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Charles Jackson Oral History Interview

Jesse Macias, Interviewer

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Jesse Macias (JM): This is Jesse Macias History 470 doing an Oral History Project and I'm interviewing Charles Jackson who's from... are you from Alton?

Charles Jackson (CJ): I am yeah, born and raised

JM: Born and raised in Alton, Illinois and attended Western Military Academy. So this is my interview with ah Charles Jackson, so...Charles if you could at first ah just the background on your life growing up parents, where you lived...

CJ: I was born in Upper Alton, in 1950, my parents were all involved with Western Military Academy. My great grandfather was among the founders he was the owner from in the 1800s until it closed - the family - he purchased the school in the 1800s and the family was involved in the school until it closed in 1971 so I grew up right across from the campus of Western Military Academy and spent my youth there really. Always playing on those fields was very where the history of the school. Went to the Alton public school district through 8th grade, and then I attended Western Military Academy I was the third generation of my family to attend Western Military Academy and ah, loved Alton public schools, but also loved my experience at Western.

JM: So you're ah family was always involved in it? Now was it like your great grandpa is that what?

CJ: Yes the school was founded 14 years after the end of the Civil War in 1879 by an Amherst, Massachusetts college graduate who believed that ah the West needed a place for the proper education of young men. And he found a spot in Upper Alton Illinois and it's the perfect - it's really an ideal setting still. And he founded the school and his first hire was my great grandfather Albert Matthews Jackson who was a Princeton graduate and had spent two years teaching at Blair Academy a prep school in the East that still exists its a \$60,000 a year tuition school which prepared young men for the very best colleges the country had to offer and Albert Matthews Jackson and Wideman who was the founder wanted to create a school like that in the West and thought it was necessary so from that point forward the family had been involved for a number of generations...

JM: Okay

CJ: ...in Western.

JM: So now that Blair in New Jersey? Is that the Blair Academy that I'm thinking of?

CJ: Ah I don't know, Amherst College is in New Jersey, Blair Academy for some reason I thought was in Pennsylvania but I could be wrong I dunno...

JM: Okay I feel like I've heard of it but it might be a different one so... okay and at that time, Illinois was West.

CJ: Oh for sure yes

JM: Okay, and you attended school through 8th grade in the ah Alton Public Schools um, maybe talk about the elementary schools a little bit in Alton on which schools you went to, did you enjoy em?

CJ: I went to Horace Mann to start with up on Edwards Street, I remember riding my bike up there, had a remarkable experience and Alton at the time I graduated from high school in 1968, and Alton in the 60s and 70s was there - in some of those years were a 1,000 people per class graduating class it was ah... an "All American Town" I had a great experience then I went to East Junior High School which is now East Elementary School I went there for two years before I went to Western.

JM: Okay now when you were in East, 'cause this was when Alton had several middle schools, they have one today, when you were back in the schools do you remember how many - was it East, West, and North? Or was there even a Central?

CJ: It was East, West, North, and Central. And there was great in athletics there was a great competition between those 4 schools, winning the sitting championship in any event was a major deal it was really much bigger system then it is now.

JM: What sports did they offer in middle school at that time?

CJ: Well, one year they didn't offer any sports and I remember they put a volleyball club together I think the board worked to get sports um, I can't remember what year it was, but one of my years there they didn't have sports - otherwise they always had football, they always had basketball, they always had track.

JM: And Alton was always pretty good at football and basketball?

CJ: Yeah, awesome

JM: It makes you wonder if they ah, kept those going, if they -

CJ: Yes

JM: I'm not knockin' Alton at all...

CJ: They had tremendous athletics

JM: They struggled at times. So then when you transferred to Western, was it much of a ah, transition for you? Or how was the transition to high school?

CJ: I lived right across from the school my entire life so, it was easier for me than it was for anyone else who arrived there. Your first day at Western Military Academy was I'm trying to think of the right word, it was ah, an experience you would never forget. You walked away from everything you were

comfortable with into a place where you knew nothing and you were the lowest ranked person on the campus. The buildings that looked the same you didn't know any of the people who were barking orders at you, your schedule was different. Parents were not allowed to come back for six weeks after they dropped their kid off and after six weeks, most students at Western had adapted and it had given them some sense of accomplishment. But, I mean for me, even for me, across the street I moved from my bedroom to the academy to a barracks and I couldn't cross that street. If i needed something I'd have to stand on the corner and yell for my brother to throw me something, it was something I've never forgot, and I can't imagine how hard it must have been for so many students who arrived from elsewhere, including foreign students who couldn't even speak the language.

JM: So you guys had kids from foreign countries come in?

CJ: Oh yeah we had a large significant foreign student population, all, almost all Spanish speaking mostly from Mexico, and those kids were very interesting their parents were primarily involved in international trade or business um, some politics, and when they sent their son to Western what they wanted was a full deep immersion in American culture, they wanted them to know habits and language there was a rule at Western at one point, where Spanish speaking students could not speak Spanish to one another, they could not room together, they could not congregate and that was at the behest of the parents. Like I said these people - these kids have gotta learn this if they're going be - some of my best friends some of the very most accomplished people who ever graduated were foreigners.

