

**Part III**  
**Nancy Graves Interview<sup>6</sup>**

Q: Did you grow up in a military family?

A: No, I did not. My father was in the paper business. However, my uncle was a Regular Army officer, so I saw the Army from their life and was familiar with it.

Q: Where did you grow up?



*Nancy Graves in 1981.*

A: I was born in Baltimore [Maryland]. When I was two years old, we moved to Hamilton, Ohio. When I was 12, we moved to a little town in Massachusetts.

Q: So you had a little bit of an idea about moving around yourself, didn't you?

A: I did indeed. Much more than my husband did, who was an Army brat.

Q: You know, that's a point.

A: He lived all his life here in Washington, where his father was on active duty in one place.

Q: That's right. That's exactly right. And that's unusual. I hadn't thought of that.

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<sup>6</sup>Dr. Schubert interviewed Nancy Graves in Arlington, Virginia, in April 1985. Both he and Mrs. Graves edited the transcript.

A: In those days, moving in the civilian world was quite a big event. So the fact that we moved three times in my somewhat early childhood was different from a lot of people in the civilian world, unlike today.

Q: That's right. Where did you and your husband meet?

A: We met in Boston. After college I was working in Boston.

Q: You had already been through college?

A: Oh, yes. I had been out of college a couple of years— was working in a law firm in Boston. He was at MIT, and we had mutual friends.

Q: What kind of work were you doing at the time?

A: I was a probate accountant.

Q: I don't know what that is.

A: That's doing the accounts of the trusts and estates that are handled by a law firm.

Q: And what kind of education did you have?

A: I had a B.A. degree from Wellesley.

Q: In?

A: Economics.

Q: Economics? That wasn't all that normal for a woman at that time to go into, was it?

A: Well, it was at a woman's college, certainly.

Q: Of course. That's a good point.

A: However, economics was not the popular major that it is now. I don't pretend to be a pathfinder or anything. It just was something I liked.

Q: So you were kind of—well, you weren't really in your field.

A: No, no. But that was really—again, you have to think of the times—that was simply a job, not a profession. Young women now go more for professions than jobs. But I enjoyed it. I worked for this law firm for three years and enjoyed it very much.

Q: Was it something at the time that you thought about continuing in? Did you have any particular career goals at the time?

A: No. I wanted to go live in Boston and work. I went one day and had many interviews, and these people hired me. I fitted in very well. I liked it. I liked the firm and I liked the people.

Q: You liked Boston winters?

A: Oh, I loved Boston—winters, summers; it didn't matter.

Q: And that's where you met—when your husband was a student at MIT? He was a captain then?

A: He was a captain then and was working on his Ph.D. at MIT.

Q: And when you got married, did you get married in Boston?

A: No. My parents at that point were living in Paoli, Pennsylvania, and we were married in Paoli. But we had both been living in Boston and returned there. He was a student, and I was working there.

Q: That's right. Did you know when you got married that his next assignment was in Europe?

A: No.

Q: I was just curious about that because—

A: Initially his next assignment was to be back to Sandia Base in Albuquerque. He got that changed because he felt that he'd be going back as a very senior captain—he was promoted to major two months later—to a less responsible job than he had held three years before when he was part of the initial group of officers sent to Sandia by General Groves.

He really didn't want to go back so soon. So we went to SHAPE instead.

Q: Was your husband's father alive then?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you remember of him?

A: He was a very impressive person physically, although he was old and ill at that point. He was tall—much bigger than my husband, of course.

Q: Yes.

A: It was really quite amusing when I first met him. Ernie had told me many stories about him. I had come to Washington by train. Ernie met me at the station.

As we drove to their apartment, he spent that time telling me not to be upset if his father never spoke to me because, first, he didn't like women, second, he was old and crotchety so probably wouldn't say anything—and, besides, he was deaf. He would probably not even speak to me and I should not get upset.

So we arrived at the apartment and had lunch. And Pop couldn't stop talking to me. He was very gracious to me—asked me all kinds of questions. And, of course, I was totally tongue-tied because I hadn't expected him to say anything to me—even hello.

But he was devoted to his son, and anything Ernie was interested in, he, of course, was. So he was very charming to me, and I was really very touched by that.

I don't know what kind of an impression I made because, as I said, I was totally tongue-tied. He asked me tax problems, tax questions, and things like that, because I also did tax returns for this law firm. I just could not get my wits together because I hadn't expected him to speak to me.

He was rather awesome.

Q: I imagine he was. And there are clues of that all around, including that photostat of that letter that's in your dining room.

A: That Ernie wrote to his father?

Q: I think, yes. Or that he wrote to his mother about his father.

A: Yes, that's right. Pop was just a very fair square-shooter, and he had very high standards.

Q: I imagine that he did. You had your first separation briefly when your husband went to SHAPE, didn't you?

A: Yes, that's right. We were married in May and went back up to Boston.

Q: That's 1951.

A: We went back for Ernie to finish his thesis. He had originally planned to have it finished, and then we would be married. However, he came down with mononucleosis and was in the hospital for eight weeks. So then he had to stay another semester at MIT.

