

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH THEODORE J. COCHRAN
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Interview with Chief of Police Theodore (Ted) J. Cochran
Conducted by Nicholas Harford and Taylor McAllister
Edited by Nicholas Harford and Thomas A. Scott
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TM: We are here with the chief of the Kennesaw State University Department of Public Safety, Mr. Ted Cochran. Mr. Cochran, thank you for having us here today. Let's get started by talking about your background, where you come from; I know you mentioned earlier in our conversation that you were born here and raised here in Cobb County. What was it like growing up then?

TC: Well I'll start by saying I'm pre K, and by that I am pre-Kennestone. I was born in the old Marietta Hospital—before Kennestone was built—in 1944. I am a product of the Cobb County School System. I went to Smyrna Elementary School and Campbell High School and graduated in 1962. I attended several colleges before I went into the service from 1965 to 1969. I then came out and became a serious college student after that and enrolled at Kennesaw Junior College—graduated in 1972. When I was in the service, I had a top secret crypto clearance. I was sent to Russian school and also cryptology school and had a job with Lockheed when I got out of the service. But while I was waiting for that project to start, the project moved to Burbank, California, and I did not want to go to Burbank. So on a whim—the Chief of Police of Cobb County lived across the street from my parents—and so I was just going to work for the Cobb County Police Department for a short period of time until I found something else to do and ended up staying there ten years and really enjoyed it.

This sounds corny, but the part I liked about it most is that I had the opportunity to help people on a regular basis. You really get to make a difference, and I had gotten that sense in the service. In the service, what I did meant something and mattered a lot. So I enjoyed that part of the job even though when I went to work for Cobb in February 1970 I believe the starting pay was \$400 a month, and we worked six days on and two off. We were all quote, unquote “salary employees.” So we did not receive overtime or sick days, but we did get one week vacation. Anyways, I left Cobb County Police Department and started my own company, which was a private investigations company and worked rather large cases such as those that consisted of railroad accidents where trains were involved. But I found that even though the money was good, I didn't get the feeling of fulfillment that I had gotten with the Cobb County job because it was all about chasing the dollar.

In 1983, I saw an ad in the paper for a police officer position at Kennesaw College at that time, and I had not been back here on campus since I graduated in 1972. I tell people, when I came back, it was like the beginning of the Simpsons. I drove around, and everything was in Technicolor. It sounds corny, but I am a spiritual person, and I knew there was a plan here, and I was being sent a message. So I applied for the job and was hired as a police officer. It was the beginning of a new department. They had just started

up. Just a little bit of history—they had a guard service here. The guard service contract didn't run out until, I think, August the first, but I got hired in June the twentieth.

One of the reasons the administration decided to go with their own law enforcement unit, number one, was growth and the complexity of providing those types of services on the [college] campus. The company that had the contract guard service was sending out [men who] were old, crippled, and half blind. I heard the straw that broke the camel's back was when Mr. [William E.] Bill Durrett, who was the number two guy in the Business [and Finance] area [Director of Business Services], was up in here on a Sunday working in his office and heard a noise. He looked up, and the contract security guard's got a gun on him and his hands were shaking. They decided right then and there they needed to fire the contract service and create the law enforcement unit.

The first director of the department was a GBI planner who had been a provost in the Marine Corps by the name of Fred [Frederick C.] Stilson. We had an incident here that I will talk about here in a minute. There was a disagreement, and Mr. Stilson resigned as a result of the disagreement. I was offered the job as Director. I took it and have been in that position ever since April of 1984. In the Nigerian incident we had a situation here where the Police Department and the University got to know each other because of this incident. We had some folks here that were Nigerian students and were enrolled here for several quarters and had not passed any courses. The University had many remedial things back then. They actually threatened a professor [Harriet S. Gustafson], and the professor came to us. So we started escorting the professor back and forth to her night class and her car because she was afraid of these folks who had threatened her.

Based on what knowledge I have, the reason for the threats is that they felt threatened that they were about to be kicked out. They needed to make some legitimate grades, so they told her that they would not be coming to class but expected passing grades out of the class. When she told them, that wasn't going to happen, then they [allegedly] threatened her and such. One of our officers went to meet up with her to escort her and discovered the two primary Nigerian students who had threatened her hiding around the corner of the building where she was about to come out. [On another occasion] the officer had a confrontation with the two students at which time the Nigerian students threatened the officer by telling the officer they would slap him. One good thing about all this is Dr. George Beggs, who was the charter member of the faculty, overheard all this from a window up above, which no one knew about. Afterwards Dr. George Beggs told the administration how well the officer did by using restraint while dealing with the Nigerian students. The Nigerians complained to the administration. I believe Dr. Siegel was out of town during the time.