JM: I had no idea they had Spanish kids there. Do you know whatever changed that attitude they couldn't speak together or did it ever change where they could speak together

CJ: It did. Um, when I was there that rule did not exist anymore. I think they just believed that the, they were learning the language and you didn't have to keep them from speaking Spanish to each other. A little bit off topic here a lot of the Latin American students were tremendous soccer players and they were always talking to one another in Spanish they thought it suited them and I'm sure they were swearing in Spanish and you know, nobody could prove it, but you know those rules were gone, but they did get a full emersion of American experience at Western.

JM: Did those kids make a difference on the soccer team? Did you guys?

CJ: Oh yeah, they were very good and Saint Louis Prep School, Saint Louis High School at the time were where they ground zero for American soccer they were really good and we were competitive not because of the American kids at Western, because of the Latin American kids at Western.

JM: Okay, I never knew that either. So you said ah, coming in for a ah first year student or fresh, do they call them Freshman or do they have a term for the...

CJ: New men.

JM: They call them new men

CJ: I mean, well, freshmen were freshman but if you came new as a sophomore you were a "New Man" and there were rules that applied to all New Men. They couldn't go out the front door of the barracks,

there were certain limits on them.

JM: Okay. Did you guys have ranks when you were at Western?

CJ: Yes. Yah, from the very beginning you were a Private, and then a Private First Class, then a Corporal Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, moving up the rank, yeah, everybody had a rank yeah - everybody had a rank

JM: What was the highest you could achieve as a...?

CJ: There was one Lieutenant Colonel one cadet assigned Lieutenant Colonel in the history of the school other than that, Major was the highest. There was one Major for 91 of the 92 years and that cadet was the Battalion Commander.

JM: Okay. Ah, and that rank that you guys got from that high school could you, when you moved on if you went into the military, how did they, what did they do with your rank?

CJ: That rank didn't translate at all

JM: [laughs] okay

CJ: We got out of Western with a with a certificate that said we were a Brevet Second Lieutenant in the Illinois National Guard but um, during war times, a lot of cadets went directly into OCS, Officer Candidate School, and then into the military and because they had the ROTC and had all these military classes they became officers immediately so there were benefits but you didn't become an army officer because you'd been an officer at Western.

JM: Okay, but you did get to go through the... umm... Academy Officer Training Program?

CJ: Yes. Yes and it did give you, if you went into the service, it was a huge advantage

JM: Okay, Okay.

JM: You kinda talked about when you first moved into living in the barracks was a little different. What was life like the barracks what were the barracks just like in general? Were they set up? (09:58)

CJ: Well it was ah there were 60 cadets in the barracks three floors all two man rooms, and your typical day was crowded busy um and steered by bugles. Bugles gotcha up, bugles gotcha into formation to march to every meal and sit in assigned seats, and a bugle put you to bed at night.

And basically, that was it. Your school days was just like everybody's else's school day, but Western had an activity period after school that they paid a real attention to. The school motto was "Mens sana in corpore sano", a sound mind and a sound body and they took the sound body part very seriously they had lots of sports, almost before anybody else did, they had almost every sport available and they expected you everyone in the building and on the grounds to compete in a sport and we were part of a conference you may know some of the schools of the conference it was the ABC league it was ah, John Burrows and Country Day, and Principia and what they would do with this athletic system that they had was they would assign every student a number based on how tall they were, how heavy they were, and how old

they were. ABC league. And, what it did was, if you were a little bit smaller you competed against "C" athletes, you could always move up to "B" but "A" could never go down to "B"

JM: Okay.

CJ: so it particularly in football, there are some people that great athletes just can't compete they had a "C" team for em' and they had tremendous coaches tremendous facilities and great schedule, so, I loved the system, everybody could compete in it, and they expected you to. And if in one season you chose not to, they had clubs; they had a sailing club, a fencing club, they had a stable, a riding club, a rifle range, I mean more than many colleges so - they wanted you to be active during activity period. And then in the evening there was a study hall um, if your grades were good, you could go to your room and study if they weren't you'd go to the big house the administration building and there would be a modern study, and then the bugle would put you to bed you'd repeat it the next day.

JM: Pretty regimented

CJ: That's a day. Very regimented. Not much time to get in trouble, although you could, but it was difficult.

JM: Did you ever go to the administrative building for studying? Or did, you did?

CJ: I did some time in the administration building studying yeah.

JM: How many, how many kids did ah? [mumbles]

CJ: You know, I don't know, the school's full attendance was probably 320 when all the barracks were constructed when the whole facility was built, 320, and for almost all the school's history it was at 320. When I graduated in 1968, it was 320. In 1971, three years later, it was down to 154, and they really couldn't they had trouble paying the bills and that was a decline... an anti- military, anti-establishment, anti-discipline approach, and it just wasn't cool to be there, wasn't cool to send your kids there, it was the only time in the history of the school when cadets when they went on furlough or went home, they said don't wear your uniforms on the train.

JM: Okay...