We were married in May, and he finished his thesis that summer. We stayed in Boston, and I typed the thesis. That was the first big strain on our marriage because we had an old-fashioned typewriter which didn't have the keys for formulae. I can remember that I did not always leave enough space for him to handwrite the formulae.

One particular time, the fact that I hadn't left the space meant I had to redo several pages. And I thought he could jolly well write smaller and get it in. And he allowed as how he couldn't. It was probably a good thing that I was a bride at that point, but I retyped those pages. He finished in September and went to SHAPE.

I couldn't follow until he had housing. He found that all that really meant was that you could have a hotel room. Although from stateside, they told you that you had to have housing.

Then it took two months to get my orders, to get my passport, to get all of these things when I was very new in learning the system. I finally went over the last day of November.

Q: But that must have been very exciting.

A: It was great.

Q: That was your first experience in Europe?

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: And your first experience with the separation which the military imposes, although a small one?

A: Yes. That was a couple of months.

Q: I focused my question on that because I wanted to get into this matter of the—you know, the phrase “Army wife” in general. That’s more than a cliché, isn’t it, because you really are—

A: Oh, it’s a profession. It really is a full-time job. And many people are not suited for it, but I think I was particularly suited for it.

Q: Would you talk about it in general, you know? How is it a full-time job? What does it require?

A: Well, it requires a willingness to change. Every situation was different, I feel, through the years. Every assignment Ernie had, I had a different role. I think it was quite a challenge to do it well.

Q: I’m sure it was.

A: And I think it’s very important that the wives admit that this is a job.

I think the assignments and the career of the husband come first, but I don’t feel the wife should feel that she’s second place. It’s just that these decisions are made way out somewhere. You don’t just decide, “Well, I want to go here or there.” The government decides or the Army decides or your husband decides or something, and you go and you make the best of it. There’s something good in every place.

Q: The career essentially belongs to both of you.

A: It does indeed, except, as I say, the wife does not have much impact on where the next assignment is—I don’t feel she should. I feel that, yes, she should be considered to some extent. But it’s primarily what’s good for many features other than simply her personally.

Q: One of the things that I was struck with when I talked with your husband about this, about how assignments are determined—he was, you know, very unabashed about how he went to his father’s friends when he needed help.

A: Very infrequently. The one time I mentioned is the only time I remember. Rather than going to Albuquerque, he really thought going to SHAPE would be very exciting. And there were very few junior officers there.

The aides were about the only other ones that I can remember who were as junior as he was. He did have one classmate over there who was an exec to somebody. But generally, we were with older people. Lieutenant colonels and colonels were doing the

staff jobs at that time that might in time have devolved to more junior officers. But then they were the ones.

Q: So it must have been an assignment with great prestige then?

A: Yes. To get over there early to SHAPE that way. The first people went to SHAPE in about January of '51, and Ernie went in September. So he wasn't in the very first vanguard, but he was very early on.

Q: How difficult was it to come to terms with this role of Army wife? Were there a lot of surprises in there for you?

A: Well, no. Not really. I had never been a wife before so there were lots of surprises in that, too, I guess. I think an Army wife has to be very self-sufficient and not dependent on her husband for her own interests.

I was dumped in Paris. I couldn't speak French. We did have one very close friend—well, who became a very close friend. I had never met her before. She was General Somervell's daughter [Susan]. General Brehon Somervell and my father-in-law had been very close friends, and Ernie had known his three daughters from childhood.

She was living in Paris with her husband, who worked for General Motors France. She was a tremendous help to me. She got me a French teacher. She got me an obstetrician. She got me all kinds of help that put me very much at ease and made those first six months in Paris much easier.

I think one could have gotten very depressed and felt overwhelmed. The other Americans at SHAPE weren't my contemporaries, and we weren't living near any of them. We were living in a hotel. Later we got a little house in Saint Cloud.

So a service wife—it isn't just Army—really must be self-sufficient and enjoy being self-sufficient and enjoy meeting the challenges of being alone in a foreign environment.

Q: And the French aren't exactly warm and charming, are they?

A: Well, no, especially the fact that I couldn't talk to them at first. We had very little intercourse, really, with our neighbors. They were friendly, but the yards have walls. You know, you aren't on an open lawn like this. And I was very busy. When I went over to France, I was in the early stages of pregnancy. Our son was born six months after I got over there. So I was quite involved with being a new mother.

Q: You were very busy?



*John W. and Susan (Somervell) Griswold with Major and Mrs. Graves at the christening of Ralph Henry Graves in the American Cathedral in Paris, August 1952.*

A: I was busy. And I didn't feel all that well at first, although that was very brief. But it was a challenge—to learn French and see Paris. You know, I looked at all those little children who were speaking French. And I thought, well, if they can speak French, I can speak French. So it was, yes, a challenge. In all of our different tours, there was a different challenge in every one of them. This one was to speak French and get along in Paris.

Q: How long did you stay over there?

A: Three years.

