

Col. Alfred Thomas and Sgt. Charles Fisher

Side 1:

[Intro] Through an interview with Norma, which included her husband who had for 10 years been on the school board, I learned about the Jr. ROTC program. [Patrick Price, Norma Price]

[27] In 1992, under Bush, the Jr. ROTC program was approved by Congress to include services other than the Army. Charles had been in the Army ROTC when he graduated from high school in 1942. The program is designed to teach discipline, improve character, and build a solid foundation for students. [President George Bush]

[47] Charles said this is not like the Hitler Youth program. There is no requirement to join and school credits are given as they are in any other course. A military degree is not given upon completion but there are advantages.

[56] Al said that if a graduate joins the service he/she will receive \$75 more a month in pay - this applies to the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Graduates are given a "stamp of approval."

[71] Al came to his teaching position in Asheville by chance. He was the commanding officer of the Marine barracks in Pearl Harbor and was about to retire after 33 years of service, when approached regarding a position in Asheville. He was interviewed by the principal, was impressed with the school and the ROTC program here, retired and moved here with his wife. [Col. William Spesel, Bill Stanley, Helen Thomas, Peter Griffin]

[133] Students enter the program when they are 14 or 15 and do not need the "decivilizing" required in boot camp.

[146] Both Al and Charles agree that color never enters their minds (and I believe it). Several years ago there were 60% white and 40% black - now it is 50/50. There are more black than white commanders and at one time the commander was a black female.

[171] Al spent three hours with Stanley (who is currently a county commissioner). He was the 7th person to be interviewed. A lot of units, in order to keep their numbers up, are lax with the regulations (uniforms, haircut, etc.) but, despite the fact that according to law 10% of the students must participate in the program, the men agreed that standards must be maintained. [Bill Stanley]

[208] There is a waiting list of high schools requesting certification.

[227] Al's wife, having moved in the service for 30 years, was reluctant to be far from the ocean and separated from friends; however she grew to love this area. They have 4 children - all are involved with nursing and physical activities. [Bill Thomas, Kathy Thomas, Robert Thomas]

[255] Charles grew up here, joining the Marines. When he was ready to retire in 1966 he helped one of the first high schools get a commission - a Jesuit school in New Orleans. On a recruiting

tour he ran into the Camp Rockmont High School Jr. ROTC and applied for that position in 1976.

[286] Charles was impressed with the student's response to care and motivation. He feels that students are still not being educated and that morals and ideals are not taught anymore. "The formation years - up to age 12 - are crucial." When he returned from Vietnam in uniform he had foreign objects thrown at him at the airport, and some of the veterans display their lack of respect to the flag and the country to their children. He gives talks to middle and elementary school students, taking some of his high school cadets with him to demonstrate their color guards. Students enroll in ROTC like they enroll in any other class.

[429] Al discusses the quality and criteria for evaluating and maintaining the standards of the students.

[487] Charles said that in 1966 the armed forces were directed to take 100,000 men into the service. While many were turned back because of lack of ability, many were admitted with 3rd grade mentality. This backfired and for many of the misfits turning to drugs and drinking during Vietnam was their way of escape. [Lyndon B. Johnson]

[513] Al adds to these comments by saying that after the military service the men bring this "couldn't care less" attitude back to Asheville. Today the situation is different. One must have a high school diploma to join the services.

[567] Charles said that in the 18th century the British Army had the same trouble - desertion with flogging as punishment. Pay and status low. When Al went to the service he received \$21 a month, Charles received \$72 a month - now soldiers receive \$800 a month and after retirement receive \$1400 after taxes. A better soldier is required. Recruitment has been cut back and is more selective.

Side 2:

[2/intro] Charles lives with his mother in Marion, driving to school every day. He starts out early so he will be on hand when the students arrive. He said that the school is expected to be a parent to many students, feeding them breakfast and lunch. These students have no guidance at home and the parents won't get involved. "Education is a game of body count like Vietnam," and, "children are having children."

[2/38] Al said that most of the young want discipline and are disappointed when they don't get it. He has seen single parents working 2-3 jobs who relate to their kids and help them be successful. "You don't change behavior, you change attitude. If you can change their attitude, behavior has to follow." "They could care less for how much you know until they know that you care." His door is always open and students know that they can talk to him. The staff can pick out the students in the Jr. ROTC program.

[2/100] Charles enjoys working with young people. Working here puts him in an economic bracket where he doesn't make enough to pay income taxes, but if he can help one person it is worth it.

[2/109] Some of the graduates come back and talk to the classes - "it is so simple - be reliable, dependable, and give 110% effort."

[2/129] Students in the ROTC program do community work - charities, fundraisers, 25-30 military grave sites, etc. [Wade Huff]

[2/142] Al reads from letters of recognition - traffic control, parades, sales drives (fruit, antique, e.g. Vetust Study Club), setting up Health Adventure Show. Gov. Hunt said this was the #1 ROTC unit in the nation. [Governor James Hunt]

[2/217] There are close to 120 ROTC's across the country. Every 2 years a 2-day conference is held within the district for senior Marine instructors.

[2/238] There are 4 major competitions, the first was in Asheville. Al came in 1975 and there was only one other drill meet in the country (Enka Air Force). Kids want to compete but need guidance. A meet is made up of: 1. Regulation, 2. Exhibition (fancy - judged by Army Reserve Drill Sergeants), 3. Marksmanship competition. [Sergeant Duncan]

[2/290] Students drill every morning and stay after school. This is their second home (see Bob Dougherty tape).

[2/302] Al tells of his early experience in the program (see O. L. Sherrill tape). Blacks had Afro haircut, whites had hair to shoulders. It was a rough 2 years and it took 3 years before students wanted to be cadets. Some of the negativity toward the military still exists. [O. L. Sherrill, Bill Stanley]

[2/346] Al won't let the students compete until they are ready. They wear their uniforms with pride. Those who don't stand for the flag are not to attend any more affairs. Trouble makers are not the blacks but the white middle class. A representative of the ACLU came in. [he did not want to discuss this - I have a date with Laura Gordon which may give more information on this.] [Dr. Leggett]

[2/445] He reads a letter of appreciation for the pride, dedication, professional training, and discipline given students. Al said "For those that want it, it's there."

[2/465] Charles feels the future looks mixed - for the upper level things will get better. They won't get better for the blacks and whites on the lower level.

[2/489] "They know (referring to Bob Dougherty who sits quietly by and is interviewed later) who will go to bat for them." [Bob Daugherty]

[2/506] Al feels we will see more of the above behavior in the future.