CJ: I would say you know, half the kids basically were in the study hall

JM: [talks at the same time] half the kids, okay I didn't know that. That ABC league I'm familiar with it 'cause we've coached kids through it before I never knew what "ABC" stood for.

CJ: That's an athletic classification.

JM: So you figure the "A" athletic you're the really like you're varsity is that how it is?

CJ: It has nothing to do with talent, it has to do with how tall you are, how heavy you are, and how old you are.

JM: Okay. I think that they still use - they still call it the "ABC" League over there

CJ: I think they just changed it, last year someone called me from Country Day and said that.

JM: Okay

CJ: I know all the same schools are in there though

JM: Yeah, well I knew they used to be because you'll find this funny, I dunno but when Tommy was there we were looking to pick up a tournament and I - didn't have any help, I had to call all the schools myself, and I saw there was an "ABC" Tournament and I called one of the coaches at Burrows, or Country Day and said: "You know did you ever have opening in this ABC tournament so we can get in." And they never called back, they probably thought I was crazy to try and get into their league tournament.

CJ: [laughs]

JM: It didn't work out very well, so...

CJ: You know Lonnie Wilson, right? You know Lonnie Wilson's son Jake, Jake got a full scholarship to Country Day because they can pick kids out, and it's a remarkable school, great education

JM: Oh yeah, I was always curious about that, because he was a great player I seen other kids and Ezekiel Elliot the one over there and I was just wondered how they

CJ: Now they're all ...

JM: They had connections over there, you know,

CJ: They find a way to get them in

JM: Yeah I have a friend that plays football, he's got a kid that's a great quarterback, and he said yah we're going to a camp, it's a select only camp in two weeks, and it's run by the both schools

CJ: Oh really?

JM: He said the call it a combine, but it's not

CJ: He might get an offer [laughs] (15:03) Western never did that.

JM: You guys didn't do that?

CJ: You know, in the 1930s they would um, the enrollment dropped because you know it was a private school and cost some money, and there was some bartering to get enrollment that I remember my dad talking about somebody gave em an Oriental Rug for a semester, you know just trying to keep the school open, and they got through that, very well but they couldn't get through the 70s.

JM: Yeah, I kinda heard, or remember hearing those stories about the anti- you know what I mean? You

kinda want to say a little more about that so you had good attendance all through it was Vietnam came up, and there was the kind of a backlash on...

CJ: Well Vietnam did it really, I think in 1968, one historian said we lived through more history than we could digest, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, Martin Luther King was assassinated and in Vietnam, there was an event called the Tet Offensive where the the North Vietnamese Communist launched a coordinated attack on New Year's Day against American forces, and it wasn't really a successful military but it altered the American psyche. Soon afterwards, Walter Cronkite came out and said "maybe it's time for us to leave if we're not going to win this" and the whole attitude changed, plus the baby boomers which would include me, were catered to, they were so big they could alter government, they could really move things and they turned against that war, and they'd it was just a you hear all the stories about people coming back from Vietnam and the treatment they got, compared to what all of history veterans have have received when they got home, and it was just not cool to go to a military school.

JM: Do you remember any specific instances where you could - did people ever protest at school? Did you ever see things in the newspaper locally where people said because I always gotta kinda wonder how it got so galvanized where it was shutting down schools.

CJ: Yeah, that's a great question, um, I really don't remember anything personal or Alton people there was always a rivalry between cadets and Alton people, for 50 years they played a football game on Thanksgiving Day and I mean there were fights and people wanted to win that game, Western wanted to win it, people at Alton wanted to win it, it was a real rivalry but, I mean, other than what was just the normal rivalry I don't remember anything where Alton was protesting against the campus at all.

JM: So maybe just once the enrollment started to slip, they couldn't afford to keep it open.

CJ: Well they had all these barracks and they had to fill them up, they were heating them, and cooling them, and yeah they just couldn't pay the bills it was hard to pay the bills.

JM: Well I know it's probably a tough story because your family was involved in it for a long time, do you remember the last year or two of Western when they were startin' to see when it wasn't going well and ...

CJ: Well, I probably should, um, I was away at William (?) College and I could tell when I came home that ah there was tension there was concern about where they could keep it open or not I remember when that decision was made, I was home that weekend, and my mother and father were with my uncle and his wife - he was a superintendent - they were at our house off campus and my brother was a student at Western and they came into the room and they said we're just gonna have to close it. And it had to be a torturous decision for them to do it, and I remember that night, and I remember my brother who spent his freshman and sophomore years attending Western, and he's going to end up going to Alton high school, so I remember that but I mean, to tell you the truth, I was 20 years old, doing other stuff, I was sad about it, I didn't know what I was going to do, but other than that.

JM: It was Randy that went there the first two years, and transferred over to Alton High, did he went to state in tennis? Was that right?

CJ: Mm-hmm

JM: Did he ever how was the tennis program at Western? They have a pretty good one?

CJ: Ah fair, I mean they had some good teams, not like at Alton. Randy also owned still the single-game assist record in Alton High School in basketball.

JM: I didn't know that.

CJ: Yeah

JM: How many did he have do you remember?

