

STANTON R. OLSON

World War II Navigator with 15th Air Force

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STANTON RAGNAR OLSON

Today is January 19, 1994. My name is Jim Will and I am a volunteer with the Rockford Museum Center, which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens who participated in events surrounding World War II. We are here in an office in the museum center and we are going to talk to Stanton Olson whose address is 3023 Newburg Road, Belvidere, Illinois. Mr. Olson served in a branch of the United Armed Forces during World War II. We are going to interview him about his experiences in the war.

WILL: May I call you Stan? Would you give us your full name, place and date of birth?

OLSON: My full name is Stanton Ragnar Olson, born at St. Anthony's Hospital here in Rockford, January 16, 1923.

WILL: Okay. How about the names of your parents?

OLSON: Anton and Anna Olson.

WILL: How about your mother's maiden name?

OLSON: Anna Johnson.

WILL: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

OLSON: No brothers or sisters.

WILL: Can you give us some details about your parents or family if you'd like to?

OLSON: Both my parents came from Sweden and my dad was a furniture worker for many years. He was in the tornado, 1928, Chair Factory "B". He was up on the 4th floor and went back to close the window in the southwest corner and several minutes later he had the window and he stepped out on the ground floor. It blew the building down.

WILL: Wow.

OLSON: My mother was picking glass from his head but outside of that ...

WILL: You mentioned he was in the ...

OLSON: He was in the Swedish Army. That was the normal way. Swedes had to donate time. Then he got his citizenship in the United States by—through enlisting in the armed services over here and served he served for one year in the Engineer Corps in France.

WILL: Stan, do you remember what life was like before the war, in the 30s maybe, especially in 1941?

OLSON: Well, I just graduated from the last class in Central High in Rockford. Jobs weren't especially plentiful. They were still, say more or less, in the depression years or just recovering from same. My first job was \$0.25 an hour. There wasn't—in those days, your thoughts weren't that you were to go to college, you were, more or less, destined to get a job locally and work your way up in pecking order, more or less. Jobs were scarce in those days and the war came along and, of course, that changed everything.

WILL: What was your job?

OLSON: What do you mean?

WILL: Did you have a job?

OLSON: No. I graduated from high school and my first job was in a plating company. Actually they hired me as chemist in plating. All I had was high school chemistry and was good at it but then I had to also be on the plating tanks and learn. All that was a little more than I could take care of. I mean I lost 10 pounds one day in the summer time.

WILL: It was physical work.

OLSON: Physical work. These big hubcaps for International Harvester—lifting them in and out of 120° water all day long in 100° heat. I did know that I just drank a quart of water every 15 minutes.

WILL: You were doing this in 1941?

OLSON: 1940. Also my next job was to go back to—I took a course in drawing and I got a job in the blueprint department at George D. Roper Corp. I worked there until I enlisted in the Army Air Force.

WILL: Remember hearing about Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941?

OLSON: It was over the radio and everybody—you know it doesn't take very long for new like that to be spread out.

WILL: Where were you at the time?

OLSON I really don't remember.

WILL: You just heard about it?

OLSON: Yes.

WILL: What was your reaction?

OLSON: Well, probably, I wasn't quite—you know, the war was going on in other places in Europe. But you were just like—you're not going to get involved. I mean as far as that's concerned, it wasn't like I'm gonna go down and enlist right now and go over there and shoot those dirty Gaps or whatever. It was, more or less, kind of snuck up on you. After a while the immensity of the thing and what was required and all of those.

WILL: Did you have any prior opinion or feelings about what was taking place in Europe?

OLSON: Well sometimes you—I don't remember that much back then as to what my feelings were. So much has happened in between that time as far as my years in the service, I kind of just closed my mind to the

thing. So many things happened to me and to others—kind of like it's only been more recently that I've even thought about it.

WILL: You recall reading in the newspapers about German aggression in Europe?

OLSON: Oh, yes. You know you were always aware of it—kind of sensitive to it. It wasn't so much in the news media, you know. Like we have TV and that now. You didn't have it then so there wasn't an immense amount of it where you were kind of were today bombarded with everything up to the minute and everything like that. In those days you got it from the newspapers and the radio but it didn't—the news media was there but it wasn't, you know, didn't occupy a whole mess of time. It was the regular news broadcast you got it but it wasn't continuous.

WILL: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches and ideas at the time?

OLSON: You know you still went to the movies in those days. Pathé and Fox Movietone News that was one of the features where you got live action movies of Hitler speaking and wondering how he could mesmerize the big audience that he had to get the people to do this.

WILL: What events led you into military service? Were you drafted or were ...

OLSON: No, I enlisted.

WILL: About what ...

OLSON: I took the exams out at Camp Grant in 1942. First place, of course, being an only child, my parents were dead against me going into the service and I didn't get to be old enough to do my own enlisting.

WILL: How old were you then in '42?

OLSON: I was born in '23, so in '43, I'd be 20. I was 19.

WILL: Family and friends really influence you.

OLSON: A lot of—In fact, I was probably more in the first line of people to go in my group of acquaintances and friends and stuff. I, perhaps, could have stayed out because the company was doing defense work. I was in the engineering department so I could have stayed out if I certainly wanted to. I always wanted to be a navigator and I went and passed the Army Air corps exams and we weren't called in. I mean I was sworn in in December of '42 but it seemed that they were taking—the Navy was griping to the defense department because they were losing recruits due to the people enlisting in the Air Force or Air Corps at that time didn't have to go in. They could enlist but they weren't called in. So all of a sudden in February of '43, they called everybody in, I mean all these enlistees in the Air Corps. The problem was that they didn't have space in the classification centers and all of this to handle them. So you got your basic training and then all the colleges were practically empty of male people. So the Air Corps went and say rented or leased—so that you had college training detachment which was kind of like a holding portion. You were supposed to get ten hours Piper aircraft flying plus additional studies in English, science and mathematics—just a holding type thing.

WILL: You did this out at Camp Grant?

OLSON: Oh, no. I had basic training down in ...

WILL: First of all were you inducted in the ...

OLSON: I was inducted out at Camp Grant.

WILL: Then you went ...

OLSON: That was physical and everything else out at Camp Grant. There was quite elaborate exams that you had to take out there. I mean mentally and that in order to qualify and normally in the cadet program out of 900 there would usually be 200 or more washed out due to either physical or to military and like that.

WILL: Out at Camp Grant after your physical and other exams, where were you sent then?

OLSON: Went back home. We were enlisted there. We got sworn in in December and still went back home. They didn't call us until February and then I had to report to Chicago with a bunch of fellows. Then we went by train, troop train, down to Wichita Falls, Texas, for basic training at Sheppard Field.

WILL: What did you think of the training? Tell us something about that.

OLSON: Well, you know, the big training, it was cold. They had a lot of flu, spinal meningitis, so they even had to convert a big hangar. They didn't have space in the hospitals for the guys there were so many of them that were getting sick. During basic training I went and tried to—you know they have these ten foot walls that you're supposed to climb over and I went—you had to run up against the wall with your foot and then grab up on the top ledge in order to pull yourself over. Well, I broke a bone in my foot—it snapped. I had to go on sick call the next day. The only trouble was the line started at six o'clock in the morning and you stood. The only guys that got in sooner was those that passed out. They were so taken up with these other guys that were sick, they said I had a sprained ankle. They gave me two aspirin and said we were goofing off. So I suffered—I wanted to be a navigator and if I got washed out, I'd be a gunner, an aerial gunner, and I didn't want to be that so I toughed it out. It wasn't until the next base ...

WILL: You worked around ...

OLSON: Yes. Fifteen mile road runs, marching ...

WILL: With a broken foot.

OLSON: With a broken foot. It was not until I got to college training detachment which was the next Shreveport, Louisiana, ___?___ College that ...

WILL: You were shipped from, Wichita Falls, Texas ...

OLSON: To Shreveport, Louisiana. There I got—we were supposed to play basketball only we didn't have tennis shoes and we were supposed to play in our stocking feet. The minute I took my shoe off and stepped out on the floor, I collapsed. They took me by ambulance out to the Barksdale Field which was outside of Shreveport. The guy in x-ray said you got a broken foot. The only problem was that they said it was starting to heal already and what they could do was support it and give me an excuse to get out of PT. The only problem was that the instructor of PT ...

