

WHY A CAREER MILITARY MAN

I am sure that those who make the decision to make military life a career do so for a range of reasons. There are those who know very early in life they want to be military careerists, never waver in their steadfastness, and dedicate themselves to making themselves ready for entrance into the military profession by way of the optimal route they have chosen or are able to take. Thus, there are West Pointers and Annapolis graduates, ROTC graduates, and officers commissioned directly from civilian institutions by way of Officer Candidate School who have always known that they wanted to be officers in the military services. There was another group who makes decisions for military careers only after careful consideration of the alternatives and sometimes only after years of considering that it would not be their choice. These decisions come from among those who have entered a period of obligated service in the military as the result of commitments made to obtain an education or because they wanted to serve their country in wartime but not to remain in its service in peacetime and for other reasons. Officers who come from this background frequently include those who have had real doubt about their commitment to a lifetime in the military

service until almost to the point of making a decision. I include myself in this latter category.

I had wanted to go to West Point from the time I was a young boy. As is so often the case, my desire stems first from the fact that my father had been an Army Officer in World War I and, second, because the hometown hero, Maurice Preston, had gone to West Point and had been a brilliant success there (Maurice Preston went on to become a Four Star General in the Air Force after a brilliant record in World War II before he retired). But I had, during these early years, always visualized it as just a step in the educational process enroute to Medical School, a long-term aspiration I had had because both my mother and father were Medical Doctors. In order to seek an appointment to the Military Academy my father, a member of the Republican County Committee, faced with a hometown Democratic Congressman, took me to visit the members of the Democratic County Committees in each of the counties of the Congressional District. At each meeting my father would start off by informing the members of the Democratic County Committee that he was a member of the Republican County Committee in Tulare County and then with that frank opening make a request for their support with the Congressman - A. J. Elliott - for an

appointment to West Point. Following his remarks, I would follow up by some discussion of my reasons for wanting to go to West Point and almost without exception these individuals responded favorably and wrote letters to the Congressman urging my appointment. As a result, we felt fairly confident that I had the Congressional appointment available, but we were reluctant to rest on that assumption.