CJ: 16 or 18 it's one of those two; he said 18 I said 16 [laughs] but he still has that record.

JM: Yeah. I kinda want to talk about the uh sports a little more, because I do always think of that when I see Western and they still have that great field down there that I'm not sure if it's being used?

CJ: Isn't that a great facility? I mean, beautiful.

JM: I always thought Marquette should move in - I'm not sure...

CJ: Oh yeah

JM: they didn't because you [inaudible] on campus

CJ: That would be great I'm not sure this school's gonna last forever. They'd had it for sale for 7 years or so, and I just hope someone can save that campus, because it's the history there is astounding.

JM: Yeah. Now on their sports front then there's was football the big thing there?

CJ: Football was the king of sports at Western and it had always been.

JM: And the football game that you guys played on Thanksgiving was that Alton High or was it just...

CJ: It was Alton High School.

JM: Okay

CJ: And Western cadets in from the 50 years that they played that game Western cadets did not spend Thanksgiving at home, they spent Thanksgiving marching Alton's streets to Alton high school and watching that football game and it was ah, remember Andy Simpson?

JM: Yeah

CJ: He had three brothers play in that game they were tremendous football players and she told me one time the buildup for that game there were two or three weeks off between the last game and then the Thanksgiving Day game she said it was unbelievable the buildup in this town for that, *The Telegraph* had

end of the world headlines about the strategies and the betting that was going on in town and it was really big and she said and then when the game was over we'd go home and have Thanksgiving dinner and we'd talk about every play they knew every single play at this game and Western was the same way they would bribe the football team if you can beat Alton high school, you'll get pie a la mode with your dinner [laughs] they wanted to win that was a huge game.

JM: Do you remember who did it seem like won more often when you were there at least?

CJ: All throughout the 20s, the early years, Western won them all, Alton went on a 13 game winning streak in the 30s, some really good games Alton won every one of them, and then in 46, 47, 48, Western won, 49, 50, 51, Alton won, and then Western dropped it was Western's decision to drop the game they wanted the cadets to be able to have a Thanksgiving vacation, and I think they might have seen what Alton was becoming then. It was becoming I looked at the enrollment one time I did a little book on this rivalry and the enrollment at Alton was just going crazy at that point so yeah. Its fun though it really a fantastic - my family talked about that game all the time.

JM: I've heard a lot of stories too about the Western football and it seems like it would be great because you guys played Marquette which is kinda a rivalry there?

CJ: Um, I think they might have I never I was there we did not, and in history maybe in late when I was out school they might have played em but I don't remember that.

JM: Okay. Well you talk about Thanksgiving the cadets stayed home that is really interesting what about the other holidays when you after you enrolled and after you started the school did you go home very much or did the kids stay there for a lot of the holidays?

CJ: They were almost always at Western ah they could go home for Christmas, and then they had a Spring Break. And during Spring Break, we had so many foreign students that ah, they could stay on campus, rather than go home and the commandant of cadets named Colonel Moore, would always take a New York trip and cadets were in uniform they travelled by train they'd go to Annapolis, and West Point, and Washington D.C. during that stretch, and then come back so, yeah but there were a lot of vacation. You couldn't go home on the weekend without very special permission.

JM: What was your school year like? Did you guys run August to May? Or did you go...

CJ: You know it started in September and it would end in the beginning of June.

JM: Okay, alright. And that trip up to ah New York City were those kids looking so they could go to school, at West Point and the naval academy or were they just kinda were those kids looking so they could go to school, at West Point and the naval academy or were they just kinda ah New York City were those kids looking so they could go to school, at West Point and the naval academy or were they just kinda

CJ: I think some were - but I don't think that was the goal of the trip I think it was just to occupy those kids you know, and give them the opportunity to see those things. There was a barracks at Annapolis that was um, dedicated to a Western graduate Edward O'Hare - O'Hare airport was named in his honor so they

always took them by that room, it was just something to do that they thought would be beneficial to them in the long run, but it wasn't to sell them on the school.

JM: Okay, did you ever make that trip with the school?

CJ: I did

JM: How'd you like it?

CJ: Um, I was a 9th grader, you know, he told us - the guy who was running it told us not to take the subway and one of the guys that I was with said we've got to take the subway, so we did it, and felt you know, rebellious, we survived the subway that's all I remember about it really.

JM: Ah. So Western ah, they had really good sports teams, what were their academics like there? Were they pretty rigorous?

CJ: It was meant to be a prep school from the very beginning. They had very rigorous entrance requirements, until the last three years or so, they had to lower them a little bit. 94% of the Western graduates went directly to college, and that numbers lower a little bit because of the war years, when they went to OCS and went to serve their country, for a little bit, but yeah, it was a college prep school which I think some people don't recognize about that but that's what it was; it was meant to be from the very beginning a college prep school.

JM: And so you had uh, you couldn't just sign up and show up you had to do an entrance exam or you had to qualify to get in? (24:39)

CJ: You know I don't remember an entrance exam, but you had to pass - put forth all your transcripts, you had to do an interview, a family interview, it was important not to be thought of as a reform school.