Q: Wow. So your first child is a son, right?

A: Yes.

Q: He came home speaking French?

A: No. He was only two when he came home. He wasn't speaking anything. He was just beginning to talk. We think one reason he was so slow to talk was that he heard both languages.

Q: Military families appear quick to form support groups.

A: This is very true. But just our environment there in Paris—there wasn't any. That's all.

Q: That's right. But other places, that does obtain, that these people do—

A: Oh, absolutely. But most of the time, we lived places that we were not in an Army group.

Q: That's right. I hadn't thought of that. You really were left on your own resources.

A: I was left on my own resources. Everyone needs a support group. And everywhere we moved, I joined a Wellesley group. There is a Wellesley alumnae association in every city in the world, I think. I met some people through that in Paris. As a matter of fact, one of the women who did become a close friend of mine lived nearby and was also a Wellesley graduate. Her husband was with an oil company. We discovered each other out pushing baby carriages.

So, yes. There were different support groups. Actually, I would say that in those early days, I don't think the Army, although it was supportive, had the emphasis on family that it has now.

You know, this was 30-some years ago. The world was quite different. Everyone was very friendly, and especially [Major General] C. Rodney Smith, for whom Ernie was working, and his family. They were all very supportive of us.

But I really didn't seek support or help. I had my friends. We were a little more oriented towards Susan Somervell's friends in the civilian world than we were the military. We had military friends, of course, especially the Canadians, but socially we were more in the civilian world.

Q: Did you get much of an opportunity to travel during that tour? I know you had a youngster.

A: I had two babies in those three years. So no, I did not travel much. We did make some trips. We went to Garmisch for a week, and that included going through Switzerland

and Germany. That was when Ralph was about six months old and we were able to leave him with my friend who lived across the street.

Then we made a trip to Holland. We had a Dutch girl living with us. We took her and Ralph to Holland because she had to make periodic trips back to renew her student visa. We also spent two weeks in England and Scotland.

And then we spent the last month in the south of France because we were not allowed on the airplane with a newborn baby. The baby had to be 10 weeks old. We moved out of our house and went to Guethary in the south of France with the brand new baby, a two-year old, and a Dutch girl.

Q: So you went over there with no children and you came home with two?

A: Came home with two.

Q: That's quite an accomplishment for one tour.

You know, you said something that once you mentioned it, became obvious, but I really hadn't thought about it. You really didn't have a regular military career because you didn't live on military posts.

A: That's right.

Q: I guess Fort Belvoir is the only post your husband was stationed on in the states.

A: Well, the schools—Leavenworth and Carlisle—and in 1971 to 1974 we lived at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

Q: Right, sure.

A: But no. That's true. At SHAPE, they later built SHAPE village. That was really an Army post, except it was multinational. They had a point system to be eligible—number of children, time in country, et cetera. We didn't qualify and didn't want to live there anyhow. We wanted to live on the economy, in the French environment. But that would have been a post environment, if you will.

Q: So your whole experience is really different from what you might call the normal Army family because you were an Army family in a civil environment most of the time?

A: Yes. I think this applies to the engineers a lot—not necessarily us, in particular. You go out to district jobs. You go out to the various jobs, and there's not a large Army community. And generally, you do not live on a post.

Q: That's right. But when you came back from France, you did come back to Fort Belvoir.

A: We went to Belvoir. Ernie was a student, and then we stayed two more years when he worked in the nuclear power program.

Q: What did you think about that environment? Did you enjoy living in that environment?

A: Oh, very much. Oh, yes.

Q: Did you have quarters on the post?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you beginning then to think about—I remember Barbara Tuchman's biography of [General Joseph] Joe Stilwell—how early in his career, he saw Monterey, California, and he decided this was the place where he was going to live. But, of course, he did not live very long after he retired. But that's where he wanted to go early on. Were you thinking about where you were wanting to live at that point?

A: No. I really and truly don't remember that we ever discussed where we would live, because we both were sure we'd live in Washington. We simply never discussed it. It just happened.

Q: Where did you live when your husband went to Korea? Was it 1958?

A: Yes.

Q: That was his first unaccompanied tour after you were married.

A: Yes, that's right. And I came back to this area. My parents, by this time, had moved to Cleveland, Ohio. I had no interest in living in Cleveland, and they had each other. My mother-in-law, of course, was widowed. I felt that I should be near her.

We tried to find a house for me and the children in Annapolis. We had one, but the lady backed out at the last moment. So we decided that I would come here to be near Ernie's mother and because there were so many West Point classmates.

That was a time that I felt I really did look for a support group, if you call it that. There were so many friends here. I play golf, and we belonged to the Army–Navy Country Club. So I wanted to have that opportunity to play golf. That’s another whole circle of friends who are military, but are not our friends through the military. They’re our friends through golf.

Q: How many kids were there by 1958?

A: Three.

Q: And they must have been a full-time job?

A: Yes. They were. They were a challenge. When Ernie went, they were two, four, and six years old.

Q: So they were starting school.

