75 years ago this winter:

The Army Invaded Saint John’s

...and future star Jack Webb was one of the cadets!

Jack was one of the 1,500 cadets of the 87th College Training Detachment of the Air Force who took four-month refresher courses at Saint John’s in 1943 and 1944. After this exposure to college subjects, they moved on to Air Force bases for training as pilots, navigators and bombardiers.

Image published in the 1944 Sagatagan, p.65; this version is from the SJU Archives, O:\...\Depts&Programs\ROTC\Army Air Force 1940s\Box1803f5_SJ Army Air Force Unit During WWII.jpg
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18471/rec/24
Text inset from 1968 SJU Alumni Magazine Spring p.38
The March 5, 1943 Times pictured the cadets at St. John’s.
Servicemen alumni also featured prominently in that issue’s four-page Alumni Supplement, which also had this announcement.
... and it became the cover for the 1944 *Sagatagan* yearbook

The March 5, 1943 Times had a second photo of cadets below the first:
Jack Webb, Hollywood producer, director, writer and actor of DRAGNET fame, was at St. John’s in the early 1940’s as part of the 87th College Training Detachment.

Army pre-flight cadets have arrived at St. John’s university and a group of them are drilling in the shadows of the twin towers. Below, a few of the boys are indulging in a bit of refreshments at the soda fountain in the college. (left to right) Privates Jack Webb, Charles Thorpe, William Webb, Vernon Van Dyke, William Whiteside, Edward Wenigar, Isaac Hale. (Times photos)

Inset: 1968 SJU Alumni Magazine Spring p.38
The Record's supplemental pages for the cadets, “This Is the Army,” before it became “WICL-CO” – see last month’s history lesson! – mentioned Jack Webb.

ATTENTION PLEASE

“This is the army” is definitely not an appropriate name for this page. We borrowed the temporary title from Irving Berlin’s show of the same name. This page is yours, and it’s your job to name it. If the experiment is successful, if you like it, there is the possibility of enlargement. We welcome any and all suggestions for improvement.

But first we must have a name for our page—we can best judge your approval of our efforts by the number of names turned in. If we get 150 names we’ll know that you want to have a page, and perhaps a paper of your own. If the response is light, we’ll know that you don’t particularly care and will abandon the idea. So it’s up to you! Leave your suggestions for a name for our page in rooms 401 and 243, just anywhere at any time. Print your suggestion, your full name, and your room number on the paper.

At the present time there are only three men on the staff. There are openings for a news editor, a sports editor, a feature editor, columnists, and writers of all kinds. A business manager is also needed. If you have had experience in these lines or are interested, contact Pvt. Chuck Woodruff, room 401, or [Pvt. Jack Webb].
...and he's on the staff list in the next issue.

ATTENTION PLEASE

"This Is The Army"

VOLUME 1
THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 1943
NUMBER 1

WIL-CO

STAFF
Editor . . . Pvt. Chuck Wodruff
Co-Editor . . . Pvt. Jack Webb
News Editor . . . Pvt. Bob Woolf
Sports Co-Editors . . . Pvt. Bob Paul,
Pvt. Arnold Paige
Music Editor . . . Pvt. Ed. Weniger
Business Manager . Pvt. Ralph Bartos
Reporters . . . Pvt. N. Fehr, J. Brown,
D. M. Brod, R. Burgess, S. Collins,
J. Ellison, C. Alig
Business Staff . . . Pvt. C. Chauncey,
D. Emerick.
Head for the “Wil-co” was drawn by
Pvt. Rene Wetzel.

April 8, 1943

1943-03-25 The Record
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/29567
WIL-CO list from 1943-04-08
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/29578
He was a columnist and co-editor for the cadets’ newspaper, which appeared in the school’s newspaper.

Webb’s column was a Dear Abby of sorts — geared in a humorous manner to the everyday woes of a soldier.

“We sincerely hope that we aren’t the cause of too much face reddening,” he wrote in the opening column.

*Yours received and contents noted*

By Pvt. Jack Webb

The original article is available at the following link:

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/29578
THE MUSIC—formal and informal, was always good. The band was a credit to the traditions of St. John’s students and the halls of René fairly shivered when the boys got together long enough to whip up some Boogie-Woogie in the latest fashion. Here they are.

Jack Webb from California organized post talent into the variety show, “Flying Blind,” which was presented in St. Cloud, profiting $1,200. This sum was donated to the U.S.O.

