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INTERVIEW WITH COLONEL DANIEL SUNDT  
NEWARK, DELAWARE  
August 16, 1972

INTERVIEWED BY: Myron Blackman

CS: Colonel Sundt  
NB: M. Blackman

CS: This is Daniel Sundt, Department of Mathematics. I came to the University of Delaware in 1956 to head up the ROTC program. I was professor of military science and tactics for three years. At that time the ROTC was compulsory for the first two years. And during my two years, or three years actually--I had the ROTC for three years--we had a reevaluation of the amount of credits that should be accorded the ROTC. The people in the Engineering Department wanted to cut out all credits, but I was able to forestall it. I asked them if they would like to teach a non-credit course. And that seemed to be sufficient. That was the only real meeting on credits that we had \_\_\_\_\_ at the University. I found that interesting. And we ended good friends. The credits were cut to where they are right now. As I recall the advanced students got 2 credits per semester and the basics 1 credit per semester. We had a problem in the ROTC in that those who did not want to take it were a drag on the program. We had one student who was such a Bolshevik that he would come wearing one white shoe and one black shoe. And no matter how much we got after him, he showed up the same way. And for the annual inspection, we wouldn't let him attend it. We put him out of the way.

NB: What is the history of the ROTC at the University?

CS: Well, I don't know the exact dates on it. But it really came into being as a live thing with the Moral Act. That's the congressional legislation which prescribed that land-grant colleges that provided ROTC training would get government support. And that's the basis of it. During the various world wars the program was changed to the extent of meeting the conditions of the war. I think in World War II they had an ASTP program, something of that sort, where the government endowed certain people to pursue certain studies. But we had

CS: (Cont'd.)

a good program all during my three years here. And I found that it grew each year. One problem always was getting the proper students for the advanced course. We would interview students, and there would be some we thought were quite likely but they weren't any good in their campus studies. If they didn't work hard enough at it, then we weren't able to accept them. I had a few exceptions where someone who had done very poorly in his freshman year was doing extremely well in his sophomore year and looked like a good bet. We were allowed to pick up--Dr. Perkins allowed it in about two cases. And it always worked out right for me; I was lucky.

When I had the ROTC--and it's still \_\_\_\_\_ --  
the first two years were called basic years. And when I had it, they were the compulsory years. And students volunteered for the last two years. And they had to sign a contract with the government that they planned on serving after they were commissioned for a period of time. It varied with the particular circumstances. Since my time, the program has become voluntary and students can elect to take the ROTC program. The first two years are still basic, and there's no real contract with the government until the last two years except for a few particular students who have a scholarship. And when they have a scholarship from the government, the government pays their tuition; and it's expected that they go on through. Of course, if they don't make it in their studies, then they're dropped at the end of the first two years.

MB: I'm wondering about the type of student \_\_\_\_\_ (muffled due to simultaneous talking by Sundt and Blackman)

CS: Oh, yes, yes. Well, when I had it the students that made good officers were usually students that I figured wouldn't have taken the program because their parents would not have encouraged them at the start. But it was compulsory, and after two years they saw what it was and they decided they wanted it and they talked their parents into consenting. Now, with the University much larger, there are sufficient of those who take the first two years on a voluntary basis to keep the program alive and quite healthy. I don't know just what it will be like if the Vietnam situation blows over, whether they'll be a sufficient number to populate the course or not. But I think it's true now; the school is much larger than when I had the ROTC program.

MB: \_\_\_\_\_, I know in the late Sixties there has been a decline in ROTC. . .