WILL: That's physical training.

OLSON: Physical training. —hated the cadets and so he said that excuse was no good. I had to take physical training.

WILL: Now for the record, what unit was this?

OLSON: It was just a college training detachment in Aviation Cadets. He was rather rugged on—I mean he caused a lot of heart murmurs to the—his son was a 4-F and the cadets made of him and so he in turn took it out on the cadets. They had a stadium like Beyer Stadium with the cement bleachers but they were on both sides and had wooden platforms. After an hour of very thorough physical calisthenics, we had to do victory laps which was up and down, up and down, up and down. Go across the field up and down, up and down, up and down. In a month's time we completely destroyed all the wooden parts of the things, running back and forth. Very thorough, very rugged. He was put on probation when we got to the classification center because there was a number of cadets had heart murmurs from the vigorous—and they were in good shape going into it—going into the program but one of those things.

WILL: Did you have any duties while you were there?

OLSON: Well, we had classes all day long and we had to maintain our barracks in the style that the Air Force or the Air Corps at that time. I

remember one thing though. We had a 2nd Lieutenant who this is his first administrative job. He wanted to show off the cadets and so he invited a retired Brigadier General to come and inspect the troops. One of the cadets had volunteered to learn how to be a bugler and to be dismissed from physical training while he learned to play the bugle. That evening at the retreat parade he got out there and played some pretty sad notes but there were about four or five dogs that gathered and they started howling.

WILL: Sort of accompanying him.

OLSON: That kind of rattled this Lieutenant and he started to march the cadets off in mass formation and he didn't know how to maneuver them so they practically walked into a wall. He couldn't think of what commands to stop them or to turn them and so he offered a right flank movement which you can't do from a mass formation so some guys reversed, some guys stopped. Kind of embarrassed him. Then he made the guys get back together again and marched off the field whistling and singing the Air Corp song.

WILL: Were you there 'til active duty?

OLSON: Oh, no. That was just a holding thing to get you so that they'd have room in the classification center.

WILL: Where did you go from there?

OLSON: Down in San Antonio, Texas. That's where their classification ...

WILL: No, that's for determining where you were going to be sent, whether you were going to be a pilot, a navigator or bombardier. They had to give you at least a week of testing, both physically and mentally and psychologically, too, to determine whether you were good enough. They spent four hours on the eyes alone. You couldn't wear glasses. You had to have 20/20 vision, both depth perception and all this. They spent another four hours on the heart. They didn't have all this electronic gadgetry. They normally just put you in different rooms with a doctor, a sound proof room and a doctor,

and he would make you do different types of exercises and get in different positions and listen to your heart. So, I mean, heart murmurs and all of that were part of the routine. Then they gave you written tests again but then the spent, I don't know if it was four hours or possibly a whole day on what they called psycho-motor tests where they try to determine whether you were mentally and emotionally, you could take combat. I mean they'd make you do things where you had to stick your—kind of collapsible little rod that stuck in a little hole that had lights on it or bells. You had to hold it and, of course, you were nervous to the point where this thing would hit on the side and it would ring a bell or light. Then they would make you count the number of times that that while they were yelling at you to remember about your numbers and shooting off guns in your ears and stuff like that. All of this was probably a series of eight different types of tests that you had to not only coordination—they had kind of a ___?___ with a wavy line on a thing but the handles reversed in the direction that you would normally—In other words, if you were going to turn it would follow this line only backwards so that there was nothing that you could have trained for or checked for before time. Everything that they—then you had to have an interview with a psychologist who asked you a lot of embarrassing questions, you know. Homosexuality, masturbation, all of these things, you know, if you weren't kind of used to it ... It was a thorough one and I had qualified for all three positions, pilot, navigator and bombardier. They were looking for pilots at the time and I said I wanted to be a navigator. They said, "Well, there aren't any positions open for navigation for at least a year. You can volunteer for that and there'll be some extra duties. You have your choice of being permanent KP which means working from four o'clock in the morning to about nine o'clock at night or the commanding officer on base has got a model infantry field with trenches and everything like that. You can go out there and help them/" and I volunteered to do that. All I had to do was dig a six-foot trench.

WILL: Maintain them.

OLSON: No. It was in limestone. Hard stuff. Pick axe.

WILL: And you had to help maintain that.

OLSON: No. No. Start it.

WILL: Oh, you had to start it.

OLSON: I had to dig—it was zig zag trenches—and I had to dig six-foot long, about a five-foot deep by two-foot wide trench. It took me all day, the first day. I had blisters on my hands and it was in July so I mean it was hot but at the end of the week, I could do one in about half a day and goof off the rest. Nobody watching you. You were just assigned that. I got shipped out first, before the other pilots, did to navigation ___?___.

WILL: When was this? You qualified for navigator ...

OLSON: Yah. That means I was classified as a navigator and then I was going to be sent to what they call pre-flight school which is mostly marching and schooling.

WILL: A training.

OLSON: It was just pre-flight. Then I got sent to aerial gunnery school. Well, then the pre-flight school which was at Ellington Field, Houston, Texas, we had a hurricane. It was also an advanced school for twin engine pilots. At the last minute, they decided that the planes—they couldn't get the planes out of the field, so the hurricane was coming and we got volunteered to hold the planes down. Quite an experience. Winds of 125 ...

WILL: How do you hold a plane down?

OLSON: With a rope. With a rope. And an anchor ...

WILL: Hang on to it.

OLSON: Hang on to the rope. And that's fastened to the wing.

WILL: You didn't fasten it to the ground?

OLSON: Oh, yah. The rope was fastened to the ground. The winds were about 125 mile an hour according to the air speed meters in the planes on the ground. The propellers were revolving. They were going and I ended up with a piece of wing about twelve inches square. The airplane went. Took off.

WILL: Took off. Nobody on it.

OLSON: And the— it was quite an experience. The rocks that were being blown with it would hit you and you'd get some pretty good bruises with that.

WILL: What happened to the airplane?

OLSON: It went up about forty feet in the air and landed on its back.

WILL: What kind of airplane was it?

OLSON: It was a twin engine like an AT-11 or an AT-6. An AT-6 is a single engine. An AT-11 and an AT-18 were twin engine Cessna or Beechcraft trainers. So we had watermelons for water and we had to get the base ready for inspection. This happened on a Thursday and the base commander wanted the base ready for inspection on Saturday morning.

WILL: You cleaned up after the dirt.

OLSON: Couldn't even tell where the streets were. All the streets had to be shoveled out. The curbing had to be white washed. We had fun.

WILL: Where'd you go after this, then?

OLSON: Then I went to aerial gunner's school learning how to be an aerial gunner.

WILL: Which you didn't want to be.

OLSON: Yes. Well, I mean, officially I didn't want to be an aerial gunner in combat. We had to all take aerial gunnery because we were still in a—if you're in a bomber you still had to learn how to shoot a gun, be able to shoot because you

were in a possession to have one. I got my first airplane ride.

WILL: Down at ...

OLSON: In Arlington, Texas. It was quite an event from the standpoint that it was the last flight of the day and I got the hottest block in the Air Corp at that time from a pilot. You sit in an open cockpit airplane facing towards the rear. You had a 30-caliber machine gun with 200 rounds of ammunition which are dipped in paint because you're firing at tow target towed by another aircraft. You can shoot the tail off your own airplane if you don't —really, there's no mechanism to stop it or discontinue the gun from firing. You're also in an open cockpit. You got earphones on. The pilot can talk to you. You can't talk to the pilot. You're fastened in with a gunner's belt which allows you about eighteen inches of movement. In other words you can hang over the side of the cockpit. You also had a hole in the floor which is open and you have the cables of the rudder mechanisms and stuff for the pilot to control the aircraft in the floor exposed so you can stand on top of them. He says, "I've got a date with a girl at five o'clock. If the gun jams and you can't fix it, throw the ammunition overboard. These two things." So as we're taxiing out to take off my load of ammunition goes out the hole in the floor except for a couple and I can't talk to him. I'm pulling the thing back in. I was kind of a little excited, too. We flew out over the coast of the Gulf of Mexico where there was open water where we were firing and the pilot was playing trying to tip the other airplane. They were flying like this, get their wings under one and try to tip the other one over. So this kind of disturbed me a little bit.

