



West Point Center for Oral History



Generous graduates and friends of the Academy who support the West Point Center for Oral History will take pride in the transformative power of their gifts.

Total Center Endowment \$11.4 million

Funding & Recognition Opportunities

Center for Oral History Naming	\$5 million
Center Director Endowment	\$2 million
Intern Program Endowment	\$2 million
Subject Archives (6)	\$1 million
Film Production Studio	\$1 million
Documentary Film Sponsorships	\$1 million
Transcription Fund Endowment	\$500,000



West Point
The United States Military Academy



Freed Lowrey
698 Mills Road, West Point, NY 10996
tel 845.446.1558 *fax* 845.446.1696
web WestPointForUsAll.org

as of February 8, 2011



“While the lessons we learn in the classroom and practical exercises conducted in the field are critical to our success as officers, nothing can compare to the real-world experiences shared by those who have come before us. What we learn from soldiers and leaders who have already been in the fight, who have themselves seen the reality of war, will allow cadets to be better prepared to lead America’s sons and daughters in combat.” —Charles Nadd ‘11

West Point Center for Oral History

From the front lines of battle to the halls of U.S. government, West Point graduates have led our country. They have been part of the nation’s triumphs and struggles, its gains and its losses. Their voices make up the patchwork we know as American history.

As a source of knowledge about that history, the stories our graduates tell are unparalleled. The stories are important for scholars trying to make sense of past occurrences; they are important for cadets seeking a way to understand their future. They are a link back to West Point’s time-honored tradition of service, but they also look forward, giving meaning to the work we do at West Point today.

While the West Point community has always seen its graduates as a source of education and inspiration, there has been no formal program to celebrate and preserve their individual stories, or to make these stories readily available to researchers, academics, and anyone interested in American or military history. The West Point Center for Oral History is working to reverse that trend. Funding is being sought to develop a website and build the center’s capacity to conduct and document ultimately thousands of interviews.

The center records the professional experiences of West Point graduates and other accomplished soldiers; indeed, with anyone whose work has had an impact on a soldier’s life. Situated within the Department of History, the center soon will become a fully activated online resource, providing a state-of-the-art website that will feature high-definition video and audio files and that will be easily searchable by cadets, scholars, and the general public.

The center will also contribute to the broader public’s understanding of the American military. Through proactive outreach, the center will bring the story of the soldier into American homes and classrooms, closing the gap of understanding that has long hindered our public discussion. We expect these efforts to encourage a wider discussion about leadership, ethics, and honor in American society.

We are confident that our center will contribute meaningfully to oral history by mining memories and subjects that have not yet been approached or that have been overlooked. Our center, though, will not limit itself to history that is long past. Men and women currently returning from service are fresh with experiences that may fade with time. We intend to collect these stories to gain a deeper insight into what makes up a soldier’s experience today. In fact, it is in this respect that we are certain of our center’s unique position.

Every Soldier Has a Story

Oral history is a perishable object; it is best when recorded fresh from experience. To this end, we have chosen the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as vital topics for our archive. These conflicts provide the center with a historic opportunity, for never before has a comprehensive, popularly available oral history of an American war been composed while that war was still being engaged. Our efforts to record the experiences of war in depth and fresh from the battlefield will ensure the center’s preeminence as a trusted resource for anyone attempting to gain a deeper under-

standing of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly the human dimension of these conflicts.

Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Farrell ’86 recalls facing an insurgent on the streets of Iraq and seeking permission from a superior officer to “kill this individual to neutralize the threat.”

The interviews record the reality of these gut-wrenching decisions soldiers have to make, but they also dispel simplistic notions of soldiers numb to the moral issues they confront. As one graduate remembers of his own tense confrontation in Iraq, “A big part of my job at that moment was not to freak out—not to fall apart emotionally.” Another sums up his time in combat thus: “Think about what your moral compass is because you will be challenged with situations that are morally, ethically gray.”

As an integral part of a cadet’s education, the center will help them understand and anticipate those moral and ethical “gray” areas. It will serve as a living history center, bringing studies of Iraq, Vietnam, the Cold War, or the invasion of Normandy alive through the voices of those who experienced history firsthand.

Preserving the Past

Veteran journalist Todd Brewster, the center’s current director, and Major John Rinquist, deputy director, have already created an archive of nearly 500 compelling interviews. The archive will be developed and expanded upon carefully and intelligently, through a project-focused approach. We will create “rooms” or “chapters” on the website: in one room there may be interviews from a particular time period; in one chapter there may be interviews from different times but with subject matter that overlaps. We have already begun this practice though a micro-history of interviews with the

USMA Class of 1967, a hinge moment in American history and in the history of the Army.

Indeed, we will ensure the broad appeal of the center by including not only stories from soldiers, but also interviews from other players—journalists, former Secretaries of Defense or State, key Congressmen and Senators—who themselves were prominent figures in shaping history. And from the beginning we have envisioned including documentary filmmakers, publishers, and others in the work of the center in order to increase its impact. As a start, the acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns is already a member of our advisory board. It is our hope that interviews from the center will serve as raw material for documentaries, books, and projects that will find a national, even international audience.

In short, we foresee a thriving center fully endowed by a community of donors, used regularly by cadets in their education, as well as the academe and historians, and viewed as an important contribution to national debate and memory. This will be an archive unrivaled in the recording of soldiers’ experiences.

With your support, we can develop the West Point Center for Oral History into nothing less than the finest and most adventurous oral history center anywhere in the world. But your support can also help us do something simpler, and arguably more important: give voice to the countless soldiers who have shaped our history and who make our future possible.

Please join us as we ensure West Point’s reputation as a leader in all endeavors, and take pride in the transformative power of the generous gift you can make today.



“I saw the flash, and I heard the boom. I was ejected from the vehicle. It really is almost like time slows down. I can remember being tossed around inside the vehicle and landing on the ground. That’s when time went back to normal: as I came to a rolling stop and I saw the vehicle continue forward.”

—Lieutenant Colonel Greg Gadson ‘89