

TOM BROWN INTERVIEW

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Lexington, Virginia

B. I don't know how representative their comments were, these were cadets who didn't know him, but who knew that he was a cadet and a graduate of V.M.I. and were ready to disclaim him, that is, not to identify with him as cadets do with each other. One of the of V.M.I. for good or ill as carrying solidarity among the alumni and feeling for the institute. But both the cadets I talked to in question were from the South and they felt that this would not have happened had he not been there, that he was an agitator, that he asked for it and they had no sympathy whatever. They characterize the attitude of the corps as being out of sympathy. I've since talked to other cadets who feel differently.

S. They are establishing a memorial in the English Department.

B. Minor Rogers was concerned about establishing a memorial to Jon. Minor finished V.M.I. in 1956.

S. They wouldn't have been there at the same time, so this was really just a concern for V.M.I. than for Jon and what he did. He talked with and talked with the alumni secretary about it and he was only willing to run a news article in the alumni magazine. He talked with Bob Wilson, the institute chaplain and so after Minor left I was in touch with these people and the general at the first faculty meeting gave a.....well, he memorialized Jon regarding his courage.

S. Are there any copies of what he said available?

B. I don't know. You would have to ask him, I think at the same time he remembered two or three graduates who had been killed in Viet Nam, it was in the same spirit, he can see that Jonathan died for what he believed in.

October 12, 1965

I'm sure you would find that he wouldn't in any way identify himself as being in support of the type of thing Jon was engaged in, but simply in his conviction - that he had the courage to carry through in his conviction. That's his point of view. And this was the tack that Bob Wilson took with him, Bob was responsible, we worked through him. He's the man who has the ear of the General and Bob brought this off just by appealing to his sense of courage. Then [redacted] put the article from the LIVING CHURCH on the bulletin board to raise the question with the English students whether or not they wanted a memorial dedicated, - I guess he's told you as much as there is to tell about that. I don't know if there has been any response from his classmates.

T. [redacted] hopes that a move for a memorial would come from his class. It did come from a couple of them. I talked with a cadet last week who is from Mississippi and he's trying hard to make sense out of an injustice which he feels in response to the trial. As he says, and I agree with him, that Jonathan and anyone who joins this particular college in this way.

He says that Jesus Christ would have been so much more useful alive than he was dead. Here's a young guy letting himself get killed where if he had stayed out of there, and not gotten killed he could have contributed so much more, the same thing with Jesus Christ.

Of course, we got into a discussion of demonstrations and this sort of thing. He has a method of achieving change he was rather pessimistic about this because he felt that there was more hostility than anything else. I asked him if he would rather have Negroes armed in the South and let them achieve their ends by violent means which seems very likely to be. He had no answer to that.

October 12, 1965

Bob Wilson did have prayers in memory of Jon at one of the local services this fall and we did the Sunday after he was killed. We had no special service. I thought it would be more appropriate for the Institute to do that than this parish.