WILL: He was trying to scare you?

OLSON: Well, I don't know if he was trying to scare me but he did a good job. I'm going out and so we get in position to fire and that plane and target is far out there and I take like this and, of course, the gun is kicking. The gun jams. The gun jams. The gun jammed so I had to get the gun into a 90° position so that I could crank it. You might have a short round so you had to just unload the thing several times.

WILL: You had to ...

OLSON: Recharge it and correct it. Well, in the meantime, the pilot has to get out of position to allow another plane to get into firing position. Well, he goes into a kind of a dive and I hang over the side with this gunner's belt, pull myself back in and I fire the rest of the shots the next time around. We immediately—He's supposed to wait for me to get the gun into a neutral position. I'm hanging over the side on the other side and so for the rest of that mission, he's flying down into the gullies in Mexico looking for a place where he's going to go hunting that Sunday. I didn't throw up but my stomach didn't come ... I was kind of wondering whether I had made a mistake in volunteering to enlist in the Air Corp.

WILL: He wouldn't land until you fired your 200 rounds.

OLSON: Oh, yah. I don't think I hit too many. The target was so far away that I couldn't. The next ...

WILL: You don't know the results of that?

OLSON: Well, the next day I got the most gentle pilots for firing and he practically talked to me every time he was going to make a little turn and he was very gentle. He got so close to the tow target that I almost had to pull the target so I wouldn't shoot the same hole in the tow target. I got all 200 rounds in the target. It's hard to explain not hitting it one day and putting them all in the next day. I also—we had another incident where we were flying—had to get experience in a twin engine aircraft with what they called a __?__ which had twin 30 caliber __?__ to shoot at targets and the ammunition was that you only shoot in short bursts, five second bursts or something like that, otherwise the gun barrels would get warm or hot and they would bend.

WILL: They were air-cooled.

OLSON: Well, yah. They were just air-cooled but you'd shoot like 200 rounds and the things

bent. I mean they distorted from the heat. We were fed some tainted meat down there by the WACs. A number of guys and we got ptomaine poisoning and the rest of the guys, they went to the hospital but I thought that I could hold out. I went up on this one flight. I had diarrhea and all that and I had a temperature of about 106 and when I saw that tow target out there, I let it go, 200 rounds. I got plenty of hits but the instructor said, "You're washed out." I said, "I don't care. I'm sick." They took me in an ambulance to the hospital. They shoved about 150 sulfa pills down me and the hospital was full and they said, "You can go home." I was in no state to do that but I spent most of my leave at home. I had to go by bus all the way from the southern part of Texas to Rockford.

WILL: You got a ...

OLSON: Furlough. The only furlough I ever had.

WILL: For how long?

OLSON: It was a week. Actually until the next class opened up.

WILL: The next class was back down in Texas.

OLSON: Yah. I had finished—graduated with the next gunnery class. Then from there I went to Hondo, Texas, where eighteen, let's see, eighteen weeks—I guess it was advanced navigation. That's where you learn to be a navigator.

WILL: A lot of math and science.

OLSON: Math and flying. You had to fly 25 dead reckoning navigation missions. Different. To learn how to use your stuff in the air and celestial dead reckoning, night and day. That was my __?__ education. I graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant.

WILL: In the Army Air Corp.

OLSON: Yah. I didn't get any furlough upon graduation. I had to go up to what they call Replacement Training Center in B-17s up to

Rapid City, South Dakota. We were in a—supposedly we were supposed to have leave—furlough at home and as an officer we were supposed to get a little more respect. We were a little like Roger Dangerfield, we didn't even get Pullmans to go up to Rapid City. We got, I mean, it was one of the—it was kind of like a troop train from the 1800s. It had these cane seats, you know, that you pull over back and forth. It had a stove—a wood burning stove in the center and the chandeliers had been converted to electricity. I mean they were the old kerosene lamps and the first night we were on there we had to sleep on the floor or that. All the light bulbs ___?___ because we had square lights, square wheels on the train. I got up to Rapid City, South Dakota. They were getting their final phases. All the needed was a navigator. They had been already trained in the B-17.

WILL: They were waiting for you.

OLSON: Waiting for me. Besides that we had finished our training and we did better than the class before so that we got shipped out before the class before. We then got shipped to Kearney, Nebraska, to pick up a brand new airplane, B-17. It was fifteen replacement crews. We were supposed to go to the 8th Air Force which was England but they diverted 15 of us to go to the 15th Air Force and that was in Italy. So we flew an airplane ...

WILL: All the way from ...

OLSON: We flew up to Nova Scotia and then from Nova Scotia down to the Azores which was a small island and then to Africa. Casablanca, Merrakech, Tunis and then up to ___?___, Italy, which was the hub of what they called the Fifth Wing which consisted of about four or five B-17 groups.

WILL: Where in Italy?

OLSON: ___?___. It's on the east coast of Italy, up from the heel.

WILL: What were your duties?

OLSON: I was a navigator on a B-17.

WILL: What were you assigned after you were ...

OLSON: I assigned to the 463rd Bomb Group, 773rd Bomb Squadron and at that time it was July of 1944 and they were heavily — . I know what you're talking about just after D-Day Normandy and so there was a lot of activity. The Fifth Army front was kind of stagnant which was the Fifth Army was in northern Italy. In fact it had just captured Rome and it was a little bit north of Rome at that time. But it was very stagnant. There wasn't a lot of activity going on. The movement. They were kind of jammed, stalled out.

WILL: Did they put you right in a combat zone immediately?

OLSON: Oh, yah. I started flying right away because they were losing planes. In fact, we were finishing up Ploiesti Oil Fields at that time. The Fifteenth Air Force flew a total of about 30 missions to Ploiesti. It wasn't just that original one, it was probably one of the roughest targets in the whole theater.

WILL: Low level.

OLSON: No, the original Ploiesti raid was low level but the subsequent ones were all done the whole Fifteenth Air Force would fly like 650, 750 airplanes and just bomb Ploiesti on thirty missions because there was a number of oil refineries around that and it was one of the most heavily defended targets because all of their oil for Germany came from there. It had the best pilots in the Luftwaffe there, Messerschmidts, the ___?___ and the 190s.

WILL: You were flying B17s?

OLSON: B17s. One thing that we flew at a higher altitude than the B24s. They flew at a lower altitude. The thing was that they always flew and they picked out one particular target. There was one oil refinery that they would go into and then the planes would more or less string out 50 miles just planes and groups.

WILL: In single file.

OLSON: It would be in groups. But I mean it would be 36, four squadrons flying this way at a different altitude. They'd go in more or less in the same line but ...

WILL: Was this to confuse the Germans?

OLSON: No. Just because ...

WILL: (Interrupts at this point and it is not audible what either one is saying.)

OLSON: One of the things when you're flying in a big mass formation, that is you've got to keep out of each others way. But you got to be visual. In other words you can't be flying in clouds. You have to be visual. You may not be able to see your target but you have to be visual because you can imagine what would happen if you had a whole bunch of airplanes going off in different directions. The only thing would be is that you had the guns, the 88s, the 105s, and the 155s were all anti-aircraft were patterned in a wagon wheel pattern on the ground. All they had to do was know what target you were going to and then they would aim all the guns there and put up the __?__. Well they had the fighters flying and calling up your altitude to the ground. So I mean you had to go through those __?__ and there was kind of—I don't know if you could get through and say the target without getting a couple hundred holes in the aircraft. It was just a lucky thing that the aircraft could take that much punishment and still survive plus also getting wounded because all you got is 1/16th thick aluminum between you and the outside. Flying at that altitude you have oxygen but the airplane is equipped—they'd taken off the fire extinguishers because they would—because the gases inside to extinguish the flames were under high pressure. They get hit by a shell and act as a shell and explode and do more damage than they would do so that you had to use just the maneuverability of the aircraft to try to douse out a flame.

WILL: Do you remember your first combat flight?