Text and photos from the 1944 yearbook

Band images and top text from 1944 Sagatagan, p.74
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18476/rec/24
1944 Sagatagan, p.62
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18470/rec/24
Jack Webb from California organized post talent into the variety show, “Flying Blind,” which was presented in St. Cloud, profiting $1,200. This sum was donated to the U.S.O.

he produced, directed and acted in the Variety Show called “Flying Blind” which was so well received and quickly established such a reputation that it was continued as the annual Variety Show by returning GI’s and other students after the War.

Image of Webb USO programs - from Webb Facebook page maintainer
Text from 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.62 (on left)
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18470/rec/24
and from 1968 *SJU Alumni Magazine* Spring p.38
‘You’re in, Miss Gale’

Cadet Jack Webb Picks a Star for ‘Flying Blind’

One day last week Cadet Jack Webb of the 87th college training detachment was looking for a woman—not any woman, but one that could speak three lines in his musical comedy, ‘Flying Blind,’ to be presented in the Technical High school auditorium Thursday and Friday.

He walked the streets, stood on corners, sat in drugstores, always looking for a woman “who could walk in and make the officers turn around.” By week’s end he had every St. John’s cadet on the hunt for his woman.

Saturday noon the bus brought its load of Sigling wingmen to St. Cloud. Cadet Webb’s collaborators gathered in a downtown room to map out the evening hunt—they still wanted the right feminine lead.

In walked Nancy Gale, 19-year-old Carlston sophomore home for the summer’s vacation. The cadets looked. Was she what Webb would like? How did she walk? How did she talk? They looked some more, said nothing.

The air was like that of a sick room in which only the doctor knew the seriousness of the case. The cadet came—Cadet Webb walked in only to let his potential star sit while he stared with the rest of the boys.

No one mentioned the show. The banner went on. Miss Gale was drawn into the conversation. Still no talk of ‘Flying Blind.’ Just wisecracks and small chatter for an hour. Ready to go, Cadet Webb looked at her, said. “You’re in.”

With their feminine lead picked (to speak three lines) the cadets went about the all-night job of writing a script, using the best of their three previous productions and combining it with everything new.

To make arrangements for rehearsals, Cadet Webb and his assistant director, Cadet Blaine Thompson, went to see their feminine lead Wednesday afternoon. In case, Cadet Webb whispered to her brother, Bob, “Can she play the piano?”

“She’s only been playing since she was eight.”

“Can she sing?”

“She sang with the dance band at Carlston for two years.”

Then Cadet Webb saw that his script needed retouching. Instead of the three lines planned for his feminine lead, she could now sing and play. Maybe a scene could do her justice? Yes.

This week the play went to rehearsals and Nancy Gale “was in,” in with dozens of cadet actors, singers, composers, directors, comedians, musicians. ‘Flying Blind’ presented for the first time with a woman, was ready for an audience.

Written, directed, and produced by versatile Jack Webb, the all-cadet (except for Nancy) review will be staged as an army benefit for the St. Cloud service canteen which, for the past several months, has been the gathering place of cadets.

Lyrics, music, skits, and solos for the show were all penned by men stationed with the St. John’s air crew, most of it by Cadet Webb himself.

Tickets for either of the two nights were on sale in downtown St. Cloud over the weekend at Dan Marsh Drugs, Pandell’s, Spanish Hotel, Hotel St. Cloud, and the service canteen. In addition, they can be purchased from cadets.
"FLYING BLIND" an all army production will be given by the St. John's air corps cadets pre-flight class. Rehearsals are under way for the show and pictured above are members of the cast with the only "Gal," Nancy Gale, in the show during practice Monday (left to right) Privates Jack Webb, Richard Wahl, Newton Blevins, J. S. White, Donald Brod, and Edward Blyman. (Times photo)
Some of the Jack Webb materials in the SJU Archives was shared via the Jack Webb Archives Facebook page in 2017

Dan Moyer Jack Webb Archives FB creator, asked about Webb at SJU on May 10, 2017
The next time Webb gets a mention in *The Record* is February 29, 1952:

Wartime Johnny Alumnus Stars On 'Dragnet' Television Show

Jack Webb, '43, of Los Angeles, Cal., a College Training (aircrew) Johnny during the war, is now a writer, producer, director, and police department files. Emphasis star of "Dragnet" (NBC-TV, alternate Thursdays). Webb, onetime co-editor of "Wilo", the army news was of the "Record", was very active during its frequently outlandish characters are all used in creating the program is on film and simply shoots Los Angeles as it is; its alleys and cheap hotels, his brief wartime stay at Collegeville. Besides his contributions show's setting.