- CS: Yes. Speaking of the decline, the elite ROTC course used to be in the ivy league. And since World War II they've merely been token units, and the government should have quit having any units at those places because they haven't produced anything. You might say they were the                     . And some of them asked to have the ROTC units taken from them, and recently I understand some of them are asking to get them back. If I were the Department of Defense, I'd say no because I don't think their output would be such that it's worthwhile.
- NB: Has there ever been. . . I know at. . . I went through graduate school in California, and about two years after I left there was a bombing of an ROTC barracks or a training center. Has there ever been any violence on the campus of the University of Delaware?
- CS: Yes. A few years ago when the same trouble occurred out in California, we had, they had visitors here. One of them came up from Florida and he tried breaking up an ROTC drill period. He appeared in uniform which wasn't his and then they did have one case where they tried to burn up the ROTC over here but they were caught doing this. And then they had this SDS group camped out in front of the ROTC. And the Sigma Nu people finally got tired of it and beat hell out of them. They moved out; that's my understanding.
- NB: Could you perhaps comment on the. . . Well, do you feel that the ROTC training is beneficial to students in general or maybe. . .?
- CS: Yes. Within my experience I had some people in the advanced course who had no push to them at all. And through these outside periods where they had to take charge of students and drill them, by the end of two years they had improved tremendously. Also, they had to get on their feet and make reports in class, and I could notice a big change. Some people have it and others have to cultivate it. And they benefited a good deal by it. And as regards the nation's defense posture, in World War II if we hadn't had the ROTC the war would have lasted much longer and the outcome might not have been what we wanted it to be. This country traditionally has, up to the end of World War II, completely dismantled its military establishments at the end of each war and all they had to depend on were people like ROTC graduates who had some smattering of military training and leadership to start out with. And we've been lucky we've had a large body of water and we've had some time to get ready for trouble. But there's no longer any time and so ROTC is still very important.

MB: With your knowledge of ROTC, would you care to make any sort of predictions as to the future of ROTC?

CS: Oh, I'm sure that it will continue. There are a lot of schools like the ivy league and different places where you have these, in some cases professors, who were able to avoid military training in World War II and they try to discourage it. They have a guilt complex, I think. But there are enough healthy ROTC programs at different schools that it's going to go on. And it gives a student who graduates that way has the security in case of war; he knows he'll be a commissioned officer. And certain ones actually go into the service and become regular army officers. You have a good example here in Newark. This Lt. General Daniel was a graduate of the ROTC here at Delaware, and he made regular army and he had an outstanding career in the service. The program now--I talked with the PMS, Professor of Military Science--and they seem to feel that they are getting a good bunch of students. When you look at them, they look pretty good. Those that are taking the ROTC.

MB: Do you think it was a good idea to put it on a voluntary basis?

CS: Yes, because it was a waste of money to bother with those who were not interested and who were trying to not only show disinterest but to hold the program back. They're doing much better now that they got rid--I call it riff-raff.

MB: When did you change over from ROTC to mathematics?

CS: I retired from the service as a regular army colonel with over 30 years. It was compulsory retirement; you either were made a general or you retired. And I had during my military service obtained an M.A. in physics at the University of Pennsylvania--the army sent you there. And also during my army service I taught four years at West Point in the Department of Chemistry and Electricity. So having taught, I figured that I would like that and also I decided that I wouldn't bother with any administration. I took a job here at Delaware with the understanding that all I would do was teach--I wouldn't be in the rank business, wouldn't have to worry about that. And I started out as a lecturer and continued as a lecturer. While I was teaching in the military program, I did take some courses in math here to you might say retool, and when I started teaching it wasn't too difficult. And I enjoyed it. I'm quite willing to retire now, though.

NB: Have the people changed in the years that you have been at the University?

CS: Yes. In teaching math we used to keep them attending regularly, particularly freshmen; and we kept track of that. That was actually helpful to the students because, coming from high school and getting away from home, they needed to be kept working. And I found that the results were much better. Right now I feel that so many of the students are not here because they want to be here; they're here because their parents sent them, and they hope to not go to Vietnam. And their performance is not adequate; their preparation is not adequate. And those who are conscientious and work hard are more or less the exception now. It's quite a change.

NB: Do you have any feelings about why they have changed?