OLSON: Yah. Never flown at altitude before. When you're talking about flying at altitude, we were bombing at between 25,000 feet and 30,000 feet in a B-17 over target. You are then on a full 100% oxygen. If you don't have oxygen at that level supposedly you are brain damaged at 2 ½ minutes. Actually, it worked exactly that way. However, I never checked out my equipment. We were issued those things but never tried them out. So on the first mission you know you're—it's, say, 60 below zero in the cockpit in the aircraft and the only way that you have of that is that you have your long underwear and flight coveralls and you have a heated suit. Your shoes have a heated lining and you have, it's like an electric blanket that you plug into 24 volts, and gloves. On top of that you have heavy flight gear. Trying to navigate as to work a slide rule, and pencils and dividers with all that equipment on. You also have your parachute harness. You can't wear your parachute very good with the strap on so you had to—but you had the harness itself. The parachute was left there. You also had a Mae West and also you had 35 pounds of flak suit which was kind of like the umpire they wear that protects your chest region and front and back. It weighed 35 pounds. You're navigating standing up.

(Will and Olson talking at the same time. Not audible).

OLSON: Not a seat but you could stand on the floor or __?__ but the vibration in the airplane is quite so that you lay a pencil down or your dividers down, it disappears. You also have goggles, you have an oxygen mask, you have a helmet on, and a flak helmet on and this is—on the bomb run, you're supposed to turn around and record your position, the altitude, compass heading all this sort of stuff in there. During that time my oxygen became disconnected.

OLSON: So I'm sitting there ...

WILL: You didn't know it.

OLSON: No. It's the most convenient way of committing suicide because you have no feelings, you have nothing, no __?__. You don't even know. You could watch yourself. Your fingernails would turn blue and that but you have no conception that you're going under. It's just a pleasant feeling.

WILL: This is on your first flight.

OLSON: Yup. __?__ So I mean nobody can recognize you. I mean except at the end of the bomb run. Well, on the bomb run, your plane has to be flight straight and level and it might be for six minutes, sometimes ten minutes, because the bombardier in the lead plane, his bomb site is connected to the auto pilot and so the pilot on the bomb run trims the airplane up, levels it off and plugs in the bomb site. Then the bombardier is in charge of the aircraft. He can move the aircraft, fly it. That's just only the lead plane. The other planes have to kind of fly in formation off of it. The bombardier has control. The pilot's got hands and feet off.

WILL: Inaudible.

OLSON: No. No. Only the lead and the deputy lead plane. They didn't have enough bomb sites to go around and it didn't make any difference anyway because only the lead plane could maneuver in the direction of that so you have to follow him so the rest of the planes are dropping bombs what they call toggling. You see the plane ahead of you open up the bomb bays. You open your bomb bays and then the bombardiers in the rest of the planes, their __?__ was just to take to make sure that the bombs got—you had to take the pins out of the bombs and set the rate of, you know, how many they're — how they're going to drop. I mean in mass or—they have timers on the things so that you drop—so that you change them and you just hit the switch. When the bombs come out of the lead plane you did that.

WILL: (Not audible)

OLSON: This is right. This is right. And you had the notes.

WILL: Do you remember your first target?

OLSON: Now wait a minute.

WILL: Okay.

OLSON: I'll get you my—here I'm sitting.

WILL: With no oxygen.

OLSON: No oxygen. So then right at the end—after the pull off the target, then you have checking. I mean each crew member checks in that he's okay. No, I didn't.

WILL: You didn't check in.

OLSON: Check in. So the bombardier saved my life. Noticed that I was unplugged and that happened on two missions.

WILL: Did you lose consciousness?

OLSON: Oh, yes. I was gone. I mean I was out for six minutes or so. For all intents and purposes I passed the (inaudible). It was around the squadron it was noted that Stan Olson has a new way of avoiding looking at what's happening because the planes on both sides got bombed—got hit and disappeared

WILL: Shrapnel.

OLSON: That's right. They got shot down. They say well that's a good way to do it. It's when you get on the bottom, you just disconnect and you don't see anything, and don't know anything.

WILL: Your first target. Do you remember that?

OLSON: I don't know. One of the first targets was Ploiesti. I went three times to Ploiesti.

WILL: How many missions did you fly?

OLSON: Actually, thirty-five. But we got credit, like Ploiesti and some of the more difficult targets farther up in Germany, we got double credit for those because we

weren't—we'd be lucky if we'd get back from them if anything happens because they were on the limit of you fuel supply and everything else.

WILL: They were tougher.

OLSON: They were tougher, not only targets, fighters also the distance if anything happened because we had a lot of times where we get shot—the normal plane for fifty missions would probably have twenty-five engines shot out. Also, we had self sealing gas tanks and we probably have about—any time you had many holes, the whole wing had to be taken care of, taken off. We were flying—we couldn't fly more than about four days in a row. We'd run out of airplanes.

WILL: How often did you fly a mission? Was it once a week, or once a day, or every day?

OLSON: Sometimes every day. As long as—well, the thing was this, that we were short crew. Of the fifteen replacement crews that went over there, seven were already shot down the first week. I'm sitting there feeling sorry for myself and a guy comes in and he says, "Well, you should have been here when it was rough." It makes you feel good.

WILL: Was your plane ever hit?

OLSON: Yes. There were quite a few times that it was hit.

WILL: Did you ever have to bail out?

OLSON: No. Almost. We decided to rough it out. Got my first DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) because we got hit pretty badly one time. And the co-pilot, his arm was more hanging than nothing. It was shattered.

WILL: My next question is was anybody ever injured?

OLSON: Oh, yah. I went through two bombardiers, two co-pilots ...

WILL: They were killed.

OLSON: No. Good enough. They were disabled. You know what I'm talking about like got a foot shot off.

WILL: This was all shrapnel, not enemy fighters?

OLSON: No. This actually, we were lucky enough that if you flew a tight enough formation, there was other aircraft. I mean I'm talking about bombers, B24s and disabled that the fighters wouldn't bother you. They were more or less looking for stragglers or ones that were loose formation so that they could ...

WILL: (Inaudible)

OLSON: This is right. We had—I think one of the things that we were lucky to have was that Hitler and his thinking, they could have had the jets sooner. We run in to them and we lost nine planes in one mission.

WILL: What did you think of those?

OLSON: There was nothing that could touch them. Our tigers couldn't touch them. Six hundred miles an hour compared to ours was four hundred. You know you don't have too much comparison there. And they were able to ...

WILL: Did that worry ...

OLSON: It was only—they had—at the end of the war supposedly they had five thousand of those things—planes available but they didn't have fuel.

WILL: Pilots?

OLSON: Pilots were scarce because the airplane was a hot airplane. It landed—it took off on a skid. Actually they were kind of expendable. The pilots—they landed at about 200 miles an hour which is very high speed and they were almost kind of told to bail out of the airplane and come back and get another one. They were so effective.

WILL: How were the injuries? How were they treated, the injured personnel treated over there?

OLSON: What do you mean?

WILL: As far as, did they have good hospitals, medical facilities ...

OLSON: Yah. Yah. They had a large, I mean it was a permanent hospital.

WILL: Not audible.

OLSON: Being a squadron navigator, I had the rough deal of scheduling the guys.

WILL: You were in charge of this.

OLSON: Yah. Well, squadron navigator, he flies—I don't know how I got the job but early on I was flying almost through half my missions in a couple months and then I got volunteered, I don't know how, to be squadron navigator. Squadron navigator only flies when the commanding officer of the squadron flies. The squadron leads the group or the wing for the Air Force. They rotate. In other words, each squadron—we got four squadrons to a group and one day or one mission ...

WILL: Four planes in a squadron?

OLSON: Oh no. Nine planes. So there was thirty six planes in the squadrons and they rotate and the only time that I flew with the squadron commander and the squadron bombardier, we would have the bombsite. It's the lead plane that everybody's trying to knock down. But it's one of those things that—I was more scared screwing up and not finding the target than I was of the flack even though—I wasn't scared of the flack but—You got limited areas to fly over and to kind of tip toe yourself through up to the target area because there are flak areas all over, coming and going.

WILL: You had to get them through that.

OLSON: Had to get them through that and besides that find the target and not be able to go

in on a bomb run at the right what they call the initial point and go in there at that where other planes are coming in before and after you so that you don't get mixed up and you may have to fly over a flak area in order to avoid flying with them or in their pattern. Everything has to be visualized. You have to make the decision—it takes you ten miles to turn a ___?__ 180° so that you have problems that you have to make decisions ahead of time.