...and a correspondence had begun between Jack and Fr. Walter Reger, Alumni Director

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/31077/rec/5
Dear Father Reger:

April 22, 1952

I am sending you a copy of the book "Drag-Net" which was published in the spring of 1952. I would like you to read it and write back to me with your comments. I think you would enjoy it.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

P.S. In memory of Father Reger, the office address is 111 N. Second St., Hollywood, Calif.
January 5, 1954

Motion Pictures/2400 West Alameda Avenue/Burbank/Calif.

January 5, 1954

Father Walter Reger
St. John's College
Collegeville, Minnesota

Dear Father:

Thank you for your nice Christmas Card and for the note you wrote on it.

Your thoughtfulness and loyalty are most heartwarming.

Sincerely,

Jack Webb

1801.6 Letter to Father Walter from Jack Webb 1954
Time magazine cover story on Jack Webb March 15, 1954
1801.6 Letter from Father Walter to Jack Webb 1954
“In 1956, Jack, St. John’s University will celebrate its centenary. Nothing would please us more than to have you participate in some way in this celebration...”

Time magazine cover story on Jack Webb March 15, 1954
1801.6 Letter from Father Walter to Jack Webb 1954
“It was a grand experience after ten years to see you again at the RKO Orpheum in Minneapolis and to bring you greetings from St. John’s where memories of ‘Flying Blind’ and your other early stage productions are still fresh.”

“I was, of course, also pleased to have you put in such a gracious ‘plug’ for St. John’s.”

“As you may know, next year – 1956-57 – St. John’s celebrates its one-hundredth birthday. We sincerely hope that you and Mrs. Webb will be able to find the time for a visit during the year. A convocation hour with our student body of 1300 boys present could be arranged at any time convenient for you…”

August 1955 letter
June 1956: correspondence with someone famous may have been difficult at times

1801 f6 telegram
1801.6 (on left) Letter to Father Walter from Jack Webb about Photo Jan. 2, 1958
1801.6 (on right) Letter from Father Walter to Jack Webb March 2, 1958
“...you have an unfulfilled ambition to do some worthwhile charity...”

“...when I left your apartment last summer: ‘I’ll build you folks at St. John’s a building sometime.’”

“...the Abbot said ‘What a grand thing it would be... the WEBB AUDITORIUM.’”

“...please consider whether you can give something at this time.”

“One of these days I’ll be shipping out a few more loaves of St. John’s Bread.”

March 2, 1958

1801.6 (on left) Letter to Father Walter from Jack Webb about Photo Jan. 2, 1958
1801.6 (on right) Letter from Father Walter to Jack Webb March 2, 1958
A gift for Fr. Walter: an autographed photo, and kind sentiments

1968 SJU Alumni Magazine Spring p.38
“There are some pretty good crime shows, at least one of which, ‘Dragnet,’ is among the most wholesome dramatic shows on the air.”

“Jack Webb, who plays Sgt. Friday, the soft-spoken, competent detective on the radio, is director and producer and also the star on television. To him belongs the credit for the show’s quiet honesty, meticulous attention to detail and absence of theatricality.”

---

SJU Archives Box 1801:6, clipping of Crosby NY Herald Tribune column as reprinted in Minneapolis Morning Tribune Feb. 12, 1952.
"On Stage 21 at Republic Studios, Hollywood, Producer Jack Webb and the company of Mark VII wrapped up the 275 performance[s] of the pioneer TV weekly dramatic documentary of life on a U.S. police force."

"No TV dramatic show ever was taken to the hearts of English speaking audiences as was 'Dragnet.'"

"More than 100 awards, plaques, certificates and medals were bestowed on Webb and company for technical excellence, story interest, humanitarian effort and general showmanship.

Police departments around the country thundered their approval of the first sincere attempt to show accurately a cop at work.

Service clubs applauded the contributions by 'Dragnet' to [the] reduction of juvenile delinquency."

(1959, source unknown)
Officer Bill Gannon from *Dragnet*

...later played M*A*S*H’s Colonel Sherman Potter

Actor Jack Webb’s death reminds oldtimers of first SJU Variety Show
by F. Martin Schirmer, O.F.M. ’71

Natives of the death of Jack Webb, star and producer of the popular TV series “Dragnet,” may remember that the actor brought back memories of a cult character to both students and Air Force cadets of the 1940s. Jack Webb was a 1943 graduate of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and a former student of the Air Force’s “Old Order Cwhose training was designed to make air cadets into fine young men for the air force. Webb’s “Dragnet” had little violence. The actor said he would never include anything in the show that he wouldn’t want his own children to see. Testimony to the excellence of the production were the more than 100 awards received for technical excellence, story interest and humanitarian appeal. At the height of its popularity, it had an estimated 38 million viewers.

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SJU Alumni Magazine, Spring 1983

1983 Spr SJU Mag p.25