Around that time Baron Daniel [Jr.] of American Express security calls me and asks if we had any student identification cards missing. I replied that I didn't know, and that our department was not in charge of that. He said virtually every one of these Nigerian folks that are running this scam that we run into had one. What they were basically doing was they would go find a vacant house, then put in a change of address for a doctor, and would then get the information off of the American Express account sent there, and then would apply for a duplicate card and would use that. All of this was being coordinated and wasn't just here but all over the southeast. It was an organization in Atlanta that

pretended to be a religious organization that was run by a lady that worked for one of the legislators. If I remember right the Osun African Temple was the name of the organization, and they would train all these folks how to do this mail fraud.

After talking to the GBI and FBI and several other folks, it was determined that the money being made off this scam was going back to Nigeria. They were trying to overthrow the current regime and put the previous regime back into power. This is a big deal, and there was a raid that took place in Clayton County of those two Nigerian students. They found 109 different sets of identification including our student identification cards that were made using our machine to support the doctor's name and then would apply to driver's licenses, passports, credit cards, etc. The two students were not there when they did the search warrant and the raid on the apartment, but they found the whole apartment was filled of stuff purchased with these fraudulent credit cards and 109 different sets of identification cards with their pictures on it. So they took warrants for their arrests.

Well, word got back to us that they were wanted felons. The administration was notified, and the administration sent word to the police department that they would not be arrested on this campus. So, we sent word back saying we were duty bound if we see them to arrest them. We hear they are on campus because somebody spots them. Our plan is at the time to get other law enforcement agencies involved. Due to the fact we didn't arrest them on campus, a 100 mile per hour chase resulted going through Marietta with Cobb and Marietta Police chasing them. They finally get them stopped. When the DA and Solicitor found out what happened, we had a big meeting up here at Kennesaw College. Dr. Siegel had come back into town, and we all sat down, and the DA told them that Kennesaw College is not a haven for wanted criminals [where they] can be hid out and secreted.

Two top administration officials got arrested for obstruction. There were a lot of talks and some deals made, and a deal that was made was that Kennesaw says we realize that we can't do that anymore, and the DA said, "Ok, we'll do away with the charges, if you behave yourself and you listen to these guys if they tell you something. Another thing that was sort of interesting during all of that time was that when the lady that was running the scam training center showed up on campus to have a meeting with the president to protest the treatment of the Nigerian students, demanding that the KSU police was racially profiling—when they came up, we ran the tag on the Cadillac they came up in, and it came back stolen. There was a Cobb County Report that it was stolen, so Cobb County contacted Capital Cadillac, and they sent their wrecker up here and took possession of the car while they were in the meeting with the president.

There were a lot of tensions. As a result of those tensions, my boss—he is deceased now and was killed in a car wreck—went back to work with the GBI after he left here. He tried his best to do what the administration wanted him to do and at the same time uphold the law. As a result of that, it caused conflict, not with Dr. Siegel, but with other higher ups, and so he said, "I can't take this anymore, so I'm out of here." So they offered me the job. I said, "Ok, I'll take the job if these certain things are met." Of course, those things were we would certainly advise the administration on how we were trying to solve the problems, keep the peace, enforce the laws, and all of that. They would have to

understand that we have other things we have to go by that don't have anything to do with decisions made by the administration.

So that was the start of my tenure, and we were the first police department in the University of Georgia System to actually put "police" on the side of the car. Before that they all used public safety patrol or whatever. Jack Vickery, who was Police Chief at Georgia Tech at the time, called me and asked when did I ask permission to do that. I said, "I didn't know I was supposed to get permission. I thought they were police cars, and they were supposed to say "police" on the side (Laughs). So we were a pioneer in that area and were also the first state agency to issue semi-automatic handguns. We used the glocks back in 1985 or 1986.

We were the first police agency in the southeast to have a canine unit on a university campus. That was such a big step out on the limb, we did some research and found out the people with the very best reputation was this company up in Illinois. We sent a car and officer up there. I forget the amount of time it took, but they equipped the car, trained the dog and the officer separate, and then trained them both together. Benny's picture is out here on the wall somewhere. He died of cancer probably a couple years ago now, but we have a second dog now, Jerry Lee, but several universities now in Georgia have canine units. We also would have been the first with a bike patrol, but my boss at the time thought policemen on bicycles was a silly idea (Laughs and chuckles). Now you see that everywhere. We were also the first campus law enforcement to be nationally accredited, though there are several now, but we were the first.