JM: Uhhuh Yeah.

CJ: That you didn't want to have happen.

JM: Just an ... I was always kinda think it was it was more of a prep school myself because you know they still had the Missouri Military Academy and I looked at it as kids who were gonna get a good education

CJ: Oh yeah. A very good education and you get that military which were the classes of all the classes of Western, I mean I had good teachers at Western but the classes I remember were the military classes: military law, battlefield tactics, weaponry, great stuff for a young man, fun stuff.

JM: Were you guys took like the military classes did you have guys who served in the military you know what I mean - did some of the guys have the first-hand knowledge?

CJ: Five guys on the staff at Western - Western didn't have to pay, they were regular United States Army Officers assigned to this school because it was an ROTC military school and they taught all the military classes and most of em are combat veterans and they were riveting when they started to talk to you about

what I mean they were Korean War vets, World War II, World War I vets if you go back you know, and they were telling these young men what happens on the battlefield, how you react to it, it was first aid, it was, I mean I wish I had a list of the classes and topics because you'd be interested in it it's very interesting stuff. Yeah, they were not paid, and we got weapons. Every cadet at Western was assigned an M-1 rifle which was the rifle of World War II and they had a rifle rack on each floor of every barracks and then they'd unlock em when we did parades and when we had military classes about ah taking the weapon apart, and putting it back together and cleaning it, we had um, walkie talkies, bazookas, you know all these weapons were available in the military department to introduce us to you know - these Western cadets to good stuff.

JM: Did they train you guys with the M-1 and with the bazooka?

CJ: Yes they did. I mean the M-1 we had the time. Primarily for the manual of arms right shoulder arms, left shoulder arms, inspection arms stuff like that, but the other weapons how to use em you know, and they'd - you'd go down there and they'd set em up and they'd give you complete instruction on how to use em - I mean machine guns everything it was - for a young man, it was it was a lot of interesting stuff.

JM: It sounds like yeah their curriculum would be pretty - pretty exciting

CJ: Yeah it was a lot more interesting than English. [laughs]

JM: Yeah what about the extra curriculum at Western, besides the sports, did you guys have dances, or formals, or you know plays, or anything like that kids could get involved in?

CJ: Yeah that's a great point, um, Western understood that the it was important to sell that you were going to have social skills when you came to Western. And Western had the great - I think Alton was chosen because of Monticello, they had not just the college there but a prep school there - and they wanted for their young women exactly what Western wanted for their young men and they arranged dances, dancing lessons, and outings on the riverboat it was there was one class at Western where 10 of the cadets in the graduating class married Monticello girls I mean those were arranged dates and it worked remarkably for both schools. Yeah it was great. They also had every new cadet would be invited to a very formal dinner in their first semester there in the superintendent's home and they would have - it would be very formal, all had the place settings would be very formal, the serving of the dishes would be very formal and they would be instructed in what dish comes first what fork to use, it was all about table manners basically and they were proud of that and Western cadets always remember that. They know how to hold their knife and fork, how to place them when you're finished, you know, and they thought that that was part of that whole socialization project that they were doing.

JM: It's interesting you say that because the thing you can never have of I'm really shocked that a manner classes aren't more important today, I know they are out there but people gotta look for them, but I think most businesses you have to have the good social you know persona or have to be able to conduct yourself you know in social situations and people, just I think struggle with it for a lot of reasons some of it might be technology but you know for a school to offer that that really that goes a long way.

CJ: I think that's why I remember it I mean it was ah, an important part of what you know, the wanted the young men to walk out of there complete gentleman. Who knew military and was prepared for college

but they they understood when it all comes down to it you've gotta converse with people, sit down at a meal and not embarrass yourself.

JM: The people skills, yeah, they go a long way. [CJ chuckles] Was there any um religion aspect to the school? Were you guys

CJ: No. Everyone attended church on a Sunday, but they was a Jewish groups that went to Jewish churches there was there were Catholics, there were Presbyterians, there were Baptists so there was a church squad every Sunday we marched my particular group would march up to College Avenue Presbyterian Church - which just closed but they were bussed to people, but the school other than that other than Sunday worship service there was no religion involved.

JM: On a Sunday though, did the whole school attend?

CJ: Everyone did, yes.

JM: ... go together?

CJ: No, they didn't go together, they all went to their own church.

JM: Ah okay see whenever I think of military school I always immediately place it with you know some kind of religion in the background or you know what I mean, or being associated more with that so. That's interesting. Um...

CJ: I mean people who lived in Alton for a while will remember cadets the cadets coming into the church on Sunday and then marching out. But it's a whole bunch of churches and they all went to their own churches.

JM: So did they wear their uniforms when they came into the church?

CJ: Yes.

JM: I would remember that too.

CJ: Yeah.

JM: There was no church in Alton there was particularly like had a lot of the cadets if you didn't a religion did they all end up going like to uptown to one of the churches or...

CJ: I think they all went to a church. I mean, I know I went to my church, I don't know where everybody else went, but and I'm not sure who had the most, but I know there were church squad busses leaving every Sunday, and arriving back for lunch.