WILL: Whether you're going to turn ...

OLSON: Or whether you're going to go to an alternate target, that the weather isn't going to be right and all sorts of stuff. So I've flown the lead—Air Force lead—you know, the whole 15th Air Force which is 750 airplanes.

WILL: Oh, yah.

OLSON: Also I have flown single aircraft, top secret mission, one time where they ...

WILL: You want to tell about that now?

OLSON: Yah. The 15th Air Force was always in competition with the 8th Air Force. Bombs on the target, mounted bombs. (Blank space in tape at this point). It was a matter of statistics. They were getting all the glory and we were doing the work. It's been kind of—you know, they get to have women. You know, I mean they were in civilization and we were in tents in the mud and in a welfare state more or less.

WILL: How about as far as writing home or hearing from home, folks at home? Did you write a lot?

OLSON: Yah. Yah. Well, we weren't allowed to say too much but as far as that was concerned. The mail was good except in the wintertime. Had problems with the—the mail would come into Naples on the western side of Italy and then couldn't be delivered and so at Christmas time it seemed that a lot of our stuff was delayed. And a lot of stuff never got to us. It piled up on the shore, you know, packages of food and stuff like

that. A lot of it was even bulldozed, buried like a land fill.

WILL: You got a lot of food or necessities?

OLSON: Yah. Care packages, so to speak. I know, we had one of the fellows in our little hut. He was from Wisconsin and we got butter, canned butter, and cheeses and stuff like that so we had snacks.

WILL: Did you make a lot of friends while you were there with the fellow Air Force personnel?

OLSON: Not too much from the point of being the squadron navigator, I was—and having shortage of personnel, putting in long hours and the squadron navigators were in charge of planning the missions for the other—in other words when you weren't leading the group, you had to go over early on to plan the missions for the other groups leads. Draw up the maps for the navigators, flight plans and mark the maps with black areas and stuff like that as the lead navigator.

At this point Will and Olson are talking so you can't make out what they are saying.

OLSON: All of the airplanes, after they come out of repair had to be up and flight checked, calibrated compasses, equipment and stuff like that to see that they were okay again and so if you're short people you were doing a lot of stuff.

WILL: Did you have any lasting friendships?

OLSON: I did. Even though there was changes of personnel all the time. I didn't drink or anything like that. I didn't have time for it anyway. But I mean it was a lot of time and you were just using people as much as you can and sometimes you didn't even get to know them.

WILL: Do you remember any of the members of the crew?

OLSON: We were visiting in the hospitals the guys that got wounded. I still write to some. The bomb group didn't have reunions or anything

like that until late on, many years afterwards and it became a historical society. That anybody could join the bomb group. You didn't have to have any affiliation. They just wanted to ... I went to one reunion down in Dayton, Ohio, in '88 and there was only two or three people that I knew and I was in the bomb group for almost a year's time over there which was probably longer than most other than the ground personnel. But the actual combat crews, they went through in about four months.

WILL: You mentioned early you went through half of your required flights in about a month. What was the number? You had to have twenty-five. Is that it?

OLSON: I had thirty, thirty-five.

WILL: That you were required.

OLSON: Well, actually, I had fifty all together but I mean thirty-five actual flights.

WILL: Were there some high light occurrences that you ...

OLSON: Oh, I had all kinds of high lights. We covered all kinds of targets. My first gig as fleet navigator was Ploiesti and the other navigator who was the squadron navigator before me, he was in the airplane. He took over on the bomb line run. Pilots was a target that was well protected from the stand point that when you crossed the Yugoslav coast, they already knew you were going to Pilots and so they would start these oil smudge pots and they had the whole target area for miles around covered over with a smoke screen. So they had a tendency — and we were — the radar at that time was not used for — connected up to the bombsite so you had to bomb, more or less, visually. We were getting practice or taking practice to try to coordinate the radar man with his scope and the bombsite with the bombardier but it was kind of crude and so with a target like Pilots, they would set oil fires out from the target and guys would drop in that and they might be dropping in a potato field. But, however, this first mission to Pilots at that time that I was leading.

WILL: (Inaudible)

OLSON: Well, this was not — This was a different one. We were on the bomb run and this navigator who recognized — there was an opening in the clouds in the area. The smoke pots weren't covered. He recognized this other oil refinery. It wasn't the target we were supposed to bomb and so he said, "Bomb that" and so the bombardier checked out and let the bombs drop on it and we raised a fire and stuff that was visible 150 miles away. Smoke came up to about 40,000 feet. It was kind of like 'hey, we really hit them that time.' And the others might have gotten shot up a great deal but we hit the target that time. I got the relief navigator ___?___ southern France and that was supposed to be a milk run.

WILL: On D-Day.

OLSON: Yah. Our target was Valence, a bridge at Valence, which was up from the coast. What I mean, it was a main route, escape route for all Germans going north. Not Italy. France. Valence, France.

WILL: In southern France.

OLSON: Yes. Southern France. It was an escape route to go up inside. We were supposed to go in low altitude. They were only supposed to have six guns there and so some of the ground officers decided that they wanted to go on a milk run. They took some of the gunners off and took their place. We went in — we were just — The Alps are in that area, too. So I mean you are just barely on top of the hills, the mountains, 50,000 feet. Actually, they moved in some heavy guns and then when you're flying anything under 20,000 feet ___?___ they can pick up parts of the aircraft. They don't even have to aim at the plane. So I was kind of — we had a lot of planes that were damaged that day that didn't get back to base. They were dropping all over the place. But we hit that — the winds shifted. We were coming down a valley towards Valence and the bombs were released but it seems that you could see the bombs going towards the cockpit and

then they would move over a little bit when the wind changed down in the valley. But the last — we bombed in trail like — four squadrons. And the last squadron made a run on the thing and their bombs hit. We heard afterwards — I don't know — I have never been able to find out specifically — we had an infantry officer who had a convoy and he said that there was wreckage of trucks and stuff like that for miles and he got 150 punctures in his tires in his convoy going through that area. I tried to get a hold of people, some civilians over there to confirm it. You know, sometimes it's kind of exaggerated at times as to what actually took place. I do find from the records from different places in the library, in books and stuff like that, that there was that the Germans had a lot of problems getting through that particular area of escape. I felt a little bit lucky on that.

WILL: What about this secret mission?

OLSON: That was — going back to that, I guess it was — they wanted to have six planes, one from each group, go out in broad daylight. Supposedly the thing was that you would — the weather was supposed to be good, in friendly territory and that ___?___ cloudy and total clouds and that ___?___. These are flat regulations in enemy territory and you had to plan your own mission. It was up in Austria. (What Will says is inaudible) But it had to be bombed. And so they wouldn't let the commanding officer fly. So it was another crew except me and the squadron bombardier. We had to fly, fly in our own mission. Couldn't tell anybody about it or anything like that and take off. The weather was awful going up there and radio silence. I found out that the five airplanes turned back and we were the only one up there.

WILL: You didn't know they turned back?

OLSON: No. Radio silence. Couldn't communicate.

WILL: You didn't see them.

OLSON: No, didn't see them. You weren't supposed to see them. You weren't supposed to

see anything. You were supposed to fly in this weather and that was supposed to be the screen on us so that the fighters could — you know you had no fighter protection, you had nothing. So get up to the target area and it was open except for one cotton pickin' low cloud over the target. You take a run on the thing and we couldn't, I mean the target was obscured so we turn around and go on that thing again and it was still obscured. We said, "Well, we can go to the alternate. And we were getting scared and scared, you know, I mean, this isn't exactly ...

WILL: It was a railroad yard?

OLSON: Yah, so we went to the alternate target and found that and got that. It was just another martialing (?) yard but I mean of a nearby town. The airplane, you know, of course the B-17 goes at 150. That's the normal speed that you drive it. We were going 200 and some ...

WILL: Getting out of there.

OLSON: Getting out of there — flying all the way back. That was one of the ...

WILL: Any other remembrances?

OLSON: Well, the time that the — we were shot up pretty badly, when I got the DFC for that.

WILL: You mentioned you got the first DFC.

