

Oral Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Milligan

Oral History Candidate: Layton Stogsdill, Class of 1956

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

*This is the Brown Military Academy Reunion, Palm Springs, 2011 and I'm with...*

Layton John Stogsdill, known as LJ, my initials, L.J.

*And you graduated?*

'57, even though they have me listed as '56 on here, because we had midterms back then and I went to school there only a couple of years for my junior and senior year, because my mom talked me into visiting the school, just to look at it. She had talked to me all in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I said, oh I'm not going all the way to military school, but then during summer school, I was drinking with some girls behind the school, the regular school and my, they kicked me out of chemistry class, so that was sort the straw; we've got to go down and at least look at this military academy we're talking about. We came down together. I didn't know, but she had my luggage in the trunk of the car, and she drove away and I'm happy to be there with Major...anyway, he was the head master.

*Where did you drive down from?*

Las Angeles. Up in Hollywood, ...Straight. And there I started and things I never knew I'd be involved with. What happened was when you went there in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, you were a plebe for the first year and if you were older and started in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, you still had to serve as a plebe, which meant-but only for a half a year-so I was a plebe for half a year, which meant I had to run everywhere I went; I was subservient to the upper-classmen. It was a real pain in the butt. I think they slacked off on me just a little bit, just because here I was over the let's call it the B11. Now, what they did is they put me in with the class bully of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and that was good, because two years older, he told me, well this is what you have to do and I said, what do you mean, what I have to do? Aren't we supposed to do this together? No, you're new here, you have to do it. So it turns out that we did it together. I didn't make him do it, but then I became the hero of the plebe class because I just made sure that he wasn't a bully anymore, so that was good. But the thing is, the people that I know now, which are Bob Barber, all those guys, Joe Mogan and everything, they were all lieutenants, sergeants, battalion commanders and so here I was a plebe and then a private and I was in B-Company, second platoon and I just didn't want anybody to see me, you know, I'm just working hard to get out of this thing. So I'm working on my grades, but I ended up goofing up here and there and doing a lot of extra duty around the quadrangle, with a pack and rocks on my back and the colonel we had down there then, or the captain, also-oh it was Major Barnum, was the head master that was really a nice guy and I was standing next to him and I was waving good-bye to my mother, which I was only going to go visit. So here I was, down there. It was a real awakening and I got into some sports, but it was like, here I was, the plebe year and I only had a year and a half left, so fell midterm. But some of the things I remember, I took my car, you're not supposed to take your car until you're a senior; well I brought my car down in the second half of my junior year and parked it in a garage offsite, so I sort of had the run of the mill, which was pretty good.

*You were big man on campus!*

Yeah, I had good friends and I think I paid like \$12 a month for this garage to put it in.

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*Now it's \$260 to park downtown.*

Is it? Okay. I'll tell you, so this was 12 months and it was a private garage in a neighborhood which was behind a house and this guy was renting his garage out. So, I would, we'd go and pick up girls from Bishop School, the girl's school, it was an all-girls school then and we'd end up going out there at night and calling them out there on the balcony and they couldn't get out, but we met them through the dance, because they bring the single girls over to the dance, then they'd shuttle them home. If you made friends with them and everything, it was pretty nice.

*I heard they also brought girls from San Diego high school and Hoover sometimes.*

Okay, yeah. We were the brother-sister school to Bishop

*Yeah, cause you were on one side of Mount Soledad and they were on the other side of Mount Soledad.*

Exactly, so I actually got to know this girl pretty good and I took her out after I left San Diego, after I left the academy and she asked me to her prom and I was probably 19, she was 18, so I drove down, took her to her prom. Well that being such a very exclusive school, they rented rooms for us over on Coronado Hotel.

*The Dell?*

Yeah, the Dell. So they just rented the whole place out for this graduation and I checked into my room; I was in a room with somebody else, you know. So that night, I said, well okay, I'm going to go get myself a cocktail, see if I can even do it. So I went to the bar, there was a bar somewhere, and I said, let me have a pina colata. He served up the pinacolata and I went to pay for it and he said, no that's all covered and I said, it's all covered? So, I came back to our table where the girls and guys were and I was a year older than them, but I said, hey, you guys want some drinks? So I ended up buying drinks for the table and then one thing led to another and she was a nice gal, so nothing really happened back then, she was a nice gal, but I do remember one thing, when I took her out later on: she was, her back was against the wall, and I was leaning against her and I was kissing her, which was normal; I tried to French kiss her and she said, stop that and I thought I had my hands on her or something, so I put my hands down and so I went back to kiss and she says, don't do that. I said, what I am doing? I'm not touching her or anything like that. It turned out that she didn't allow that, so she was a really nice gal. I took her out for maybe a year after that; I watched my p's and k's.