We have always had a lot of good people, however, we do not have enough people or a budget, but we get the job done and keep the campus safe with what we get. One reason we can do that is that we have the highest starting pay for police officers in the State of Georgia. Our police officers start off at \$40,500 a year, which is higher than anyone else in Cobb County, and, I think, anywhere else in Georgia, and way higher than the state patrol. We have officers that work for us that were ranking officers in other departments. Bobby [J.] Putnam was a state trooper. Also, [James D.] Doug Shirley, who retired as a captain for Fulton County Police Department, along with Mike Brown, who was a veteran officer from Cobb, and all this is due to our pay structure. At one time we had to choose between pizza delivery people and folks that had been run off from other police departments, and we have gotten out of that mode, which has really made a difference. We get to do a lot of neat things because of the kind of people we could hire here.

TM: In your younger days like in high school and the times you were in college before you joined the Navy did you see yourself becoming a police officer?

MS: No, never thought of it. My father owned a very small furniture manufacturing company on the northside of Atlanta. I grew up shoveling sawdust beginning at age 10 during the summer. [The company] employed ten to twelve folks. Some of the management skills I have today were taught to me in that place. It was a minimum wage place. We had ex-convicts, we had people who didn't care about anything but getting their paycheck on Friday, and in certain times I was in charge to make sure the job got done. I learned to motivate folks that weren't that motivated. Being the oldest of seven children, and the way my father raised me, when I went into the Navy, I made E-5 in four years, which is

almost unheard of, so I was leading seaman. Every time I made rank, I was put in charge of something. It's the same sort of thing in the service. You've got to be able to motivate folks to do what you ask them to do. I don't have to do that to any degree here for it to amount to anything. It gave me a good background of learning how to talk to people and getting along with people. I am naturally an upbeat person, and not a close to the vest person. I tell my folks all the time I will tell them what I know, but don't hold me accountable if it changes because I'm not going to wait to make sure all the "i's" are dotted and the "t's" are crossed before I tell you things. But I enjoy being around people. Being on a university campus with traditional aged kids, you know, I've raised four daughters since I've been here of whom all have gone to school here and all have been successful. I enjoy coming to work every day and sitting here with guys like you.

TM: What was it like growing up in the area and how has it changed?

TC: Oh, my goodness. Well, when I graduated in high school, [Campbell] was Triple A, and it was the highest rating back then, which meant you had a thousand students. All the Atlanta schools were in one region. So we had to play Griffin, and all the other Triple A schools were not close to us besides the other Cobb County Schools. At that time the only school east of U.S. 41 was Sprayberry which is where the Walker School is now, and then North Cobb which was between Kennesaw and Acworth. There was nothing in west Cobb besides McEachern. East Cobb had not started any development, so that was all farms. This is what I was told which was probably true back then—if you wanted to get elected to office in Cobb County, you had to only have the support of four or five people. It was Roy Barnes' granddaddy that lived around Mableton. Over in West Cobb it was the Cecil and Herbert Bullard. In East Cobb it was the LeCroys, and in North Cobb, actually to come to think of it I forgot the name of the family in North Cobb. Then in Smyrna it was Hoot Gibson who was the mayor of Smyrna.

Politics was a lot different back then. We had one commissioner Ernest Barrett who Tom Scott wrote about and gives credit for the development of Cobb County the way that it did. Growing up in Smyrna, I can remember when you picked up the phone and the operator was on the other end, and you said 116J which was my grandmother's number, and they would connect you. Everyone got their water out of the water tower. It was a small town and everyone knew everybody, and it was wonderful place to grow up. Belmont Hill Shopping Center came into being when I was nine or ten and was the largest shopping center in the southeast which consisted of 2500 parking spaces. Little league came to Smyrna when I was ten years old, and there wasn't any organized youth sports before that. None of us thought we would make the little league teams and play, but, of course, we did.

One of the trivia questions I ask folks that claim to be old Smyrnans—I say, "Ok, tell me the original four little league teams, their colors, and who their managers were." Another one of my trivia questions I ask folks is, "The big chicken in Marietta was not originally a KFC; what was the original name?" The big chicken was originally Johnny Reb's Chick, Chuck and Shake, but everyone just called it the Chick, Chuck and Shake. It changed to KFC about five years after it was open. My wife and I attended the grand opening of the store across the street, Thrift City, later became K-Mart—we were dating at the time, and I was a freshman at Oglethorpe, and she was 15, and we twisted for 25 hours in a twist

marathon and came in third place. My left knee has not been the same since (Laughs and chuckles).