A: Ralph was starting school. I don’t know how many of our little family stories you want in this. But Ralph entered first grade just after Ernie went to Korea. I decided I needed a vacation. My mother came to take care of Ralph and Willy, who was two. And I took Robby, who was four, with me and went to New England to visit friends.

While I was gone, my mother got a message from the school that they had given Ralph a test and they were very disturbed by it, because he had totally flunked the reading readiness test. They thought he was a bright child and they couldn’t understand. Well, it seems that the test was not appropriate to the child because he had been reading for two years at that point. And to give him a reading readiness test when he was already reading just didn’t work. That was just one of the things that happened.

Q: But, you know, life is filled with these little crises—and they are at the time, aren’t they, because you don’t know what the—

A: I really wasn’t upset. I knew the child could read, which they didn’t know—couldn’t figure out.

We spent one year there. It was a good year. It went very fast. We kept very busy. I always made an effort to be upbeat about all of these things. Before Ernie left—and he took about two months leave, I think, before he left—I heard my son Ralph, again, out in the neighborhood where somebody had asked when his father was going to leave, saying, “We don’t know, but we certainly wish he’d hurry and go because we are going to have so much fun after he is gone.”

So that was the way I felt the Army wife has quite a responsibility, because if she lets herself get down, then it spins off on the children and it snowballs and it's very bad. But the boys and I had a good time.

Q: Does it get progressively harder to get upbeat about these things? Or does it get progressively easier? Or does it matter?

A: I wouldn't say. I never had a problem with these things. I knew from the beginning there would be many separations. I certainly knew Ernie should go and must go to Korea, that he must go to Vietnam. And no, I never even thought about it. I guess I was peculiar. But all these problems that are now coming up about wives and families never occurred to me. You must remember that my point of reference among the military had been more to separations of two or three years during World War II than just one year.

That was his career pattern. I was prepared for it long before we were married. The letter he wrote to my father asking to marry me said, "There will be times when Nancy cannot join me." So, you know, it never occurred me to make a problem about these things. It was my idea that I should make the best of it for him so that he wouldn't be worried about the family. I think he always had confidence in my being able to cope with the children, which I did.

Q: Judging from what you just told me about Ralph's comment to his friends, your kids were pretty well equipped to deal with it, too.

A: I think so. But I made a conscious effort to develop them that way.

Q: What kind of a father was your husband?

A: Oh, I think he's a great father. He was not the father that went to the ball games and watched from the sidelines. But he taught them all to read—all four of them—took the time to teach them to read.

He was always wanting them to think about what was going to happen next. He's a very far-sighted type. I mean, through all of this construction and remodeling of our house, this has been one of the things he has emphasized. He can see what would happen next if such-and-such was done this way. So that is the guidance he has always given the children—not to belabor, "what do you want to be when you grow up," but to think about it and to plan as you went along so that you had options when you got there.

Q: Of course, he was an only child.

A: So am I.

Q: And his father was very, very closely observant of his progress.

A: That's right. And I think Ernie had the same attitude towards his children. Ernie was younger. Ernie's father was 44 years old when Ernie was born, and that in itself makes an entirely different relationship, you know. By the time Ernie was 10, 12 years old, his father was well in his 50s. That's a wholly different relationship. Ernie was a generation younger when his children were born.

But he was always busy. He had very time-consuming jobs. I went to all the baseball games and football games and diving meets. I don't think he ever went. I think the children would have liked him to go, but they accepted this relationship. So long as somebody was there, we were supporting them in what they did.

But it was a full-time job for me. I don't see how women can work and raise a family and be an Army wife. Something has to give. I was fully employed, I can assure you, through all these years.

Q: You only lived on the military post that one time?

A: Other than Leavenworth and Carlisle. And then Fort Sheridan, but that's much later in life.

Q: Is there an informal chain of command among Army families? Do wives of senior officers—

A: Oh, I think there's a certain respect for the wife of a more senior officer. But I think that would be true, or should be true, in the civilian world as well.

Whenever my husband had a troop command, I was elsewhere. I wasn't part of that. I think in the other branches of the service, probably the wives are more conscious of this chain-of-command concept. I am not because it was just never in my experience.

In various jobs that Ernie has had, of course, he always had a boss. Even when he was a three-star general, he had a boss. I think there were times, probably, when the wife asked me to do something—but never in a commanding way. I was always very happy to be a part of it. No, I don't really think about that.

There's no rank among wives, they say, you know.

Q: They say that, do they?

A: They say that.

Q: I didn't know.

A: Oh, that's an old cliché.

Q: Is it true?

A: Probably not.

Q: Overall, what is the stamp of this kind of a career choice on child rearing? What are its benefits and the problems that it caused?

A: I think the benefits are the different experiences. I think that, generally speaking, the military children have benefited from moving around, from being able to cope with situations, with not being tied down to a very narrow environment.

I feel that I have seen this in many children—service children—that they are brought up to be independent. Now maybe this is because of their mother—the successful Army family has a very independent woman in it. And this can't help but be an influence on the children.

Q: Especially since you're the parent they see the most.