JM: That's pretty interesting. Um, as far as ah,

CJ: [cough]

JM: the cadets their life was the military full time was there anything people did outside the school I guess the kids don't have a job, everything you do is on campus for the most part, did you...

CJ: Yeah I think so, um there are some exceptions. We had when I was there when I was a junior we had a senior who was a tremendous swimmer and he swam with an Alton group and some AAU tournament and did very well. We had some excellent musicians one who played with the Alton Symphony Orchestra there was some exceptions but those are the exceptions, for the most part, no they were pretty separate.

JM: While on campus, did people have did you guys have set responsibilities where these guys were working the kitchen, these guys were on cleanup detail, or who was in charge of keeping up with the school or maintaining the school?

CJ: Oh they had a staff who was involved in maintenance that cooks we had people who worked at Western for years um, the guys the chef's name was I can't remember his first name which I should it's Stafford and his um, son was like was a very high ranking student at Alton High, and then became a civic leader, we had a barber that was hired. The cadets served as waiters and it was sort of a prized job you got paid a little bit and you'd get out of some formations you'd serve the food to the rest of the cadets and stuff like that, um, yeah it was pretty much run by cadets other than the maintenance of the camp this was not, I mean kids could get on time squad and they'd have to you know, perform some duties but that was other - they had a maintenance staff independent of the cadets.

JM: Okay. How were the accommodations at the Western? Was the food pretty good do you remember what the meals were like?

CJ: I remember liver and onions, and it was just awful. But, I think I think if you ask most cadets they'd say generally the food was pretty good I mean you know, what I dunno who it was Grant said "an Army travels its on it's stomach" or Sherman or someone they said the best way to eliminate grousing and discontent is to make sure they're fed well. They were fed pretty well, yeah. Basically.

JM: How did the meals work? Did you guys get just one plate? Could you go back? Or was it a strict diet?

CJ: There were no seconds if you were at a table where you could get someone trade you his dessert for something you could do that, yeah at Western they had a table chief at one end of the table and an assistant table chief at the other, and five - it was a long rectangular table - and five cadets on either side and the cadet in the middle was assigned that position and that was called Siberia because the food would start at the two ends of the table so everybody would pick what they wanted, and this guy always got the worst food, and they would rotate people in and out of there so if somebody made the table chief mad, you know, and he would also at the end of the meal would stack the silverware the forks, the knives, the spoons, so the table chief, I mean the waiter could clean it up in a hurry. My first meal at Western, maybe because I was the superintendent's nephew, they put me in Siberia for a while, and I remember thinking I mean they got the food to me, and they were picking it up, and this is the fastest, nobody can eat this fast it turned out I got real comfortable eating that fast, but it just seemed like it there was there were always time limits on stuff, you know, you just ended up adapting to it, the meals would be one of those.

JM: What was about an average meal, or how did you guys get?

CJ: Oh I dunno. Seems like 15 minutes to me, I could be wrong I don't know how long it was.

JM: And that was breakfast lunch and dinner?

CJ: Yeah - we'd march in, when we were finished we'd snap to attention and march back out yeah I don't remember how long it actually was, but it just seemed abbreviated there was no you know sitting around the table with coffee conversing, you'd do that someplace else.

JM: Yeah. And Siberia is where nobody wanted to be?

CJ: That's right Siberia was a punishment seat.

JM: You had to do it your first year? [coughs] Did they have any other traditions where maybe the freshman had a responsibility they didn't want or, if a kid was not falling in line they were going to... any unwritten things?

CJ: Well, there I might have mentioned this. At Western, when you became - when you were a freshman, if a senior was in the hallway when you came out of your room you had to snap to attention and just wait there until he just let you go, sometimes he'd make you stand there a while, sometimes he'd let you go - you could never wear your hat in the barracks and you could never in or out of the front door, I mean there was a little bit of verbal hazing which seemed to work, I mean you were pushing kids to get uncomfortable and you wanted the freshman class, the new kids, to bond in the best way and the best way for them to bond was for them to go through this experience together that came through the military department: "don't be easy on them, you want to make this difficult so they when they conquer it they've accomplished something." So yeah there was some of that but you know we had an event at the end of the year called government inspection where a high ranking government official defense department official would come and inspect the school and inspect your uniform, your room, your barracks, the facilities your weapons, he'd ask you questions about chain of command, um, field first aid, and if you passed you'd get an honor ranking Western always got the honor ranking, and after that government inspection weekend all the rules were relaxed, all the freshman became old men instead of new men.

JM: I think a lot of schools kinda gotten away from that, there's a reason you're tough on em, people you know they don't want people kinda be pushed nowadays I feel like you get something out of it, the school I went to was kinda tougher on freshman, and it made you appreciate - get in line - and it made everything...

CJ: Well I mean the military has done this for a long time and they believe that there is a benefit to having the, I mean, in the uniting of this unit, if you share this hardship and then conquer it, I think it works too, I believe it.

JM: That's a pretty good lesson to learn too. So you ah graduated from Western Military Academy in what year?

CJ: 1968.