CS: Uh. Well, so many of them have no idea of what they want to pursue. And as long as their mother and father will send them here, they're willing to stay here. And some of them put out minimum performance. Of course there are many who are conscientious. A lot of it I imagine in good part (?), those whose parents can afford it quite easily don't feel the pinch at home and they're not as conscientious about it. You know, they know that their being sent here is not quite such a pinch on the parents' pocketbooks.

NB: Has the teaching of mathematics changed?

CS: Uh. Yes. They have these large sections now and not too many of the small sections. I always taught small sections. But, even in the small sections, I find it has changed. The attendance is not nearly as regular as it used to be. And the students don't stay with the program as well. And if you get behind in mathematics and you're not bright, you've had it. You can get behind in things like history and English and cram, try to read up; but you have to have your basics and build from that in mathematics or you're in trouble.

NB: Have you noticed many changes at the university since you've been here?

CS: Yes. The type of students, I mean the student attitudes toward their work has changed. And so many of the new professors are more interested in things like this organization for raising pay and that sort of thing than they are in teaching, I think. They and the students have both changed. I know in the Math Department, we've had a complete

CS: (Cont'd.)

change. You might say you have the old guard and then you have these new ones. And their attitude is entirely different.

MB: Has teaching become a business rather than a profession?

CS: Well, I guess with the union coming in, I would feel like we're almost a member of the C.I.O. But I'm not joining, and I'm glad I don't have to join.

MB: How do you like working for the university?

CS: I found that they've been very fair to me, and I've enjoyed it very much. And in the Math Department, they've been very fair to me. But I have my fingers crossed on how this new setup is going to work. I think a lot of them are disappointed right now. Their contracts are based on what it was a year ago. Until they can do some arbitrating with the university officials, there is going to be a lag in. . . I think there's going to be a lot of lost motion and useless work in the process. I just don't feel that what they've done is necessary myself. I voted for the University Professors organization because I was afraid the other one might get in sometime. And they're just a bunch of jerks as far as I'm concerned. I'm glad to have that on the tape, too, ha, ha.

MB: One of the complaints that students have--you'd be particularly well qualified to comment on that--is that, not so much at Delaware but at other universities, is that they get caught in the system. And it seems like an army private would have a similar feeling of being caught in the system. Are there similarities between a university structure and the army?

CS: Uh. No. Well there might be with the change in the army now, but in the army it's well understood that a private coming in is just a recruit. He has to learn how to work in the military. And then as he gains proficiency in doing his task and also leadership, he's promoted. He makes corporal, and private first class, corporal, and then if he's a technician he advances in the technical grades. And eventually he can hope to be a master sergeant or a warrant officer. Or in time of war they get battlefield commissions and become commissioned officers. So you might say if you have individuals who hate to take orders from anyone, they'll have trouble in the army, they'll have the trouble in the university, and they'll have trouble anywhere. So there would be that paramount, but I don't see anything else.

- MB:                     (muffled)                     idea from the ground level, from the individual level is that the system is so involved in paperwork that it loses the human touch?
- CS: Well, in the units you have much more contact with your leader. You take. . . In the squad the squad leader is the person that the men in the squad look to, and he's supposed to take care of them. And then the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant looks after the squads that are part of the platoon. So they always have someone interested in them and looking after them. They don't have that impersonal sort of thing. And then you take your company commander who looks after the platoons and the platoon leaders. The company commanders by the battalion commander and so on so that there's a good bit of interest and contact as well.
- MB: You mentioned changes in the army. What. . .
- CS: Well, I was thinking about the grooming, appearance--haircuts, beards, and mustaches, and whatnot. And not getting up for reveille. I think their discipline is probably going to suffer tremendously. And if you don't have any discipline, you don't have anything because **discipline** means when you're told to do something you do it. That's something you don't have in the university at all. You tell students that they have something to prepare, and so many of them don't care and they don't do it.
- MB: In the old days when I was told I had something to prepare you had to prepare \_\_\_\_\_.
- CS: You have this backfire now. When the university president tells that something will be done in university then the professors kick up their heels and say, "We won't do it," and that sort of thing. A backlash, you might call it. If there's a valid reason for it, well, that's one thing. But where it's just being hardheaded and Bolshevik, well that's getting nowhere. It leads to chaos.
- MB: How does Delaware--I know you haven't been at West Point for a while--but how does the University of Delaware compare with West Point?
- CS: There's no comparison.
- MB: Why not?
- CS: At West Point the students attend classes of 16 at the most per section. You prepare your lesson every day and you recite. And, if you don't, you're held accountable for it and you have to explain why you haven't prepared your lesson and you get punishment for it. And they cover



