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Interview with John Doran

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Side 1 - Interview (telephone) with John Doran - 11 November 1985 - page 1

C: John Doran?

D: Yep.

C: Mr. Doran, my name is Cecil Currey and I am a writer in Florida, a history professor, and I am working on a biography of General Edward Lansdale.

D: Who?

C: General Edward Lansdale.

D: Oh, yeah.

C: I thought you would say, oh, yeah. Pooley Roberts gave me your name and said you would be a good person to talk to about his college days.

D: Oh, well, sure.

C: Do you have a few minutes?

D: Yeah, go ahead.

I'll have to get back in the files here.

C: Well, those are the mental files, aren't they?

D: Oh, yeah.

I have seen him recently, you know.

C: No, I did not know that.

When did you see him?

D: Last January.

C: You know that since then he has had a kidney operation...

D: No.

C: Yeah, he has had a kidney removed and he is not really responding as well as he should.

D: Well, I talked to him on the phone, I guess about 6 weeks ago.

C: I will be seeing him tomorrow, I am flying up to Washington, and will be staying the night with Ed and Pat.

D: Oh, great.

C: ...and I will pass along your regards to them.

C: Mr. Doran, how did you meet Ed?

D: Well, we were fraternity brothers. We were ...when he was pledged... I knew him at least 4 years at UCLA.

C: Were you ahead of him in school or...

D: Right, I was at least...I was the class of '29. Was he '30 or '31?

C: '31.

D: So when he was pledged there at the fraternity, I knew him, and every since. Pooley Roberts was in the same fraternity.

C: What could you tell me as you think back on those years about Lansdale as a young man? What kind of a person was he?

D: Well, he was a well-read young fellow. He certainly knew how to handle the English language and the classics, too. Well, he was a casual type of fellow, and yet he was very serious. He got around socially with the young ladies, in an innocent sort of way I suppose. Anyway he had lots of dates and he was gregarious with the fellows, too. He would take part in their activities, and he lived in the fraternity house most of the time. So it was a very pleasant experience to have him around. Where he differed a little bit from some of the other fellows, he was quite interested around the campus to know what was going on. He wrote for The Claw magazine--did Pooley mention that?

C: Yes, he did.

D: ...a humor magazine.

C: Pooley even came up with an old copy of The Claw.

D: I had some but some of the fellows lost them before I could get them to Ed.

Well, he was interested in the military. I don't know what he had in high school; I guess he might have had some.

C: He was in a thing called the National Training Corp in high school, NTC. And then he got in ROTC in college.

D: Yeah, ROTC.

He was very serious about obtaining his commission, which he did. He would go to every summer camp he had the opportunity to do. He got to know all the faculty pretty well at UCLA, the ROTC faculty. He developed friendships there that most of us would not, because you don't usually get too well acquainted with your professors, you know. You do or you don't, but he enjoyed their company and they apparently enjoyed his. I would say offhand though he got around the campus a lots and I don't know if he wrote in the Daily Bruin or not--that was the newspaper--that I am not sure. I wouldn't be surprised but what he did. I think he must have because he would come back and tell us what was going on politically or something on campus, and it would be interesting, at least; nothing vital. He wasn't promoting any activities or anything like that like youngsters do nowadays. At home he stood in well with his family, I know, and my mother knew his mother.

C: You were family friends then?

D: The fraternity had a mothers' club, and that's how they got together. I don't know anything about his Dad.

C: You didn't know Lansdale then before he came to college?

D: No, no. I was at Long Beach all that time; he was from Los Angeles.

END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

D: I don't think I am helping you very much.

C: I think you will.

D: He was a popular fellow. A lot of people knew him and liked him. Well, he is rather a subdued personality. He doesn't flash anything, like

D: some people you know. He had a good sense of humor.

C: Try to remember what fraternity life was like then. What did you people who were already members of the fraternity do to the pledges?

D: It was pretty easy. Our particular one, we didn't do much. I think when they were freshmen they ...during the period they were freshmen or pledges, we might ask them to do something like sing a song...

C: No swallowing goldfish?

D: No, nothing like that. We might ask them to clean up something in the kitchen just as their regular chore, nothing serious. But Hell Week they might make them wash windows, that sort of thing, and then have something silly at lunch, that they would have to tell stories or something like that.

C: Would you have any way of remembering your house mother?

D: No, they didn't have them.

Well, sororities had them, but no, none of the fraternities had house mothers that I know of. And there were very few around the country that did.

C: Well, back in a day when college students were thought still juveniles, there was no adult supervision?

D: We didn't need any. The seniors were pretty well in line, and then our own alumni came back once in awhile. They were pretty independent, the boys were. They certainly were a lot tidier than that gang that came along in 1960--totally the opposite. I mean, they saved their money. A lot of them were working, away from the school.

Oh, yeah, our fraternity was a local fraternity. It was started there at UCLA like about 10 others. We petitioned Phi Gamma Delta and ~~they took us~~ ...it took us about 3 years to get the charter. It was hard to sell UCLA on the national level because we would go to conventions, and in about a week...