JM: And then, what were your choices for ah, college you said you went to William Jewell?

CJ: I went to William Jewell College it's a Southern Baptist school, Liberty, Missouri.

JM: Did you go there to play sports or anything? Or you were just like..

CJ: No I didn't, one of my teachers had gone there, um, someone from Alton had taken me out there to look at the school, it just seemed like a good choice for me, I didn't really do well there, I was um, Western was been troubled during the time, after my junior year is when Western closed, and it was a private school, and I was not paying my own way, and this is ya know, what am I gonna do? I was gonna go to Western, and teach there, so I dropped out of school for a while and then I went back to school at SIUE, got the teaching degree the history degree, and turned out great.

JM: How was SIUE when you attended there? You know, say much about it?

CJ: You know I don't, I just went to classes I wasn't drawing any big conclusions about the school, it worked for me.

JM: Have you been on the campus at least seen some of the changes?

CJ: I have. It's remarkable. Yeah. Astounding changes.

JM: I ah, even from when I went there, it was only 20 years ago, and its grown since then but the people that I talk to from the early days at SIUE, they never envisioned what it would what it grow to be so it's...

CJ: You know SIUE used to be SIUA? It used to be at Alton.

JM: Well I've heard the people say before we could have had SIUE.

CJ: Ahhh I dunno about that, but it was for a while,

JM: It was housed, where was it housed?

CJ: Shurtleff? On Shurtleff campus.

JM: Oh. Okay.

CJ: The dental school campus

JM: And then did they just make the decision that SIUE had more space?

CJ: I guess so, I don't know how it happened, but...

JM: [laughs] I hear some people say stuff about that...

JM: You ah, you went to William Jewell, and then you went back to SIUE got your teaching did you look - were you trying to find a job in Alton, or were you lookin just anywhere?

CJ: You know, I didn't know if I wanted to teach, my script had been written in my own mind. I was gonna go to Western my dad had, my grandfather had, my great grandfather had and I thought do I want

to teach in a public school? I was questioning that, do I want to teach co-ed classes? I mean, I was comfortable in this all male environment. And I said well, I gotta finish this, I gotta started - I'm three years into it, so I got a teaching degree and my first job was offered to me in Chicago suburb um, this school was Fenton High School

JM: Mm-hmm

CJ: Bentonville Woodell near Oakbrough, and I just took, it was just great, and then I got a job at Triad, Troy Illinois the following year, married an Alton girl, Ellen, in honestly it was it couldn't have worked out better, I had a great school district I was in the right job, felt great about it, I was teaching AP US History classes, I mean I got lucky I really got lucky.

JM: So you knew Ellen before you?

CJ: Yeah, she grew up ah near the campus at Western.

JM: Ah okay, I didn't know that [inaudible] and then what year did you get that job at Triad? And how did you get that job?

CJ: You know, I um, let's see, they had a job opening and I had been rehired at Fenton High School in Chicago, but I wanted to come back here, Ellen was living back here and I heard that Triad had an opening, and I went to Lou Houser who was the Superintendent of Bethalto School District, who I knew from church, and I said: "Whadda ya know about Triad High School?" And he said "They're better then we are." Now that you might wanna cut out, he goes: "They're a great school district." He said: "They're better than we are." So I went down there, and I um interviewed for the job and got it, and it was you know, I couldn't have asked more of, it was perfect for me. I got to coach basketball and tennis and it was some of my closest friends, my best relationships, students, just a great deal for me.

JM: What else do you like about it? It just - good student body? Good community? You know a lot of the families down there?

CJ: Yeah, and I watched it transition too. We were a school of 800, we went to 1300 when I was there, changed schools, just a student body with a good values you know they're curious, they're compassionate, they're informed, they wanna be informed, it was really a great district. But you know guys from there? Right?

JM: Oh yeah, the Carmody, still pretty good friends,

CJ: Love the district.

JM: You know you oughta come up to the Alton open sometime the um, all the all Fall Converters play.

CJ: I just sent Jeff Falkenberg the paper, you see the headlines?

JM: No I didn't - Oh yeah, I did

CJ: Yeah, brother affair? Right? So I posted something and he said: "Can you get me two copies?" So I

just sent it to him, yeah.

JM: I didn't think about it

CJ: Devon was one of my favorite students ever, he's a great kid.

JM: He is a great kid, he's ah, he's teaching there now, coaching tennis just like you did. So you knew the Falkenberg for you all or you and Jeff pretty good friends? Did he coach basketball? Is that right?

CJ: He's coaching basketball with David right now. David's coaching now.

JM: Oh maybe that's what he was saying

CJ: Yeah, so Dave's you know, I think freshman coach and Jeff is maybe sophomore coach I'm not sure which is which but they're both coaching there yeah.

JM: So your son's coach and your son David is teaching in Triad.

CJ: Teaching and coaching in Triad.

JM: What's he say about it?

CJ: Loves it. The legacy continues [laughs]

JM: I talked to him when he first went down there, and I yeah, we'd love to have him back in Alton, but I'm really happy for him.

CJ: He likes it.

JM: Yeah he won't ever come back.