CS: (Cont'd.)

much more material at West Point than they do here. Their time is filled, and they have to produce or they are let out. But here the pace is nowhere near commensurate, and there isn't any discipline to compare. They are entirely separate and apart.

MB: Do you think. . . Just concerning philosophy of education, which do you prefer?

CS: Uh, well, it's the. . . As far as getting through and covering a lot of academic work, you'll do a lot more at West Point. You might find that there's not as much time for daydreaming and you might say researching and thinking some particular thing through very carefully. But I know at West Point the procedure there used to be that everyone took the same courses. But they now look over each student's records before he comes and then they give him some sort of test. And a plebe at West Point might start taking, oh, differential calculus, something higher if he comes in there with the sufficient background. And that would be true in languages. Instead of starting out at the bottom, he might start out in way up in English or Latin or Spanish or Portuguese or Russian or German. They offer many languages, but I think they only try to gain good facility in one. And they have language for two years. And in law I suppose it's the same way. They teach a certain amount of law up there. If they come with quite a bit of background, they don't get to repeat the same old background. So West Point is very different from when I taught there or when I was a student there. I was graduated from West Point in 1929.

MB: So, in other words, the West Point system would not be good for a place that was geared towards research?

CS: Well, they do quite a bit of research in military history up there. The students built a library and they delve into it. But they can't do that in every subject, you see. They have a certain amount of material that they have to cover in a given amount of time. And they just don't set it up as research. If they wanted research, then that would require graduate study, you see. And so many of the West Point officers take graduate work at different colleges. I'd been out of West Point five years when I went to the University of Pennsylvania. And I found that all the competition I ran into, even if I'd been out five years, I didn't find it too difficult. I had to review a lot of math because I hadn't been using it. But if they had given me two years

CS: (Cont'd.)

instead of just one year, I think I would have gotten a good bit out of it. I got my master's, but I felt like I was just ready to start doing something when I finished.

MB: Has the, shifting the subject a little bit, has the status, in your opinion, has the status of the army declined in the eyes of the public in general \_\_\_\_\_?

CS: Oh, it blows hot and cold. When I was at the University of Pennsylvania in 1936, when I'd go to church I wouldn't wear a uniform because they looked down their nose so much at people in the service at that time. It just varies from season to season. Right now the military is not popular. In case of an emergency like World War II, then everyone's a hero. The populace is quite fickle. They blow hot and cold.

MB: I asked you this off the tape (?), but you mentioned something. Are you looking forward to not teaching or would you \_\_\_\_\_ (simultaneous voices) \_\_\_\_\_?

CS: I may teach a little in extension but not this fall. If you're on social security, you're not allowed to make much or they take your social security away. But I told them that I'd like them to consider me in the spring and I'd take as much as I could get allowed but it wouldn't be nearly as much as they ordinarily pay for extension teaching.

MB: Have you done any extension teaching?

CS: No. I felt busy enough teaching in the daytime, and I didn't require the additional money. Most people do it for that.

MB: That would be a different type of student.

CS: Yes. I think it would be a better student in extension because they have a better attitude. They're there because they want to learn and they know they need to. And the approach would be quite different than so many of the students we have in the regular courses. The attitude would be quite different. I think another thing is that in extension they should expect more of you. They would want you to fill in the gaps, you see, and be as helpful as you can be.

MB: Okay, thank you very much.

CS: You're welcome.

(END OF INTERVIEW)