

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Raymond Olson,
U. S. Army, China Burma India, World War II

2003

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Olson, Raymond (1926-), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips mono.

Master copy; 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips mono.

ABSTRACT

Raymond Olson, an Oregon, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as a member of the 214th Horse Cavalry in the China-Burma-India theater of operations. Olson tells of basic training at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) including KP duty, playing on the fort's baseball team, and tension caused by Mexican soldiers at the base. He talks about training with the horses, boat ride overseas with them, and arrival in India. Olson drove supplies behind Japanese lines on the Burma Road and comments on the road conditions, danger of bandits, Chinese labor, and the harsh weather conditions. After driving the Burma Road, Olson was sent to Kunming (China) to train Nationalist Chinese troops. After the war ended Olson became a military police officer and describes recreation activities, running an officers club, and transporting Nazi sympathizers from China back to Germany. He touches upon Army food, return to the United States, brief use of the GI Bill, and joining the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion.

Biographical Sketch

Olson, (b. July 1, 1926-) served with the 214th Horse Cavalry and later the Infantry in the China-Burma-India theater of World War II. He was a truck driver on the Burma Road, and later trained Chinese troops.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Interview Transcript

- John: Well, this is John Driscoll, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Today is January 16th, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Ray Olson, a veteran of World War II, in Stoughton, Wisconsin. Good morning, and thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview, Ray.
- Olson: You betcha.
- John: Okay. So, why don't we start at the beginning, Ray, and just, where were you born, when?
- Olson: I was born in Oregon, Wisconsin, July 1, 1926.
- John: Okay. Ah, early life? What did your family do? Things like that.
- Olson: Well, my family was very poor.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: Very poor. And, so, I only, almost got two years of high school, and I quit, and I was going to conquer the world. So I joined the services. And then they had made, I was seventeen at the time and they wouldn't take me.
- John: When was that, about?
- Olson: In 1943. July.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: And I got in, in 1944, before they would take me. They put me on reserve, is what it was.
- John: Okay. Can we go back before that, a bit? Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?
- Olson: Oh, you bet.
- John: What were you doing? Tell me something about that.
- Olson: Well, that was in December, so, I had to be in school. I hadn't quit school yet, quite. So, yea, because it was in school, because everybody was just, couldn't believe it.
- John: I remember we couldn't figure out where Pearl Harbor was.

Olson: Yes.

John: Okay. What did you do right before you went into the service? Were you in school, was that it?

Olson: Yea, in school. When they wouldn't take me. They didn't tell me that when I signed up. I thought we were good gun fodder at that time. And, cause you don't know too darn much.

John: That's for sure.

Olson: And so I worked for Ray-O-Vac, and a few odd jobs like that until, well, they took me in the service. My birthday is July 1. They took me July 7.

John: That would be 1943?

Olson: Yea.

John: And this was the Army?

Olson: Yea, this was the Army.

John: Okay. You enlisted. Where did you enlist?

Olson: I enlisted through Madison, but I ended up in Fort Sheridan. And then Fort Riley, in the horse cavalry.

John: Oh, yea?

Olson: Yea.

John: Wow.

Olson: I don't know why. I hate horses. I hate them to this day. But I ended up in the horse cavalry. Took basic there.

John: Okay, what was the horse cavalry doing in 1943?

Olson: Oh, that was quite an outfit. If it wasn't for that over there in Burma, India and Burma, those boys, half of them never would have got through.

John: Do you remember the outfit that you were in?

Olson: 124th to start with.

John: 124th?

Olson: Cavalry. To start with. But, then, I got switched over into the infantry while I was in, I believe I was still in India. They switched us over.

John: So you went to basic at Fort Riley?

Olson: Fort Riley.

John: And that was how many months, do you recall?

Olson: Oh, that was three and a half months, or whatever it was. And we ended up in Fort Ord. Took a little more training, how to dig foxholes. They got on a ship.

John: You went by ship?

Olson: It was by ship up to, ended up in Australia, first. To take on supplies.

John: Did you have horses with you on the ship?

Olson: Oh, yea.

John: You took horses with you?

Olson: Oh, yea. There was boats after boats of them. Most of them were sunk. Japanese got them.

John: I'll be darned.

Olson: Oh, yea. Yea, we ended up in Australia, and just took on supplies. We were only there a day or two, whatever it was. We got as far as the wharf. They wouldn't let us go any farther.

John: Okay.

Olson: So then we took off for India.

John: Okay. What would a kid from Wisconsin be thinking when he found out he was going to India?

Olson: I didn't even think about it. Because it never, well, I guess I read about it in a book but I'll be darned, there was nothing, and I was sure surprised when I got

there. It was a lot different than the way we live.

John: Yea, very much so.

Olson: Yea.