A: You're the parent they see the most. You are making them be independent. Part of raising them is to make them be independent.

Q: That's your job. That's right.

A: I would imagine this might be true among civilian wives also. But it isn't as necessary.

I think there were more benefits in moving than shortcomings. I think we were rather fortunate in that I do think one of the problems in raising children in the military is the high school years. We were fortunate that affected only one of our children.

When he was a sophomore, we left him to board in school, and I feel we should have had him with us. Later he did come to be with us. And so we overcame that problem.

But I can see where moving around in high school is a severe problem on the children. That, I would say, is the biggest. Through the early years, I think it's more of a benefit—the move to different schools. Ralph was in nine different schools the first nine years of his school life.

Q: Is that right?

A: And heaven knows, it didn't hurt him. But we did a lot at home on schooling. Not only did Ernie teach them all to read, we read with them. We worked on their schoolwork with them. We supplemented the schools, which they're now saying—I read articles in the newspaper—is what they want parents to do. At that point, they did not want parents to do that.

We often found that teachers thought we were meddling and we shouldn't be doing these things. But we had to overcome the fact that maybe next year the kid wouldn't be in that school, he'd be in an entirely different school. So he had to be able to cope.

Q: Did your husband consciously set out to teach all four of his children to read? Is that something he wanted to do?

A: He consciously set out to teach Ralph to read. Having taught him, he felt he owed it to the others. So, yes. He read a book on a plane one time—you may have heard of the book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*.

Q: Sure.

A: He picked it up in the airport, and he read it. In the bibliography was recommended *Reading With Phonics*, which is written by two men named Hay and Wingo. He immediately bought this book.

At that point, he was working all hours of the day and night for General Lampert in the nuclear power program and didn't see Ralph, who was almost four years old, very much. But this was the time they had together—about an hour after supper that he sat down with his Hay-Wingo book and taught Ralph to read with it. That was their time together. Ralph was quite able to learn.

I think almost any child can be taught to read at a very early age. And I think that the educators are finding that now. At this time, they would tell us we were making disciplinary problems because when the child entered school, he already could read so, therefore, he would be bored. We felt it was up to the teachers to keep him interested in something.

Q: I'm with you.

A: We had different problems, different teachers. But now they want the parents to help.

Q: Which of your husband's assignments was the most difficult and stressful for you?

A: Why don't you ask me which was the most exciting? I didn't find stress due to my husband's assignments. I don't wish to make myself out to be a Pollyanna. I really don't. But I have thoroughly enjoyed this life.

Q: That's great.

A: I readily admit many women couldn't be Army wives. That's perfectly true. I probably couldn't be an astronaut's wife. I don't know. You're in different situations.

But if you want me to say that I had such a stressful time when my husband was in Vietnam, I didn't. I really didn't. I didn't let myself have it. I didn't worry about him. I knew he was out doing his job, and I was here doing my job. There was no assignment of his which was stressful on me.

Q: Okay. Which was the most exciting assignment?

A: I really can't single one out because I feel they were all different. I think, probably, the last assignment when he was dealing in international security affairs. That opened many new avenues of interest. We met fascinating people and world-known leaders. That, I think, was very exciting. We did a lot of entertaining, so I was a part of it. We went to many events at embassies and attachés' homes, and that was really very exciting. At that point, I had no children at home, so I could devote time to entertaining, and I was free to travel with Ernie.

Q: Obviously I'm bringing some erroneous assumptions to my questions.

A: Well, I don't know about that. I just want to knock some of them down—some of your preconceived ideas.

Q: Well, that's the idea. If they need knocking down, then you have to do it because that's the purpose of the whole thing.

But in some ways, I am a little bit surprised, because of my assumptions. I look at women I know—many of whom have careers—and they seem to think it's very important that they have to have—it's just important for them to have this kind of work, rather than the kind of work that you did so well.

A: I honestly feel that there is no more challenging job than raising four children—or raising children. One child, I think, might be harder than raising four of them.

Q: One's a handful.

A: One's a handful, and one's a challenge because he doesn't have siblings to interact with, and you have to make that environment for him, either with friends or with your relationship with him or something. I know about being an only child.

But I think there are probably more failures in the endeavor of child raising than any other endeavor in the whole world. To be successful, I think, is a full-time job.

You know, there were other things that took my time. I didn't sit home and simply take care of children. I feel that the mothers or wives must have interests of their own—outside interests—to make an interesting person. I played golf; I belonged to a neighborhood book club; I did volunteer work with Scouts and school because of the children.

You can't just go into hibernation and be a mother and a housewife. I don't feel that that helps anybody. I also had another responsibility. For about two years my mother-in-law was very ill. She broke her hip and made a fine recovery for the first year, and then it was downhill after that.

Every day for two years, I drove from here to either Distaff Hall or Walter Reed to oversee her household and to see her. So there were many claims on my time. But I always tried to have outside interests. I have many outside interests—sometimes too many, my husband would say.