OLSON: I got one and three, too. They didn't give out DFCs in Italy as readily as they did in the 8th Air Force. You almost had to do a number of things in proving like a squadron navigator or do some leading or do something like that otherwise you didn't get decorated. I could have gotten it for different missions. (This part inaudible). But the thing was that that one was kind of peculiar from a standpoint that I had to take off my armaments. The plane was riddled to the extent the oxygen was shot out, some of the hydraulics was shot out. We didn't know whether one engine was out and stuff like this and we still had to go over the Alps. But we didn't know whether we were going to make it,

you know, whether the plane was going to blow up or not. We were sitting there and the pilot said, "Get up here and get the copilot out of the seat.

WILL: Is this the one you mentioned earlier that you almost bailed out?

OLSON: Yah. Well, I was wondering whether we were getting ready because when you get one of these hits, the whole plane shakes and hitting him — he got shot. All the plane was full of alpaca.

WILL: (Inaudible).

OLSON: No, hitting the copilot. His arm was shattered and I had to (something about oxygen) and crawl up there without my parachute on. In the meantime the plane might be going down. Going up there there's not room enough to have all of this and take the flak suit off, too, so I can get up there and pull him down into the companion way and up in the front, plug him into my oxygen, put a tourniquet on. He was bleeding and give him morphine shots, keep him warm and all this sort of stuff and still keep track of where we are because you were having to fly back by yourself. Screaming bloody murder for fighters to come and help us and escort us back. So there is a little bit of an experience. He survived. Kind of landed back at the base at the main air tour at __?__ that was near the hospital. Sitting in the airplane, we're down on the ground afterwards, the blood and stuff was frozen in there and then it started unfreezing so you got blood dripping out of the airplane. You kind of get a little shaky.

WILL: Even in the summertime.

OLSON: Oh, yah. You could go up and test out an aircraft and take your candy bars and just in a half hour you'd have a frozen candy bar at 30,000 feet. Sandwiches, too.

WILL: You said you arrived over there in July of '44.

OLSON: Yah.

WILL: Were you over there until the end of the war?

OLSON: No. That's another story. I got my 1st Lieutenancy inside of four months. The position of squadron navigator called for captaincy. I was put in for captaincy. The rest of the crew got their captaincy but some person of the 15th Air Force noticed that I wasn't a commissioned officer for a year. That was one of the requirements to be a captain. They said I had to fly — I only had four missions left to fly. They said it wasn't enough. You'd have to fly some extra ones in order to get your captaincy so they said, "You take off and go up to Rome for rest camp and think about it and if you want to get you captaincy, you can, say, fly an extra five. In the meantime, they went to Berlin and they lost nine airplanes. So I said, "I think I'd like to be a live 1st Lieutenant than a dead captain."

WILL: You did go to (inaudible)

OLSON: Yes. I did there.

WILL: What did you do there?

OLSON: At the rest camp. Toured. Looked around. Of course, the Vatican. Beautiful city of Rome. They had a lot of tours for the Red Cross. Get a shower and go shopping at the PX and souvenirs and all this sort of stuff but I didn't want to go to the Pacific.

WILL: You had a choice then.

OLSON: After you complete your tour, you're shipped home, get a leave and then you're ready for the Pacific.

WILL: When was the end of your tour?

OLSON: It was in March, I think it was, of '45. So then they still had some fighting in Europe. It hadn't been the end of the war yet and so they said, "You can get into this ferry outfit" which was an Allied called the Mediterranean Allied Air Force. You can be a navigator there and they only had like three or four navigators for the whole squadron and you got ___?___ in either a C-47 aircraft and you go in for the ATC, Air

Transport Command, ___?___ in other words you went into combat areas. But they were all VIT (?) missions or mercy missions or anything like that, special, so I volunteered.

WILL: This is still out of Italy?

OLSON: Out of Italy. We were based at the base of Mount Vesuvius and we flew C-47s originally but afterwards C46s. I had a variety of missions, flew supplies into the partisans in Yugoslavia.

WILL: How did you get them out?

OLSON: No. No. We landed and they marched off the aircraft under guard with machine guns.

WILL: You didn't trust them.

OLSON: Didn't trust them. Couldn't. Couldn't circle the field. It was just a gravel field near Zagreb one of the cities. When they marched off, the partisans looked at you aircraft. I mean inspected it to make sure you didn't have any spies aboard, unloaded the supplies which were meat, slabs of meat, and flour. Made you sign a ticket, marched you back on the aircraft and you took off. The Yugoslavians had their other Yugoslavs, in other words, they fought among themselves after they fought the Germans together. They were very tough on each other, too. I mean one of my buddies was a Yugoslav and he had to crash land in Yugoslavia. The partisans were at the aircraft sight and they were salvaging the wreckage, draining gasoline and stuff from the aircraft before the Germans come. One of the partisans was smoking a cigarette while ___?___ and the airplane caught on fire. And the Lieutenant, a Yugoslavian, shot the guy for his stupidity.

WILL: Wow.

OLSON: No army court martial or anything like that.

WILL: He'd finish it. He'd take care of that.

OLSON: I also flew Mercy Missions which was one of the roughest ones that I have flown in that

they had a call that a guy in Athens needed an iron lung. The only iron lung available was at a hospital near and abandoned airfield up in northern Italy. The problem was this was night. None of our in that ___?__ Squadron had made a night landing in three years. In order to qualify, they had to go up in an airplane and make night landings just to ___?__ their record for qualification. The first airplane took up the generator governor took off and the prop ran away from us. We had to go back and get another airplane and try it out. Finally got one who qualified on the three landings. We didn't have the maps over there — we didn't have maps of the area so this abandoned airfield was just a mark on the map and the maps we had were not the detailed ones. They were only area maps what they call regional.

WILL: Inaudible

OLSON: No they weren't. They were actual navigation maps but they didn't have the detail of the area, just general big streams. That's all. We took off, a moon light night with plenty of clouds. It didn't look too bad. Then it kind of dawned on me that the whole area was flooded and we couldn't tell the rivers and the lakes and the creeks or anything like that up there. They were — the only thing we were supposed to have was that these people in the hospital up there had the keys to the landing lights on this abandoned field, only they didn't have the keys to the lights on the abandoned field. All they had was an ambulance with those ...

WILL: Half covered.

OLSON: Half covered headlights on the thing. The abandoned field is in the mountainous area over there and so it was difficult — all I had to do was to work with was the ___?__. I had no radios. All the stations were off the air at night up there and all the cities and everything else was dark. You're flying into an area that's completely dark. Clouds and hills and once you get below the hills you get your eyeballs stretched out but we did find the field. We had an awful time getting the iron lung into the

aircraft because it just wouldn't go through the doorway.

WILL: This was a B-17 or what?

OLSON: No, a C-47. We finally got the thing loaded and we thought we were doing pretty good. Our eyes felt like sandpaper had been rubbed on them and we were flying down to Athens. We were thinking, boy, you know we did something — we did some good. We didn't bomb people. We didn't hurt anybody. We were going to save a guys life. So we walked into the Athens airport there — into the British guy in back of the desk. Hey, we delivered your iron lung. He said, "I say old chap, the guy died yesterday afternoon."

WILL: Oh. You guys were too late.

OLSON: We wouldn't have had to make the flight. We risked our lives so to speak. ___?__ war criminal investigators around. There had been some — I don't know what they done to ...

WILL: Were these Italians or Germans?

OLSON: No. No. We had a — . The war criminal investigators were investigating either some disappearance or that of a reporter. Some kind of newspaper man. Then we had to go up to ___?__ and we were the first ones in there. They had never seen Air Force or Air Corps people. Coming into Salzburg, they were under occupation. At that time there was early on, the war had just been finished and they were occupied but hatred, you could say that if looks could kill, we were dead. We had to take our insignia off but what Berchtesgaden looked at that time was the French had come in after the occupation and smeared feces all over the walls, crapped in the wash basins, and they urinated on everything. They had a first class hospital there with all the radar X-ray equipment and that because they were trying to develop the master race. They had SS troops and select Aryan women. They were breeding a race. That was in the mountains. They had champagne, of course. All the equipment — the x-ray equipment was all broken and battered and the tunnel was this

deep in champagne. (What Olson says here was inaudible) I flew supplies, aircraft people down to Egypt for rest and recuperation, so I got into Cairo and Alexandria. We took VIP people around to set up — this was the president [Yimo Tao] and Vice President Ford, the production manager of General Motors.