John: A little bit more about the cavalry, before you get to India. What, I mean, what did you ride horses to do?

Olson: Well, you, actually in the cavalry you do more walking than you do riding, and your horse comes first. You will get up at four o'clock in the morning and feed him, curry him. And then if you have been a naughty boy, you can clean up the stables. They didn't have stables. They had picket lines, that you tied your horse to that. But it was terrible, as far as I am concerned. It was more of a show at one time. The officers always had the best horses. And we got the ones that liked to throw you some place. They even had us go over, what do they call them? Steeple-jacks? Such as they go over. We did that. Course I had a horse that didn't believe in it, and many times I went on and the horse stayed there. God, that was terrible. And we went over to learn how to go across the rivers, hanging on to their tails. But the ones we had were riding, but they also had pack ones, that you put on your mortars, and machine guns, and that. I got out of the overseas.

John: Oh, man. So, you got to India?

Olson: Yea, got to India.

John: Do you remember where?

Olson: Ah, it was either Bombay, or Calcutta. That was where we put in. That is why I remember. If I had that book, I'd have everything. We had to go out of town about three miles, walked. To a staging area. And, of a hundred and some degrees in the daytime. And about almost thirty at night. And all those darned animals running around you. And a lot of guys had monkeys for pets. Are they a nuisance! Oh, God. So, and there is where I get confused. We walked sixty miles, but I don't know if it was from there, or if we got a ride on the trucks to as far as Lashio. India, that is the Ledo Road.

John: Do you know how to spell Ledo?

Olson: L-e-d-o.

John: Okay. I tried to look it up the other night and it's not in the encyclopedia. Burma Road is, but not the Ledo Road.

Olson: Yea. See, a lot of them didn't know that, but this was first. This was up around Myitkyina. You heard about that?

John: Yea.

Olson: But I don't know how to spell it.

John: I can look that up. Myitkyina. Yea.

Olson: Because they fought over that, I believe, twenty-three days. Back and forth.

John: Yea. That was a big fight.

Olson: I was lucky. I didn't get into that. I come in just after it was settled. Yea. So, we were there and I, I wish I had that book. I think that is where we started driving trucks. I never drove a truck or anything like it in my life.

John: What kind of trucks?

Olson: Oh, these six-by-sixes, they called them back then. I don't know what they call them now. We hauled gasoline, ammunition. We ended up, that ran into the Burma Road. And that we got sixty miles behind the Japanese lines on the Burma Road.

John: Oh, man.

Olson: We drove without lights. Fifteen miles an hour. That was tough. You don't know what roads are. You might as well go out on the farmer's ploughed field. But it was a road. Make a mistake, you didn't have to worry, because you were gone. It was so high up in the air, you were down.

John: Mountains?

Olson: Mountains, oh, God. Yep. That was terrible.

John: And where were you driving to?

Olson: Well, we went, they had air bases at different places. And, because the Flying Tigers, you know. I met Major General Chenault, later on. I wasn't happy with him, but that's all right. He sort of chewed me a little bit because I didn't wear my corporal stripes. Big deal. Officers club, I was helping to run, in Shanghai.

John: Yea.

- Olson: But, we drove them, and, oh, God, and so many people didn't know how to drive. We had no training. That's yours, over there. You just take it and go. Have you ever heard of the Twenty-Four Steps?
- John: No.
- Olson: Well, that's on the Burma Road. Twenty-four steps, just like this. And, if you go over, forget it. And I know, some of the corners, you have to back up. That is how bad the roads were. I know, I had one hand on the emergency brake, the other was going the other way, to keep from going over.
- John: And you were hauling gasoline?
- Olson: Gasoline, for the airplanes.
- John: Mostly gas. Did you have drums, or in tank trucks?
- Olson: Drums.
- John: Drums. Okay. How far would you go on a trip. All the way, or what?
- Olson: Oh, you would go until you had a safe place to, well, the Chinese did most of the help. They were all over. Little army camps, it was all Tent City, I called it. And you'd go to them because the most dangerous thing on the road was the bandits, in the mountains.
- John: I've heard that. Yea.
- Olson: They'd kill you. They didn't care. They'd shoot you just to get a few trinkets. What could they do with the truck. Only one way to go on it.
- John: Now, were you escorted, or were you armed?
- Olson: No. Well, we had our own rifles. But no, just on our own.
- John: In a convoy?
- Olson: Yea. We'd have convoys, spaced out.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: But when you drive without lights, whew!