I often think, what would my life have been had I married somebody else, or had I been in a different environment. I really don't think I would have grown the way I have or enjoyed life so much. A lot of that is due to Ernie. He set many challenges for me, you know, that he wanted me to do—to learn to do.

Learning to use the computer is just one example of it. But all through our lives, there have been challenges to meet, and each new assignment was a new learning experience.

Q: Are you inclined to be as methodical as he is?

A: Oh, no!

Q: I mean, he obviously plans way, way ahead.

A: We complement each other on these things.

Q: What about particular challenges of raising a family in the late 1960s and 1970?

A: Oh, I think our children were very much creatures of their times. Our oldest boy graduated from high school in 1970.

His rebellion, if you will, was to go to West Point. Now that may sound a little strange. But he went to Saint Albans School, which has its own standards. They were very much East Coast liberals. He got absolutely no support at all from anybody—either his peers or the faculty or the headmaster—except for Mr. Saltzman who is [Major] General [Charles E.] Saltzman's son—to go to West Point.

They felt it was a waste of his intelligence. He was valedictorian of his class, and, of course, they thought he should go to Yale or Harvard or that kind of school.

You have to go back in time. That was the Cambodian incursion, and the schools were closing. In the spring of 1970 when he had to make his decision, he really didn't know—nor did anyone—if Harvard or Yale would be open in September. They were closing, some of them, early that spring.

Q: I remember.

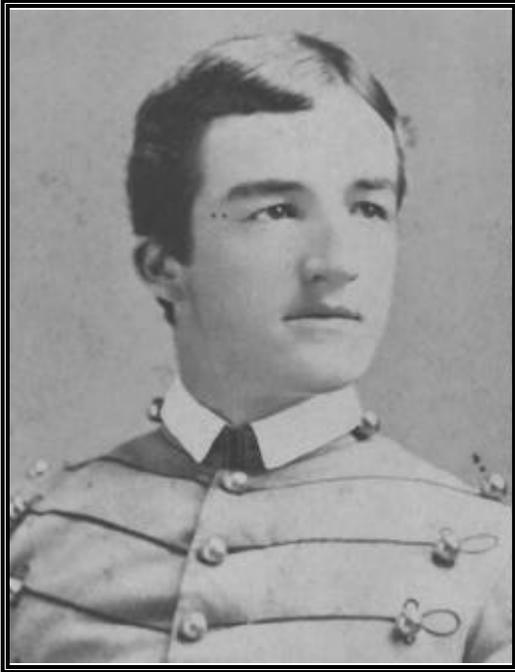
A: And he said, "I'm going to college to get an education, not to march in parades." Well, I shouldn't use that because he did end up marching in parades. But not to march as a protestor. So that was one of the reasons—I think one of the very major reasons—he went to West Point. Had it been another year, I think he might not have gone.

Our second son is very straight, conservative, and was very busy in school with studies, athletics, and extracurricular activities. He didn't have any problems.

Our third son continued at Saint Albans School in Washington after we moved to Chicago in 1971. In his second year as a boarder, after some other infractions, he was suspended for skipping evening study hall and violating curfew on a school night. So we got him back in the home fold and faced his his behavior straight up and straightened him out—not without some heartache, but we did. He was intelligent, and we got him to realize the consequences of his folly.

That's why I think the high school years are so important. We were just lucky not to move much at that time. When Emily was in high school, we were set in one place for four years. I think that our third son grew out of his rebellion in a short time and got his feet back on the ground. He has gone on to be a responsible adult.

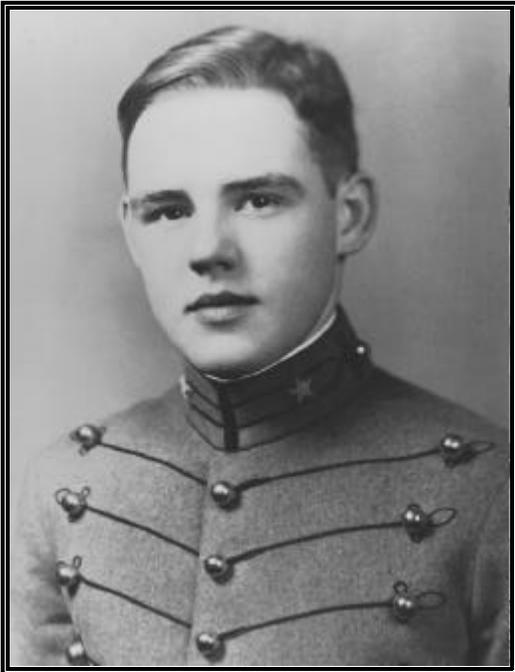
Q: I am really fascinated by your oldest son's choice. Were you surprised by his decision to go to West Point? Had you encouraged him to do that?