WILL: This was after the war.

OLSON: Yes, after the war in Europe. But they were looking at all the different places to re-convert all the vehicles and that. We toured all of Italy, especially northern Milan, Turin, Venice, where they could — We were flying VIPs around and they were selecting and inspecting the different places where they were going to convert all the war equipment to end the Pacific War.

WILL: Where were you on VE Day?

OLSON: VE Day, I was at Naples.

WILL: What was your reaction?

OLSON: It was kind of funny from the standpoint they didn't have — it wasn't planned or anything like that. The most thing that I remember was they had a — probably about an eight story building in Naples overlooking a square. It was occupied by the British and they didn't have confetti but they had toilet paper that the were reeling out and the kids were down on the street and they had the other end of the roll and toilet paper to them was really — and they were waving at the people up there to throw a roll out — .That was my impression of VE Day.

WILL: OK. How about VJ Day? How did you hear about it? What was your reaction?

OLSON: I don't remember, actually.

WILL: Being in Europe, I suppose you wouldn't pay that much attention to it.

OLSON: I was putting in so many hours flying that I could get to rest camp. I might have been in Cannes. I flew my maximum hours and I had two weeks off each month just to go to rest

camp. Total flying hours and so I was probably one of the first guys to go into Switzerland on rest leave. Spent 8 days and it only cost me \$25. But I didn't have no idea what the exchange rate was between the American money and that and so \$25 we got all travel, meals and housing, hotels and everything. Then we got \$25 to spend. That was equivalent to 150 Swiss Francs. They wanted a limit because we could probably buy out the place if they had unlimited — \$25, the guys had a lot of (inaudible) so you know you could buy the best wrist watch. You know, Rolex, or ___?__ or any one of them watches and still have money left over for other stuff.

WILL: VJ Day came after that. The atom bomb.

OLSON: Yah.

WILL: Did you hear about that? What was your opinion to that?

OLSON: I don't remember. I'm glad it was over with. (Inaudible). We were given intelligence briefings a lot, you know. Kept up on what was happening in the war and if we had to go and make a landing on the shores over there. It was going to be costly in manpower and it was more or less a blessing so to speak if it ended the war even though there was destruction. I had made a study of it afterwards and it was a different perspective.

WILL: What do you thing about it now? Has your opinion changed any?

OLSON: Part of my course at Rock Valley College was Japan and Hirohito. I also have missionary friends and I've been in Japan in recent times, in '81, because my daughter was a missionary, a short term missionary, for five years over there. I had missionary friends, so I've been to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and all over. I did find out that Hirohito had already, because they didn't have extensive defensives of Tokyo and some of the other places and the fire bombing that the American forces and the B29s had done that already hurt them. Hirohito had made overtures for surrender before the atom bomb was even ...

WILL: Looking back today ...

OLSON: The only problem was that Hirohito and them who were talking surrender, they made overtures to Russia and Russia wasn't interested in having the war cease until they were able to get into the thing supposedly and get into the sharing of the spoils. And so here the atomic bomb really wouldn't have had to be dropped.

WILL: That's your opinion.

OLSON: It's not just my opinion. Different things have happened.

WILL: You were not seriously injured over there.

OLSON: No. But we had a shortage of personnel and I had bad knees. I had fallen off the truck and we were short personnel so I had to fly when they lifted me in the airplane. I couldn't have gotten in the airplane. I couldn't have bailed out. They would come down and get me out of the airplane and bring me over to the medics and give me heat treatments and stuff like that.

WILL: Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital?

OLSON: None of that stuff is on my records.

WILL: I mean after.

OLSON: No. I said none of that stuff is on my records. In fact I got into the ...

WILL: Have you got any opinion of the VA?

OLSON: I got into the service not knowing that early on playing sand lot baseball, having brand new spikes, hard ball spikes, and I didn't know how to slide into base and I ripped my knees and in those days you didn't go to the hospital. Vicks Vaporub and aspirin and tough it out and didn't know that to qualify you had to sit on your haunches. I couldn't do that and they didn't pick that up in the physical exam. At that portion of the exam was in a group and I was in a back row and the doctor said, "OK, jump up and hit your haunches, I mean kick yourself in the hind end."

I couldn't but they marked it off. Every time I took a physical exam I stayed clear of that. None of it is in my records. Really, I wouldn't have been in the Air Force or the Air Corp.

WILL: How did your family support you when you were overseas outside of communicating? I know you mentioned your parents didn't want you to get in.

OLSON: Really, I had good moral support from letters and stuff like that and CARE packages, so to speak, and they even sent me one of these battery operated, you know, you had to take code and so I was practicing. They sent me a code sender so I could practice outside of class.

WILL: Were you married at the time?

OLSON: No, No. I got married when I was recalled to active duty in Korea.

WILL: What was tough about Korea?

OLSON: I don't want to talk about that.

WILL: I know this is supposed to be about World War II.

OLSON: I had equally as varied a career in the three years of Korea. Roughly speaking ...

WILL: Was it easier, harder ...

OLSON: Harder in different ways. I was involved in opening up the Tulane Air Force Base up in northern Greenland where Bert Hassel was the commanding officer up there at one time. General Keuter — you don't know him from Rockford?

WILL: No.

OLSON: He was the general from here and he was one of those — I think he probably volunteered me or our squadron out of __?__. It was my first affair when I was recalled to Smyrna, Tennessee.

WILL: When was that?

OLSON: That was in 1950. We were — four navigators. We checked in that morning at the base. The base had already been practically eliminated from the standpoint that they were a troop carrier outfit. They 2C119 and were all sent over to Korea for the Inchon drop. So all it was a bare base left over with just housekeeping personnel. We checked in in the morning, us four guys and they says, “We want four volunteers to go to Alaska.”

“When?”

“Today.”

“What are we supposed to do?”

What happened was some general in Washington called up that morning to the commanding officer of the base and wondered what those C82s which was the flying boxcar aircraft were doing up in Alaska. Nobody knew anything about it. Looked in the pigeon holes and found they were supposed ... it was the only airplane capable flying a radar tower over the Mount McKinley range to an outpost because they were thinking the Russians gonna be coming and they had to have this radar tower installed up there and that was the only aircraft and nobody knew about it. We got volunteered. Today that plane's got to be off the base today so we had to get all our shots, all our equipment. We didn't know what we needed or anything like that and nobody else did either. We took off. We had ... the pilot was an administrative guy. He only flew five hours a month. He wasn't that really sharp on the aircraft. The aircraft were in bad shape because they had taken all the paratroop jumping assignments for the whole United States so the maintenance on the planes were being flown with mistakes or the oil leaking out and all this sort of stuff so they weren't in the best of shape. We take off at five o'clock. The red warning light for the fire ... the engine is on fire. We didn't know whether we should ... because it might have been a short circuit in the thing and that thing was just turning red or whether it was the real thing. The

guy said, We've been up here ... we've been going all day. We might as well go back and get a night's rest.” We land. Of course, we got the fire trucks, you got everybody. The outboard of this one engine, the heater changer had separated and the main hose line which led from the gas tank was collapsed, burned and charred. Another couple of minutes and the plane would have blown up. They said, “Well, we're going to get that thing fixed and you've got to get that airplane off this base whether you just taxi it through the fence of whatever.” So at midnight we took off. Got the plane fixed. It was going all the way up to Alaska. They wouldn't let us fly route from Seattle out to Anchorage. We had to go back to Great Falls, Montana, and fly the inland route. Well, at that time was this big forest fire that was spread over the whole territory up there. We landed at Fort Nelson, British Columbia; I think it was over there. However, we sprung a leak in the gas tank and it was leaking out. They were supposed to fly a crew in to — had to take the wing off and replace the gas tank and stuff like that. However, the forest fire was only about ten miles away from us and they said, “You've got to get that airplane out of here. The smoke covered the whole area and it was going up to 40,000 feet from the forest fire. They had an air crash up in Mount Squetnal (?) up in Alaska and they were bringing back the bodies on a DC4. The DC4 tried to go through this cloud—it was violent updrafts and stuff like that. The caskets—they had passengers strapped on the regular pull down seats but the caskets were in the middle strapped and they broke loose and they were floating. The skin of the aircraft was rippled. Rivets had ripped loose and stuff like that. They had a rough time. We had to drain the gas from the thing and get out of there. In the meantime these were four C82s and they were flying up to Alaska. There was an emergency radio. A little boy had fallen off a garage roof and had some kind of skull fracture or whatever and he needed to be taken to Anchorage as fast as possible but that's a no no. Regulations, you can't pick up civilians and stuff like that but one of the planes went down, picked up the boy and the mother. The mother was nine months pregnant. We finally got her up to Anchorage. The airplanes