TM: What is the difference you have seen in Kennesaw State itself since you have graduated here and all the changes that you have noticed.

TC: Well, the biggest change and part of the growth process is that in the early days, all of my counterparts, which consisted of six folks, would meet in the student center at 9:30 every morning to have coffee and again at 2:30. Now, it wasn't a business meeting, but we talked business and got a lot of things accomplished. Not only was it the administrative side of the house, but a lot of the academic side of the house was in there at the same time, and it was more likely you knew everybody.

When the growth started the progression was so quick you couldn't keep up. I went to an awards ceremony this morning, and there are people here today that have been here for fifteen years that I don't know. That would have been unheard of back in the 80s and 90s because we interacted with each other all the time, and there is no venue for that. I feel like the faculty, staff, and students were all closer together back in those days, and it wasn't deliberate—it just occurs because of the growth and because of the situation. There were a lot more student and faculty and staff interactions, which was a casual interaction. As a matter of fact, Tom Scott married Kathy, who was a student back in those days, who I saw this morning, who I had not seen in a while.

NH: Going back to your war days. I read that you once served in Vietnam; I was wondering if you could explain your experiences there, and was it hard adjusting back to civilian life.

TC: Well, I flew forty-two recon missions as an aircrewman in [a Lockheed] EC-121 "Willie Victor". We went in with the raids and experienced some high stress situations, but I functioned well enough to receive awards, and I'm proud of that. I attribute all that to the way my father brought me up of taking responsibility—for example, playing baseball—if you get hit with the ball, you can always hurt after you throw the ball or make the play. That kind of mentality is what he preached, but also being an E-5 and in charge of people, I got a chance that not many people get, and that was to be in charge of folks under fire. That is a whole set of different logistics and ramifications. You get to see every day in those kinds of situations, it doesn't matter how many stripes are on the sleeve or what officer insignia is on the uniform, there are only two groups of people, the hackers and the non-hackers. Everyone knows who falls in each group. I learned a lot, and that added to my management skills. What was the second part of your question?

NH: How was it adjusting back to civilian life?

TC: First of all one point that made it easy to me was that I never had any after-action or nightmare much less physiological anything. I did have one breakdown one time, and it was very strange, and I would have never predicted it. I was sitting by myself and watching a movie by the name of *Hollywood Canteen* [Warner Brothers 1944]. It's about World War II and the veterans. I had some friends—one in particular—that ended up an alcoholic and is on dialysis. He lives out in Texas, and I still talk to him, but the experience ruined him, and I felt bad. You see, when I went to Vietnam I already had a

wife and a child and got there in 1967 when I already was 23 years old, and so I had things to take care of. I didn't have time to think about that sort of stuff, but watching the movie *Hollywood Canteen* and seeing how well the veterans were treated when they came back stateside from World War II, I had a crying spell because I didn't feel bad for me, but for the guys that needed that that didn't get it when they came back. My buddy was one of them who needed that. It was well publicized that we didn't get that. I came back.

After I was in combat and hadn't been with my family in nearly three years by this time, it was a period of joy for me to be with my wife and my oldest daughter. Then that being said, when I went to work for Lockheed, I was waiting on this project. I had already taken the management selection test and already passed their security clearance thing. I was just out of the service and told them I just needed a job, and they said the project just isn't ready, and that it's a top secret clearance thing. In response they said they could put me to work in the plant, and so I said that was fine.

I had worked in my father's table factory and knew that stuff whatever it is, so they put me to work in the plant. I walked around with a bit on a screwdriver handle knocking burrs off of holes that had been drilled, and no matter how much I tried to convince myself that that was somewhat meaningful, I had a hard time doing that. Going to work for the Cobb County Police Department after the project moved to Burbank and I didn't take that job, I knew right away from day one that what I was doing everyday was meaningful. So that helped me realize that in some sense it was divine intervention. I don't think I would have been as happy working on a project in Burbank, California, as I was as a rookie police officer with the Cobb County Police Department.

TM: Is that what attracted you to the police department?

TC: Well the Chief of Police, [Edward H.] Harris Burruss, who I still see every once in a while says, "Well Ted, why don't you go work for the Cobb County Police Department?" I said, "Well, you know, that sounds like an adventure and something to do." So that's how it all started.

NH: My grandfather actually served in the Vietnam War and was a colonel. He received heckling a little bit when he got back because the Vietnam War was such a controversial war. There were so many different views and opinions on the war. Were there any marches or demonstrations here at Kennesaw you were aware of?