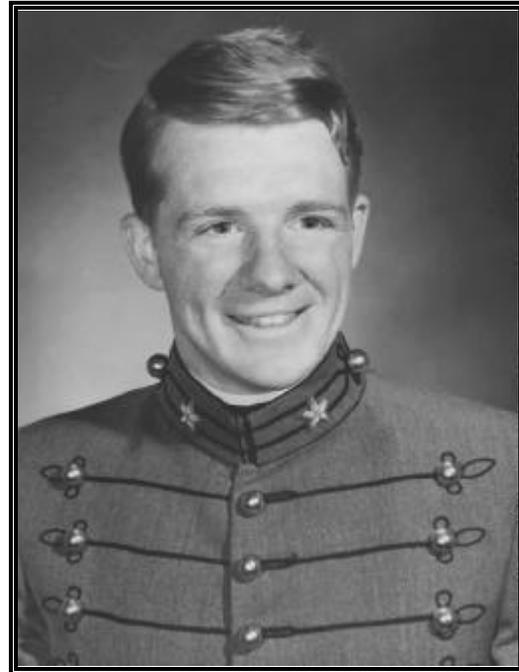
*Rogers Birnie, Class of 1872, No. 1*



*Ernest Graves, Class of 1905, No. 2*



*Ernest Graves, Jr., Class of 1944, No. 2*



*Ralph Graves, Class of 1974, No. 1*

**Four Generations of West Point Graduates**

A: We had encouraged him to keep the option. To go to West Point, you have to start thinking about it long before you have to think about going to a civilian college because you have to get your appointment and you have to do all these things—the physicals and all of that. So we did suggest to him that he get this option.

Ernie came home from Vietnam in the summer of '69, just before Ralph's senior year, which is the time you take your children on the tour of colleges. He and Ernie drove to look at New England colleges. We are New England-oriented. Ralph was to pick out which ones he wanted to see, but Ernie did inject, "Well, let's just stop at West Point. You should see it, and my good friend, Freddie Smith is up there, and we ought to just talk to him."

So they did. But that was just keeping the option for him. When Ralph got all his acceptances, he had many fine options. He's methodical. He thought about the pros and cons of all of these schools—which, again, was colored by the upheaval on the campuses at the time he was having to make this decision.

He went upstairs in his bedroom one night. I guess he was up there about three or four hours. And he came down and said he was going to go to West Point. I was thrilled. I felt it was good for him.

The full-man concept that the academies have was great for him. It really was. And I think he has not regretted it.

Q: Your husband must have been very proud to have him there?

A: We are. And of the fact that he graduated number one. We knew he could do it and just were afraid he'd fritter it away. But he didn't. He hung in there.

Q: You weren't particularly interested, or you didn't particularly try to channel your kids towards a military career—any of them?

A: No.

Q: I guess not one way or the other.

A: No. We felt it was a very good option. Ernie has had a fine career. He has had many opportunities, many interesting jobs. His father before him found that the Army was interesting and at times very exciting. We thought it was fine.

I would have been very happy if the other boys had gone in. Their personalities were different, and they weren't particularly interested. We certainly never pushed them. They didn't even apply to West Point.

Q: You have a daughter in the military, too, don't you?

A: Yes. But not a West Pointer. Many times she was asked by acquaintances if she would go to West Point. But she was raised by parents who feel women do not belong there.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: I feel that way. If you think we pushed the children towards the military, we certainly pushed her away from being among the first women at West Point.

Q: Why do you feel that way?

A: I feel it should be combat training for officers to run our military, and I'm very old-fashioned about the role of women. They don't need to go to West Point.

A very small percentage of officers are academy graduates. I think there are many, many places for the females in the military, but I don't think they have to be educated at the academies. I think this has changed the academies, and I just don't think women belong there.

They can go ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps]. Our daughter went through OCS [Officer Candidate School]. We're very proud of what our daughter is doing, and the fact that she went through basic training at Fort Dix. She's a non-athlete, and she managed to do all the physical requirements and went to OCS—

Q: Is very rigorous.

A: Both her father and her brother feel OCS is one of the hardest ways to get a commission.

Q: Yes, it is.

A: And she did that. She's an AG [Adjutant General Corps] officer. We're very pleased. I have two daughters-in-law who are military. An Army nurse is one of my daughters-in-law, and my newest daughter-in-law is Carole Smith, [Brigadier] General [Frederick A.] Smith's daughter—Freddie Smith's daughter. She is an ordnance officer.

So I feel there is a role for women in the military, very definitely. But I don't think it's at the academies. But I shan't belabor that any more.

Q: It's an important point. What advice would you give to young families setting out on a military career?

A: Do you mean setting out on a military career with one of them or two of them?

Q: Well, either way.

A: Well, maybe it's the same either way.

I feel definitely that the man's career should be first. I do not think that in any situation you can have two determining factors. There has to be one. Something's got to give.

I never felt I was second class by being an Army wife who deferred to her husband's career. That was part of it. But I always felt that his career and his assignments were the driving force.

I think that's true in civilian life. You can't have two careers where neither is taking precedence over the other. I just don't see how it can ever work—and especially in this more mobile world we have today in the civilian world. Moving there is now certainly equal to what the military do—numbers of moves.

Q: You're not kidding.