*She's probably married to some billionaire by now.*

She's absolutely, cause she lived in Lajoya. Her parents did, so I used to go over to her house. So yeah, her parents had a lot of money, even though they put her in boarding school there, even though they lived in Lajoya.

*I looked into putting my kids in Bishops when they were in, just starting up high school. It was 17,500 per year. It was more than, I mean that's what it's going to cost me to put her in college.*

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Exactly, but because my Brown experience, BMA experience was so good for me, and it did give me the discipline that I didn't have from my dad when I was young, I turned around and I have two sons and a daughter. My two sons are the oldest; they're two years apart and I put them in Army Navy Academy up in Carl's Bend.

*Really, how was that experience?*

It was sort of good, although back then, that's where they learned to smoke, you know, because the kids smoked. That's where they learned those bad things.

*I was up there in September to talk to the new commandant and I'm trying to check into the history on Army Navy, cause that's where Brown started; it was Army Navy first, they left, Brown bought it and so I'm trying to get some background information, but when did your kids go to...?*

They graduated in '86 and '88.

*Right, there would have only been about a hundred kids in the school at that time?*

Yeah.

*Yeah, there's a punk rocker that graduated from there sometime, some rock-and-roll...*

Go in the big gym, you'll see all the classes there and so you'll see in the class of '86 and class of '88 the name Stogsdill; those are my two boys and while my second son was there, a kid died because he, this was in '88, or '87-'88, because he was spraying Freon into his mouth and his larynx froze and he was all alone in the bathroom and he died and because his father was a big person around campus, put a lot of time in, he was a CPA, he had done a lot of things earlier where he really should have been reprimanded and thrown out of school, but he wasn't and he kept doing it and he died.

*So what I'm hearing, and I kind of know this about Army Navy, that the discipline that you got, the West Point of the west, faded and I'm starting to hear this a little bit from the guys in Glendora, that tradition faded as it moved to Glendora-took a while for that to fade. Then when Army Navy continued, they don't have that, it's the West Point of the west that you guys had.*

We were held under very strict rules and of course, you've got to realize the Korean War had just sort of ended, so we had guys at school teaching ROTC that had just come back from Korea that lost a lot of their men and it was still very intense and John Brown was still alive. He died probably about my last year there and that's when things started to, maybe the discipline and everything started to crumble and little bit, but he was very strict on those things. When I dropped my kids off, I had a choice of going two ways, because I wanted my boys to go to military school and it was either going back into New Mexico to the academy back there, but we live at the beach and I thought, I went out there and visited; I mean it's out desolate, it's like the French foreign legion and I said, I can't send them here, you know, this is going to be tough enough just going to school down here. When they first went to school at Army Navy Academy, there was a guy called, he was the guy that ran the place for 30 or 40 years and

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he was a little bit senile, so what he would do-they allowed him to stay on campus-but he was there forever and guys that would get in trouble, he would give them a coin to get them out of trouble, in other words, if they were doing their extra duty marching hours, he would come up and say, what'd you do? I was doing this. Okay, take this and get out of trouble, so you know, it was going slack; it was going through a transition.

*As opposed to you guys, if you did wrong, you paid the price.*

Absolutely. We paid the price and we went off with our heavy equipment up in the mountains behind there...

*Oh, Mount Soledad?*

Yeah, with our, the heavy, the machine guns and the rifles and the backpacks and you know, the whole ball of wax to go on this day's march and we never missed church, because you missed church, that sucks for you.

*You marched to the top of the memorial, didn't you?*

Yeah, we sure did.

*There were no houses back there.*

No, there was nothing up there. We just walked up the side like...

*What did you find different in terms of the classroom, between the public school and going to Brown?*

Well, in going to Brown, the classrooms were smaller; they took...

*They were smaller in size or smaller in number of students?*

Smaller in size and number of students. Like my public classroom for chemistry was the kind that went up like this; it was Las Angeles High School.

*Okay, so you had the assembly style.*

Right, so there were in that class, maybe about 50 students. So and we had study hour, you know, I think about 2 hours every night at school, they had us sit down and be studying when they walked by.

*There's no way you had that in public school.*

No, absolutely no way. You could tell your parents, well I finished my homework; I've done all this, and so I had to study and they'd walk by and they knew if they'd catch you, more...

*More marching up Mount Soledad, right?*

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That's right, and I didn't get away, and then our chemistry teacher at Brown Military Academy, he just thought, I can't think of his name right now.