TC: When I came to school here in September of 1969, there were some protesting, but it was pathetic compared to other protestors in other places. It was low key. We had some protestors that set up a tent out here by the flagpole and were not going to leave until the war was over or whatever, and that was during the streaking era. People would be running into classrooms with nothing on. The students at Kennesaw Junior College didn't take protesting 101 like the people on the west coast did, so it wasn't serious. Another thing which I thought was interesting because of my work schedule—I went to work for the county, and I had to wear my work uniform to class sometimes to make it work. There were a couple snide remarks, but you know nothing too serious.

NH: Has the prosecution changed since that time of individuals parading around and running around naked as of today if they did the same thing. I'm sure back then you guys were more lenient towards that attitude rather than today.

TC: The whole attitude about law enforcement changed, and changes were necessary, but back in those days if someone got caught speeding that had a Cobb County tag, they would get treated differently than if they didn't have a Cobb County tag. They were treated differently if they were from the south as opposed to Michigan, Ohio, or New York. If you caught somebody speeding from out of state, there were not ways to keep up with folks like there is now, so you would not write them a citation, instead you would just haul them off to jail, and they would have to make cash bond on a speeding ticket that was fifteen miles per hour over the speed limit. So we took drunks home and even had regular drunks we would take home on a regular basis. Everyone knew who they were. We had roofers and church pew installers that got drunk after work on Friday or Saturday. When they got caught in a bar fight, we would show up, and they would state nobody will take us alive and all that crap. Now, we didn't have to hurt them, but they were not going to go unless you physically put them into the car.

It was a whole lot different back then because things were a lot more hands on. There was a lot more snatching people up and that kind of thing, but drugs changed that. Drugs didn't start showing up here till the early 1970s. When you heard about drugs it was somewhere else in a different part of the country. When drugs came here things became more violent. We never had an armed robbery and never a bank robbery, and all that changed with drugs. How you treated people changed. You didn't have to worry about getting shot. That just didn't happen. You may get your nose bloodied, but when drugs came in, you had to start being careful because behavior got completely unpredictable.

Another thing that was happening the same time in Cobb County is the development of east Cobb, and people became a lot more transient. In the 1940s and 50s everyone knew everyone who lived on their street—their kids, their parents, and so forth and so on. When the corporate age came about and people starting getting transferred every two or three years, people would be moving in and out of neighborhoods. We use to call Indian Hills the Golden Ghetto because it was full of those kinds of people and was a high crime area mostly committed by the children of the people that lived over there. This would have been around 1975 or 1976, somewhere along in that time frame.

All that changed along the same time drugs were coming in, number one, and number two, the population not only increasing, but becoming more transient. There's a good quote by J. Edgar Hoover when asked the main contributing factor to crime in the United States was, let me think exactly what he said. A "tourist cabin" was his answer because it gave criminals the ability to be anonymous and travel from place to place. That seems like dark ages obsolete, but in the 1930s motels came about and apartment complexes arose. When I grew up in Smyrna there was only one apartment complex I knew of, and it sat right there next to Smyrna Elementary School. The people that lived there were single school teachers. It was like Mayberry; when a stranger came to town everyone knew that there was a stranger in town. All of that changed when the drugs came in.

TM: Around that same time, growing up in Cobb, how did you see the Civil Rights Movement? What did you witness in that area?

TC: Well, the Civil Rights Movement in Cobb had some brave black folks in Cobb County. They also had some sense. Somebody said this back then, and I've always remembered it, "When good people sit down and discuss problems, good things come of it." There was a lot of that going on instead of hanging folks, burning folks out, and things you heard about in other parts of the country. I can't help but to believe a lot of that was a bleed over from the mayor of Atlanta at the time who was Ivan Allen. Ivan Allen was a very brave man also as far as standing up for the rights of all people. My grandparents were from the mountains of North Carolina, and they didn't recognize black people as being humans. They were not bad people, they were good people, but it's hard to explain to people today how different it was back then. In Cobb County, I think, Ernest Barrett was a good leader. As far as race relations were going, the Cobb County Police Department, and I won't say what city it was, but there was a black area, and the black areas were segregated back in those days. Marietta had Baptist Town; Acworth had Taylor Street; Marietta had Roosevelt Circle; and Smyrna had Rose Garden Hills and Davenport. Powder Springs had their little section. I'm proud to say that I heard we arrived on the scene of a fight between black on black, two or three on each side. Some of the crowd headed towards my partner, and I and one of the black guys standing there said, "No, no these are Cobb County boys. It's not the blank police department." And they said, "Oh, ok." You see we were known for treating everybody fairly. I didn't know if that was a cultural thing from the top. I've never heard anyone talk about, but I just knew in my experience.

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