A: And always there's got to be one that has to be dominant. I also don't think you can shift back and forth. I don't think one can say, "This time we're going to make the best move for your career, but the next time we're going to make the best move for my career." I just don't see how logically this can ever work. I'd be very willing to be proven wrong, and I'm sure in some cases, it is made to work. But I don't think it's the optimum.

I feel this is also true in the two-military-careers family. My family knows how I feel about this. My daughters-in-law know how I feel about this. I feel that the man's career should be the determining factor because I feel that, really and truly, what life is all about is family and having children, and I think only women can have children.

Somehow, I have been raised to feel that only the woman can have a child. Therefore, that is her primary role. And her career is second to that. Now if people choose not to have children, that's their choice, but I feel they are missing life's purpose.

Life isn't black and white. There are many grey areas, and I don't wish to sound as dogmatic as many of my friends and family think I am.

But there always has to be a goal. There has to be a driving force. I don't think a family unit can have two driving forces. I don't know if I've been very articulate about that or not. But that's the way I feel.

Q: I've never done an interview with the spouse of an officer before. I've done 80 or a hundred with soldiers—both active and retired. So, I'm not sure I'm doing a good job of this.

And I only have one question left, and it's really—you've obviously been thinking about our conversation beforehand. What questions should I have asked you? What do you want to talk about? What's important that I've missed?

A: Oh, I think that you have certainly hit the important thing, which was my reaction to Ernie's career, both as a mother to our children and as his wife. That, I felt, was the most important thing.

I can certainly sum it up that I have found all of the moves a challenge, a learning experience—there was something different I had to learn in all of them.

The first one, I had to learn French. The second one, I had to learn to be a wife and a mother. I came home with two children. I had had household help the three years we lived in France—had a live-in Dutch girl. Suddenly, there I was confronted with being a housewife with two little children. That took some learning!

When Ernie was in Korea, I had to learn to be on my own. The next year, we went out to California. Then we learned how to plant grass and take care of lawns and pour concrete and do a few things like that. That was fun. We enjoyed that—those five years out there.

Q: That was kind of an academic environment out there, wasn't it?

A: Well, not really a structured academic environment, no. There were probably more Ph.D.s per capita than any place in the world, including college campuses. But it wasn't the academic environment as such. It meant the schools were very good because most of the children's fathers had advanced degree and were scientists.

All of this includes learning to move and learning to have the children be very self-sufficient. And they were very lucky. I admit we had a lot of luck. The three boys, as

we moved into new environments, didn't care whether there were children around to play with or not because they played with each other. So this made it easier.

Q: Your husband retired about four years ago.

A: It will be four years in July.

Q: What kind of adjustment has that involved for both of you?

A: Well, I feel the fact that we did not move when he retired, which we had planned—you talk about planning ahead—made it a much easier adjustment. This was definitely thought of ahead of time when he received his third star. We could have had quarters at Fort McNair. We were already in this house. We had already decided this was where we were going to stay when he retired. We knew that assignment would be his last assignment. So we consciously did not take quarters at McNair. One of the major factors was that we didn't want to have to move at the time of retirement. We wanted to be able to be right here, and that he could choose—easily have whatever option he wanted as his work after the Army. So there was very little adjustment, really.

Q: Did your husband ever have second thoughts about his military career?

A: Never.

Q: Did he ever think about getting out?

A: Never.

Q: One of the things that kind of surprised me when I talked to him—and very little did surprise me, but—because he was a pretty methodical and systematic—

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Not pretty methodical. Extremely methodical and systematic person. I was surprised that he seemed to derive the most satisfaction from being Director of Civil Works and not from getting his third star and going to DSAA—that civil works was his first love.

A: I believe this is true. I think this is from his background—he's always said that—from his background as a little boy when his father and all of his father's associates were in civil works. To them, civil works was the plum assignment, at whatever level.

I remember he'd tell stories of General Larkin, who built the big earth-fill dam in Montana.

Q: Fort Peck?

A: Fort Peck. Ernie, as a little boy, would sit there with his eyes and ears wide open when [Lieutenant] General [Thomas B.] Larkin came to dinner when he would be in Washington from the site out there and tell his father—Ernie's father—about building the dam and the problems and the excitement and all. And this is just what Ernie was bought up on.

So, one, to have civil works jobs as you go along was exciting. But to be Director of Civil Works—all his life he had seen this as the most exciting job. And it turned out to be a very exciting job at the time he had it, but I think his only regret is that he didn't have it longer. It was a very short time.

Q: But DSAA wasn't an anticlimax because it was—

A: Oh, no, no. That was totally different. That's apples and oranges. It was an absolutely different environment. You see, an awful lot of people who are in international security affairs have come through the attaché jobs.

Q: That's right.

A: We had never had that experience. So, yes, it was totally different. But again, it was a big management job. There was a great deal of money involved—keeping track of it all.

It was very exciting. It really was. But the civil works, that was fun. That was good.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about?

A: I don't know. I think you've gotten a feel for the way I feel about the Army. I guess that was what you wanted.

Q: I sure did. And I thank you.

A: Well, I thank you. I'm very pleased to have been of any help.