*Where'd he live?*

I'm not sure, but it was mentioned that he died just this last year. He's been to some of the other reunions. We called him Mal, M-A-L? And he was, you know, you always think your teachers are older; I was like 17 or something and he was probably in his late 20s at the time, maybe early 30s. he was a chemistry teacher. Does it show who died? He was on the list of people dying that attended the school.

*No, I was checking to see this; this is 2007 and I was seeing the faculty, if he was in here.*

Yeah, he would have attended one of our reunions.

*Clifford Royand, Teddy Fowler, Kenneth-Kenneth Holly?*

His name was an 'M on it. His last name, M-A-L-something.

*No, it's not even listed here.*

No, you know it was listed as far as the paperwork got that he passed away this year, or last year. Now, he would-he was one of these great guys and in fact, it mentions in that paper that he would let people come in and do experiments and such. One of the kids went to Cal Berkley or something like that. But if there was something big going on at school and we had to go to class, and he knew everybody wanted to get out for whatever it was, he would design a project in chemistry that would smoke the room out. So he'd, let's see how this experiment goes; oh, wait a second, I must not have added something; okay, everybody clear the room and then we'd all leave. He'd say, okay, I guess we can't go back in there today, so then we'd leave. So that was a way of him not getting in trouble for just dismissing the class, so somebody says, well, how come you didn't finish that class? Well there was an experiment that went bad, so he was sort of going along with that.

*No, I was going to say, you definitely seemed to have a structure going to Brown Military versus a public school.*

Right, and I need structure.

*What did your mother say about the change in you or did she notice it?*

I don't know if she noticed it as much, other than, you know when you're a kid, you don't know if they notice anything. She knew that it really helped me later on in life-I mean, she was definitely worried about me. My dad had his own businesses when he died at age-he was in his 40s; I was six and so I went on, it allowed me to go on to university.

*Which university did you go to?*

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USC. I went to city college first, then USC and...

*That's my favorite university.*

Right. Back when it was only 12-13 dollars a unit or something like that.

*If you're a USC grad, you're set for life I think.*

Well, you used to be. Now, I don't care, it doesn't matter where you graduate from. There's not a lot happening out there for the graduates.

*My friends I went to high school with, a lot of them went to USC and they're still working. I'm not, but they're still working, so I think it's the best college, well Stanford's probably the best college.*

Stanford and then Harvard.

*But SC's got the...*

Well, it's got the ritual of it for John Wayne went there, ... and my business, which I'm still involved with, cause I never sold it, and my older son runs it and it's still got about 40 people or so will be 40 years old next year.

*What's that?*

It's called *Photo Sciences Inc* and we're incorporated and we're part of the process in the manufacture of microchips and lenses and all that kind of stuff, so pretty high-tech.

*How do you think Brown helped you do your business?*

Well, two things: my dad being an entrepreneur, I think it's in my genes, so I think that initiated, because I took a lot of chances; I'm a guy that takes chances. If you own your own business, you're always taking chances, but it has allowed me over the years to be a fair owner-a fair boss; I try to be fair to everybody, even though you know that the people that you're dealing with, that work for you, a lot of them won't think you're fair, because a lot of them say, well I don't get enough money. Well, I mean you get more than other people in other work doing that job and this is, but it's fair to me if you want to go someplace else, you're more than welcome to. A lot of them, when it was their first job, I said, well you're making a mistake, but they didn't know what it was like, so they would come back in a couple of years, hey can I have my job back; that slot's filled now, but we'll see, we'll call you. And then I would give people breaks, let's say if they had done something wrong and they're like, and I belong to the exchange level and when kids are of an age, if they're doing something wrong or even if, everybody deserves a second chance, so I would give a lot of people second chances. Some of them worked out, part of them didn't. I did the usual trips across the border, to Tia Juana with the girls; it was all a lot more talk than it was action, you know.

*Well you were only what, 16?*

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Yeah, 17, 16-17. You'd end up giving money to somebody for something and then a guy would come out with the Black Jack and say, well we're closed for the day and there was nothing you could do; they had your money.

*Well, you learned your lesson, right?*

Right.

*Well, talking about how you treat your employees, do you feel that the way in which you were treated, I mean, did you advance at all in rank?*

Oh, stayed a private, cause of my extra duty hours and I wasn't there long.

*Ok, but you learned to follow the rules, and you learned how, you'd watched other guys that had been there longer move up and you saw the benefits. Did you incorporate that, do you think into your philosophy?*

I believe that-let me put it this way: the Christian part of the school affected me and fairness, that's all I can say, because everybody, the leaders down there all tried to be fair-the principles involved. Now the cadets, they had their own way of fairness and a lot of it was not very fair, it was just how they felt, but if you look back on it, it was who they were, but they tried to do their best job possible.