D: of course, we would send a brochure of our chapter and the men in it and what the school was like, but we had a hard time getting a charter. So we had to work harder than most fraternities ...

C: Was Ed involved in any way?

D: Oh, yeah, We all were. So as a result we were careful that we made a good impression and to keep out of trouble, so they wouldn't have any...

(problem with tape) ...charter, Phi Gamma Delta. Our local we called Delta Rho Omega, went by DRO, but still the Greek was Delta Rho Omega. We had more responsibilities than some of the other fraternities, because we still hadn't got our charter. But we stuck with it...it would come to a national voet and we would lose by...see they had about 60 chapters and some people didn't want any more. Well, now they have all got more--Phi Gamma has over 100. They were in a period then they just didn't want to expand but the Berkley chapter and the Stanford chapter, they certainly were all in our favor, up and down the coast. I say we had more responsibility as a fraternity to certainly keep the place orderly and tidy and our own department in better shape some of them would.

C: What did the campus look like back then?

up until 19...

D: It was on Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles--they moved out there in '29, yeah. The new campus was very large, you know. That is a big school. In '29 it was large enough for 5,000 students. There were one and two story buildings...had trees and grass. The neighborhood were homes where most of them were two story large houses that probably were built in 1915 or so. It was a good neighborhood. It was about 3 miles from downtown Los Angeles, on the way toward Hollywood.

C: Was there a lot of new construction going on because it was a new campus?

D: Well, when we got out there, yeah. I am talking about the old one now. When we moved out to the new one, there were one or two new buildings first, and then all the rest were added afterwards. Now it is very large. But the Westwood Village didn't have much; now it has got buildings 25 stories high. One corner had 3 gas stations; now there is a tall building on each one of them. But the whole area, called Westwood, was all new construction. And fraternities rented...some people built apartment houses and then rented them to fraternities. Others would find a house here and there that was for rent. They were all scattered around within about a mile of the campus.

C: What kind of a student was Ed?

D: I don't know what kind of grades he made...don't know. I don't remember any remarks of his that he wasn't doing well.

C: Did he show any interest in the Orient at that time?

D: (unintelligible) He was more interested in right where he is, in Virginia and Maryland and that sort of thing. I can't remember anything about the Orient. In fact I probably would since his Vietnam experience, I might have thought back and said, ah ha, but no.

C: Do you remember any adventures or any fun times that you and he had together?

D: No, they were all more or less...at the fraternity house...we were roommates for a year.

C: Well, what was it like to live with him then?

D: Well, he was tidy. We had double deckers. The fraternity house was in a one story building and it had a small one at the rear. It had two small apartments like might have been for servants or something. We lived in one of those, and it had a little bathroom. We were right next to the big house. I don't know if we ever went to bed at the same time or not--it doesn't make

D: much difference, I guess...whoever studied later was it (laughter), the last one in.

C: What did you all do on the weekends?

D: Well, we scattered. I don't know what he did. Most of the time I would go back down to Long Beach.

C: Was that your home?

D: Right. I wouldn't get back until Sunday night.

I know that he enjoyed his military duty up there in that Monterrey area, when he had the reserve commission. He went up there quite often, to the summer camp, two week training. I went about once every 3 years. He went more often.

C: Were you also commissioned an officer?

D: Yes.

C: And where did you serve? You were in World War II?

D: Yeah, I got my commission in 1927. After I left there I went to law school, but I took correspondence courses, did some summer camps. When World War II came along I was ready for it more or less. I learned enough from World War I; I was told the difference between an enlisted man and an officer and what their purposes were, and I said, well, it may be inevitable so I might as well try to obtain a commission and keep it. That was my attitude.

C: Did you serve in the Orient or...

D: Oh, no, I went the other way.

C: So you didn't run across Ed during the Second World War?

D: No, not at all. I don't think I even had a letter from him. We were scattered pretty much. I might have heard something about him, you know, because he sent chain letters around--not chain letters but newsy letters

D: about some of the fellows, find out where they were. I was in an armored division --invasion of Morocco and then we were down in North Africa a year and then after the invasion of Sicily, our division went over to England for 6 months, and then we were in the invasion of Normandy; stayed in northern France, Belgium and Holland and to Berlin. So mine was just the opposite of Ed's.

C: Well, Mr. Doran, I think that you have answered the questions that I had.

D: It's pretty hard...you could say gregarious and friendly, and he got along fine with many people, whether they were important, whether they were politicians or just ordinary duffs like myself, he got along with them. And he was tidy. He had to be or he wouldn't have gotten along militarily. He leaned in that direction. And on the writing...on The Claw, of course, he did go around school and try to get information ...personality...but I still think he was on that Daily Bruin, the newspaper.

C: I appreciate very much being able to talk with you, Mr. Doran.

(conversation omitted: he has been to a convention on beach here, Clearwater Beach, military)

END OF INTERVIEW

John Doran Interview, 11 November 1985

When I cite the Pooley interviews, simply say, cf., JD Interview, 11 November 1985. Not much in this one that would be helpful. Actually, there is nothing in this bland interview that would be helpful.