. He is now a WO-2-

-Yeah, chief foreign officer.

-Fourth tour in Afghanistan, alright-

Wow, so he's made a definite career of it.

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He loves the army. This is why I'm telling you this: when he re-upped this last year, \$140,000 bonus, because of the amount of training that he has gone through, he is a professional killer; that's what he-he started off like you, an engineer-he was an engineer, and he studied by using DVDs there to take the classes the military had given him and he became top in his classes by just doing this himself. Again, he didn't have the training like you had or that, but this fixed him and his next promotion, which is in a couple months, he'll be a lieutenant, you know?

That's a neat story, how that kind of a career can be part of your life, if not your life and it is and I think if we digress and go back to Brown Military, same kind of thing is that you can be an average person and walk into the door as an undergraduate at Browns and four years later walk a completely different person-transformed.

There is not one of you that have not done that; I have not met one guy that was mediocre yet. I know there's probably some guys out there.

I'm sure there probably is. The other thing is that I think there was an assumption, cause the school was fairly expensive, but I went there on a scholarship. You know, you had to keep your grades up and all that. And I was able fortunately cause my mother didn't have a lot of money, to pay for my education there, but all of the kids that went to Browns were not like the rich brats that the parents just didn't want them around at home. There were a few, where the kids that ended up there were there just because the parents didn't want to mess around with them and they had a lot of money and they said let's just put them here and get them out of the way. Michael Anderson's an example; so there were some that-Joseph Banana, who-bad guy-

I know who that is.

-But whatever, those kinds of people were very rare. But even those people in that stage of their life, had an opportunity like everybody else, even though they got there for different reasons, could have achieved and done well, cause they had the same opportunity and some people did well and some did not. I remember in my class a John Provos, which was the brother of Provos too was, if you remember, the kid on Lassie-

Yeah.

-Well his brother was in my class, so again, some of these kids had a lot of money or came from Hollywood or whatever; I had roommates that came from Bolivia. I had a roommate once that came from Saudi Arabia. When I was in San Diego, I had two roommates, in fact I used to take them home with me on holidays; they were two Eskimo guys, real genuine Eskimo Indians from Alaska, great kids, who again were in my class. So you got sort of a cluster of cultures together too. We had a lot of influence from Mexico and Guatemala and all that.

That's why your baseball team's so good.

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Yeah, baseball and soccer and so we had guys-in a normal public high school back in the 50s, you wouldn't have seen that mix. You would have just seen your neighbors there.

And you didn't see it as a mix either, did you? Cause you were just cadets.

Oh yeah, everybody was equal in that sense. There was no such thing as bigotry or anything about racism; it didn't, it wasn't in the vocabulary. You didn't think about it.

Let me ask you this, if there's one thing that you took away from Brown that you'd say was the most important thing, what would that be?

I think-and I'll use the term leadership-and what I mean by that is to this day, I have some abilities, some skills, I feel very comfortable being a manager, a leader or a decision-maker, whether it be for one person or five-hundred people and I got that skill obviously just from experience, but the fundamental rules, the A-B-Cs of what you need to do to be a good leader-and by the way, one of the very most important things of being a good leader is being a good follower-I learned how to be a good follower, that would follow instructions, and at that same time being able to make decisions, which is the different between a follower and a leader. So I grasped that at a very young age, so when I'm like 18-years-old, I'm somehow in a leadership position over, you know, a couple-300 cadets, with expectations of these superiors and I'm never supposed to fail; you're under a magnifying glass, which to me is not much different than being in a corporation today of hundreds of people, boards of directors expecting you to make the right decisions and do good things and at the same time, that one other thing I would add, which to me is a flavor of leadership, a good leader, and that is the idea of honesty and morality to human-other people; treat them like people. And I think another thing is that I got a foundation of that at Browns, even though I'm not too sure I could articulate it at the time when I was there. But when I think of the things I've-I'm a chief information officer at a company right now; I've headed up large groups before in my career. When I look back on the things that I do with my people, one of the things that's the biggest thing to me is fairness and honesty-the honesty that how I treat them-and how I treat them with respect and care about them, or I have some respect and integrity and honor about the company itself. I'm there to help the company.

Do you think it was the Christian basis that-?

I think that that was a fundamental piece, that there is a God, that God's in control and that all along the way, God gives us a lot of power and moral strength. I think that has had a great deal to do in my early age of understanding the right from wrong kind of stuff.

-Your moral compass; it gave you a moral compass?

It does. It gives you a roadmap or something else-and I've seen this of course through my life of good, bad and whatever, where-and I'll call it miracles-where God had guided me and directed me and in ways that are truly miracles, but my understanding or acceptance of that being truly not just a quirk of nature, but truly God-driven was because of the education, training-embedded in us. I remember in San Diego

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in 7th grade, going to our Bible study leader, who was a teacher at Browns, took us on a bus-ride, somewhere-I don't know where I'm pointing-somewhere in San Diego and we went to a Youth for Christ meeting that night and I can remember, again, that and then the chaplains and then we had a -quote- chapel, but it was a prayer service kind of thing every Wednesday and then we had a service every Sunday that we had to go to-and we had to. It wasn't like, hey, who wants to? The whole corps went and again, all of that stuff just sort of starts to become you over time and I would say the majority of cadets, not every one of them, but the majority of cadets were very much influenced by that value and by that being, you know, impressed upon them.

I think so. That's one of the things that that lady said she finds you guys impressive in that way.

Yeah, I really think it was great and it was a level of religious study and understanding of the Bible that I did not get in, say Sunday School at church, or at home. We were living it; I mean it was a 24/7.

The honor code instilled in you the moral compass that's being taught to you, the whole thing's centered- Brown I think had the right idea, of instilling Christian values, he says, in developing leaders for our community through military training.

No, it's very true and that flavor-I only saw Dr. Brown a couple times in San Diego, and then he got older and passed away and then I did see John Brown Jr. a couple times after that, but no, it was just sort of-I don't know, you look up and you just respect them. You just say, man, these guys are cool. These guys have been there; I want to be like them kind of thing.

You know that's-I'll turn it off now-