JM: What about Mike Stump? How'd he end up down there, your friend Mike Stump?

CJ: It was basketball, Mike was um, his first teaching job was a Springfield Griffon and then he went to um, I think it was Breese Central he coached there, Stan Eagleson the Hall of Fame Coach was his assistant there, and then my brother Randy was coaching at Carrollton and he moved to South Western, and asked Mike Stump to come to coach with him, so Mike became the coach at South Western then Randy went to Beth Alto, and Mike Stump followed him to Beth Alto, and then, ah, we were trying Todd Greg - you know Todd? Todd was coaching at Triad, and so I said: "I got the guy for you. This guy is really knowledgeable about basketball." So we hired him at Triad there, and that's where he retired.

JM: Yeah, he was from South Western too wasn't he?

CJ: Yeah that's right, Todd.

JM: Okay. Now was his kid? Todd Gregg also? Was the other Todd Greg I thought also?

CJ: Todd Greg's son played graduated this year from Triad

JM: Oh Okay.

CJ: Yeah, and he played.

JM: You got your job in Triad what about more on the personal life? So married Ellen, and you guys...

CJ: Married Ellen and I think the best thing we did was our 4 kids, uh, all our, you know this isn't a parent talking but they're great kids, they're compassionate kids, and they're competent kids, very proud, and got 2 grandkids.

JM: Oh I didn't know that.

CJ: Yeah.

JM: So um, what are they all doing now?

CJ: Well, start with Matt. Matt works at Boeing he just got a new job a great job, he's gonna be working with ... I should be better about this, working in this simulator for a fighter I can't remember what it is, but it's a promotion it's a better job, he's very happy at that. He lives in the area, and he has a daughter our first - granddaughter. My daughter Jane is an attorney with a firm in Los Angeles, and she has a son named Jackson, Jackson William Wells, David is number 3, David is now teaching at Triad, doing very well down there, and Tommy is living in Chicago working at a very good job in Chicago seems very happy they're all doing well.

JM: How'd your daughter end up in Los Angeles?

CJ: Ah, New Orleans. She went to Tulane. When we dropped her off down there I did not like it at all I thought it was a hell-hole, but she loved the school Tule and now we love the city.

Because we know exactly where to go, she takes us to the great dining, you know, the great Jazzfest, and she lives down there now.

JM: So you guys don't go down to Bourbon Street and

CJ: Well we did in the day, it would get down there... [laughs]

JM: I see Matt down at the tennis courts sometimes, so him and David Yost, and

CJ: Oh yeah,

JM: So post Western Military Academy what do you guys do to try and keep alive some of the stories from it or, connection with the community I know there's kinda been an effort to you know keep this memory alive.

CJ: I think it was 2010, Mississippi Valley Christian School who sits on the Western grounds, well, where the Western grounds - wanted to sell the site and some alumni got together and said if we're going to do anything to you know perpetuate the legacy of what happened here and the graduates, we've gotta

act now. So we went to the school and the city, and they were phenomenal. The school gave an easement of the land around the front gate which was hallowed ground for Western to the city, the city accepted it and made what is, in essence, a "pocket park" and they said do what you want with it. And we raised money, and we constructed a 12 foot high obelisk made of material that allowed us to tell in text and pictures the story of Western and it was 4 sided, we said let's tell a different story on each side of this obelisk I mean the fundraising was much easier than we expected because we had support in Alton and tremendous support from the alumni so yeah that's the big thing, we have done and we have alumni groups that we have not had in every reunion is an all school reunion because unlike other schools, the the experience was so unique that when you went through it, whether you went through it 1946, or 1966, you - it's a shared experience. Like you went through it together. Yeah, we've got that memorial going and all school reunions, but the group is getting smaller every year, we're not adding anybody to it.

JM: How far back does that reunion go? What's the oldest class you guys have that comes back?

CJ: That's a great question, I think in the past do you know the name, Jim Goodwin?

JM: I don't think so...

CJ: He was a class of 46, and he just passed away, and he came from Washington Missouri and stayed in Alton, and he was a one of the leaders of the city, he won the Rotary Club Service Above Self Award he was on park department he was a remarkable man, he just passed away, 46 was about I think right now in this upcoming reunion in August, we're gonna have like, I would say, I dunno if we'll get to anybody in the 40s. We have in the past, but I'm not sure, late 40s.

JM: Where do you guys do your reunion?

CJ: Well they always go to the Upper Alton Museum, they always go to the memorial site, they always go to Loading Dock as the introductory thing for on a Thursday, they're gonna have a formal dinner. And they always play golf at Gordon Moore Park, they go to a number of places, you know? They plan the weekend out.

JM: I'll come down to the Loading Dock and catch you guys down there.

CJ: That would be Thursday, Thursday the 17th. [laughs]

JM: Okay okay. Well um, I really appreciate your time. Anything else about ah, ah, your life or Western Military Academy ah you want to talk about?

CJ: I think we're good.

JM: Alright I really appreciate it, we're going to use your interview.

CJ: Did we get the time?

JM: We got it yeah.

CJ: Good.