*I mean, they were being overlooked by the people above them, so it couldn't go too far out of hand.*

And there were some really tough, there was a guy called El Chinco, who was a chief master sergeant, or the master sergeant of arms and he was from the Philippines and when you saw him coming, I learned things like, I'm going to duck out and not walk by this guy, because he'll probably find something wrong with my shoes or something as a plebe especially. So you learned how to get through society, you know, but you tried to do the best you could and then I was popular with my younger cohorts because I had a car and they were even too young to drive. I probably shouldn't have been running around...

*And you're a plebe and they're a plebe?*

Yeah, but I didn't bring my car down there when I was a plebe.

*Ok.*

Yeah, because I only had to serve half a year being a plebe, because if you joined in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it's your whole first year. If you're older, they make you serve a half a year.

*Oh sweet!*

Yeah, so that was good. And I still remember to this day some of the things that you used to have to say. You'd put your hand out, sir can I have a lacteal float extractor of the female bovine species? That

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was if you wanted to have the milk pitcher passed down and they'd look and they'd say, no. So you'd sit there, eat some more, you know, like this and everything.

*It was a square meal...*

Square meal, yeah. And of course, the upperclassmen were making sure that they followed suit so that it trickled down through the way. On one of my trips back east once, I was on a cruise ship with my wife and we stopped at West Point for the night and I got up at about 4:00 in the morning and walked up the hill from the Hudson River there and I was up, it was a drizzly day and I had my rain parka on and I watched, it was revely and they do-do-da-do-do and all these guys running around everything and it just made me feel good to see that because I was an older person, because we went through the same thing, exactly and, when you go up to the chapel at West Point, it was just a bigger example of what our chapel looked like, because of all the flags of the different battalions and everything. So I was...

*You were at the West Point of the west.*

I was at the West Point of the west.

*It was only for a year and a half...*

It was two years.

*...Two years, but I mean that's a huge-it still affected you tremendously.*

But I missed a lot of the things; I didn't have my picture taken and you know, because you weren't...

*My father didn't either and he was there for three years.*

So you missed a lot of those shots. Anyway, it was a pleasure and I really appreciate you doing this, because I've been coming to these for about 17 years or so; I haven't been to everyone, I missed a lot, but I feel sad when I looked at the end of the line coming, and it's maybe 20-30 years from now.

*Well the purpose of this is that even if the end of the line comes, we still look on with pertuity, because voices are still here and they're in the universe. Let me ask you this: what is one thing that you think, the most memorable thing that you think of Brown Military Academy, for you?*

...The discipline I had to follow affected me the rest of my life, because I really was getting away with a lot of stuff at home with my mom-she was such a great mom.

*Well she loved her son.*

Absolutely, so the discipline I received was due me and looking back, I wouldn't have sent my kids to military school if I didn't think it was good for me when I went.

*You're the only one I've met that's done that.*



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Really?

*Yeah, and you know what, kudos to you for doing that; I'm glad you did it. I hope your sons got a good experience.*

They did; I keep asking them now and finally they're coming around in their late 30s and 40s and say yeah it was good for me, because right away they said no it wasn't you know, but now they say, yeah it got me into college too, it was you know a good experience.

*What college did they go to?*

One went to Humble, the other went to Chapman University and they're both working, married, my daughter's, you know...So now my late wife died about 12 years ago and I used to bring her to these reunions to start, so a lot of the people who go here know her and then after she died, I waited about five years and got married again and that blonde that stood up at the very end, that's my new wife and she's just great, she's such a sweetheart and she really enjoys being down here...

*You're such a player.*

You heard her, what she thinks of all the guys; we're all gentlemen and that's true. When you look at us as a class, a people that went through there, we're all still pulling out the chairs for our wives, I mean, we've had our ups and downs and all that kind of stuff, worse than everyone else, but we're still, we know, we've been taught what is the right way.

*You know, what I find about you guys is this, is that you've taken the leadership skills that they've taught you, they taught from the discipline they've taught you and you've become successful, forget better and different, you guys have become successful. Your involved in the community, you're an entrepreneur, you're president of the rotary or optimist club; you're involved in things and you're an asset to the community you live in and you look back, you're lucky that you took your kids to military school and they still have that also.*

Right, they still have, even though it was going through the period of slacking off and not being so strict, because I liked the strictness of it that we had to go through.

*And I think the time had come, I think the time had come that we need to go back to that.*

Well you won't be able to get back to that, because there's so many people out there that are trying to make it easier for everybody nowadays.

*Yeah, but if you're in a private school, you can do that and I don't know, it would take a lot of money and a lot of people too to do that. Okay L.J, here you go.*

There's my card, so...