were in a hangar up there for about a couple weeks. They didn't realize how bad shape they were in to get them flyable. In the meantime, I decided to take a flight out on the Aleutian chain in a DC4 with mats (?). That ended up, we had two inches of ice on the aircraft which so practically — we were flying over the same place for like an hour making no ground speed whatsoever and the wind was battering To make a long story short, we landed at Shimya which is the last outpost out there. We skidded on the ice and broke the front wheel on the aircraft. Had to get another aircraft and flew back. We flew missions out to this outpost. We had to supply them with all the fuel and stuff like that for the winter because it was August of 1950. The snow was coming down the mountains from Anchorage. The tundra started on fire out there. So then we had to fly in a couple hundred guys to fight the fire out there. Of course, this place was a small gravel strip with smoke all over the area we had a lone radio beacon to home in on and just at the end of the runway was a 7000 sheet of rock. If you missed the runway you know you're going into that so it was touch and go to come in there plus the fact the C82 is not a very good aircraft for landing on gravel strips. It has heated wing, it has a hollow propeller with electrical wires in it. In gravel, you get a nick in the leading edge of the propeller it stress cracks and you can lose a propeller blade. If you can't sever the engine right away, you lose the engine. It vibrates right off the airplane. Every landing we had to come in we had to examine the blades on the propellers to make sure we didn't get cracks like that but the cross wind on the gravel would scrape off the rubber on the tires so we had to have new tires put on the aircraft. This is my first month in the Air Force. Coming back from that, I volunteered to go to Mats Military Air Transport out of Massachusetts flying milk runs in DC4s which were actually planes from the Berlin Airlift. They were passenger and cargo we flew to ___?___ Africa as well as Germany.

WILL: This was during the Korean War?

OLSON: Yah. We got this urgent call that they needed — we got volunteered by the General of Mats, the first squadron, to deliver free supplies

up to Tooley, Greenland, which is about less than 800 miles from the pole. That's where Peary picked up his Eskimos to go to the pole. This was in March. March is a no no. In the winter you don't fly up north in the pole region. Nobody — bush pilots wouldn't even fly up there. We were going up there in a plane that was not even winterized, we had no survival instructions. You couldn't land up there. You couldn't bale out; you were quick frozen. It was 60 below zero on the ground. You got icebergs out the Kazoo and all this sort of stuff. All they had was a gravel field, two Quonset huts; no hangars so the airplane had to be unloaded with the propellers going. You flew 48 hours in a row, the navigator and stuff like that.

WILL: You didn't get to sleep on the flight maybe.

OLSON: You're a navigating. Normally the Polar navigation requires — the only thing that they did in those days was the B29 flying to the Pole above the weather with good navigation gear, the gyros and stuff because your flying north of the magnetic pole so that the equipment in the C54s, the compass is pointing down — I mean backwards and just going this way. So you use Polar navigation. We were taught a quickie course in Polar navigation by some guys who had never been up there. Well, they didn't know any parameters on the stuff and we were supposed to fly up there and you used the gyros in the aircraft and the B29s they didn't ___?___ hardly anything. You had three navigators. You had a radar that you could pick up 100 miles. You had navigation gear flying above the weather. You had gasoline supplies so that you could fly back no matter where you were. We were going up there with limited gas. You had to fly up there with the gas you had and come back with the gas. I mean there was no supplies up there. They only had one radio beacon up there which you could get within five miles of the field or you could have the runway lights because they had one generator. It was just awful from the standpoint — we didn't know about twilight zones and all this sort of stuff. The second mission I flew up there, all the instruments in the plane froze. We lost our

heaters in the aircraft so we didn't know which direction we were flying. Had no idea. Couldn't. I mean the twilight zone up there is eight hours, but the sun is below the horizon but you can't tell whether it's there. So we had no idea which direction we were and the gyros — they're supposed to fly up to altitude and they needed the heat to maintain the gyros but we didn't know whether they were toppled or whether we were going to fly in circles. If you don't think you can sweat at 70° below zero in the cockpit, you can.

WILL: Never really thought of it.

OLSON: The only thing we could do is think that maybe the gyros still had given us an indication of direction to fly. We thought we were flying south and trying to pick up on the radio because a lot of the radio beacons up there don't function all the time. They're just on sometimes. I picked up the automatic radio that searches. We were so far away from that to indicate anything even where the station was. I picked up a radio beacon leg and it spreads out, an A and an N. If you are in the middle of the beam you got a clear signal but you can't tell — you have to pass through the leg in order to tell which side of the radio station you are. We were so far out from it, it was 150 miles wide before we could find out if this radio station was here or there and we were running out of gas. We did make it back. You're at the base of the Aurora Borealis so that ...

WILL: Does that interfere with it.

OLSON: All your radio communication is blocked out for days so that you're not getting any radio signals or weather information or anything like that so you're flying up there blind. We made — the one airbase is 90 miles up the fjord and there is 100s of fjords. They all look similar it you're trying to go underneath the clouds and up there and we went up the wrong one one time. We had to turn the aircraft around in the fjord. A C54 to turn around in a fjord. If we would have put the wheels down, we would have touched the ground. All these things, you know. We made landings up there — you know

you're supposed to have a minimum of 100 feet. We made them in less than 25 without any ground control folks. We had to land. There was no — and that didn't get any commendation for — it was much more difficult than night flying unarmed aircraft weather 'econ' over in North Korea.

WILL: It was Arctic flying is a lot harder ...

OLSON: Arctic flying. Yes.

WILL: How long were you in?

OLSON: Three years. After I flew 50 missions in weather 'econ' over North Korea and China got fired on, search lights, both night and day missions in a B26 aircraft. We had pilots that wanted to be jet pilots and they liked to take risks.

WILL: You never flew in a jet.

OLSON: No, I never flew in a jet. I had charge of 85 jet pilots at Dover Air Force Base when it was being built. It's now a Port of Embarkation. At that time I was a Port of Embarkation officer when it was being built. They took \$97,000,000 worth of equipment from another base, Granier Air Force Base in New Hampshire and stuck it down in this base and none of the buildings were — I mean there was two different environments, grounds, and all this sort of stuff and nothing fit and try to — in the midst of all we have here are tar paper shacks and that and to try to stop the whole construction going on — to have them realize that their buildings and everything they were doing out there was wrong for the — they couldn't just copy the buildings. You had the Chesapeake Bay and the water was only like 12 inches down by the tide. They were trying to put communications things in and all in cement and the things would wash out constructors. They'd get washed out and washed out.

WILL: Gee.

OLSON: I had 85 jet pilots all over the world that had to get information back to me or to our section so that we could send in a report to

Washington every day. The teletypes would get soaked in water and all this sort of stuff and they'd print gobbledy gook, you know, like square words and stuff like that.

WILL: You sound like you've lived quite a life.

OLSON: I'll tell you learn a great deal from — the six years is what I never know — having been, you know, a kid that wasn't even destined for college, who had never been farther than Chicago by train and the World's Fair in 1934 and '33 — outside of that once to Wisconsin, 350 miles up, but I had measles at the time and so I spent everything in the back seat of a car in a closed bedroom up there so I knew nothing of — to see the whole world, I have been practically all over the place.

WILL: You have since retired.

OLSON: Yes.

WILL: As a Lieutenant Colonel eventually?

OLSON: Yes. Well I was in the reserves for 20 years

WILL: Well, I guess that ends our official interview.

OLSON: I had a lot of experiences in the reserves, too.

WILL: Say goodbye

OLSON: Goodbye.