- John: Yea. Twenty-Four Steps, you call that?
- Olson: Yea. I wish I had, I had pictures of it. I've lost that. My kids haven't been too good on stuff. And it isn't in that book that Steve has got. But, there is a lot of pictures in there. That would be interesting. And it is in there, because I ended up in the 475th Infantry. So that was all in there, the whole thing. We were called Mars Task Force, when we first started.
- John: Mars?
- Olson: Mars. It used to be Merrill's Marauders.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: Then, it was Sir Galahad, or something, then it was Mars when I got there.
- John: Okay. I see.
- Olson: Yea, I missed the war, for about two days, I think it was. I got out of it.
- John: Okay. Ah, when you would start off, how far would you go? Would you go all the way, or would you go so far and turn around?
- Olson: You couldn't turn around. There was only one way on most of the Burma Road. Just room for one truck.
- John: So you'd just go all the way to the end?
- Olson: Go all the way, yea. And usually, we ended up with just giving the trucks to the Chinese. They got everything. And of course, they had that, what did they call that war between then Nationalists and Communists? They were firing over us at night, you know. The tracers. We could watch that. There are pictures in that book on that.
- John: Oh, man.
- Olson: They didn't care about us. And there was nothing that they were going to hit. They just, I don't want to put this on the air what I think about these people.
- John: I know what you mean.
- Olson: We had a little better education, and we knew what they were doing.

- John: Well, when you would get to the end of your trip, how would you get back?
- Olson: We never got back.
- John: You didn't?
- Olson: No, we went on because, well, we walked. This sixty miles that I am thinking of, I wish I could remember it because we had a lieutenant that wasn't too sharp. And he had us, one night, we had to sleep out, walking sixty miles, there is no roads, no nothing. And we, he had us sleep on army cots, you know, those fold up ones? In a creek bed.
- John: Oh, boy.
- Olson: Because the snakes, animals, he had us down there, and it was during a monsoon. And I woke up, and I could feel my cot starting to move. And there was water, the water was coming down through there. We were sopping wet. It didn't matter. So he had brains enough to get us out of there. We took off on our own, got out of there. But, I wish I could remember where that was. That was an awful thing. Yea, and so, we actually didn't do nothing then, from then on. We just, we ended up in, let's see, now, we called it Parachute City. We lived in parachutes. They made tents out of them. And all different colors. They were beautiful. And some of the boys had shirts made out of it. That is, I don't know, silk or rayon?
- John: Silk, or something.
- Olson: And those Chinese were good at it. Tight fitting. Of course, when you are young, you, now, there wouldn't be enough material.
- John: Yea.
- Olson: Yea, we lived there. And then we flew out of there into Kunming, China.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: Trained Chinese troops.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: And that was —
- John: What about the language?

- Olson: We had what we called a fonigwan (?), He was with us. I got a picture of the guy here. Yea, he is in here. He is on the end, there. That is the Chinese interpreter. See, that is how many of us trained, we trained about four thousand, just that many of us.
- John: Are you in this?
- Olson: Yea, I'm right with the girl.
- John: Oh, okay.
- Olson: And that big, tallest guy there, is the officer.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: And we had, when we were training them, we had a little building, and I got to be in the same building that he was.
- John: What were you training them to do?
- Olson: Soldiers. They didn't know which end the bullet came out of the gun.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: And when we got done with them, they still didn't. I just, they re different, now. They had an education. But they had no education. Yea, we had them when they were throwing hand grenades, and they'd go like this to throw it, and have their hands off it, and there it goes back there. Quite a few times, we had to be alert and grab it and throw it. Yea, they weren't the best. Yea, we trained them in everything, I mean. I never had mortar training, but they told us how to do it, so we just went — it was better than they knew.
- John: That was Kunming, you said?
- Olson: Kunming is where we started, yea. Yea, that book, it's got that in there. Steve will get ahold of that book. I wish you could see it, because there are some nice pictures in there. I'll get Gary to get Steve to bring it in. Because you and Gary meet and see —
- John: We see each other every now and then.
- Olson: Yea. Have Gary have it. He should have it, and it would be handy.

- John: Yea. Okay, you enlisted in July, you went in in July of '43. This would have, you were in Kunming about?
- Olson: That would be in '45. Because I got kicked out, well, kicked out in August.
- John: Did you see any Japanese while you were over there?
- Olson: Never. I could smell them, in Burma, because we were there and we were walking around. We were young and we didn't know any better. We could have got blew up by something. The foxholes and that, we seen it. There was bodies around, here and there. They'd skip one. They tried to bury them all, but they don't smell very good.
- John: I know. I know. Okay. And then, the war ended?
- Olson: Yea.
- John: And what happened then? What did you do?
- Olson: Well, they dispersed the people. My outfit. I don't know nothing about the rest. I was, they made an MP out of me. I had to guard the wharfs, because they'd steal your teeth right out of you.
- John: So I understand.
- Olson: I was there. And we had a lot of recreation time. I didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't chase girls. So, my time was playing ping-pong. I got so the captain was the champion over there and I used to beat him all the time. He was the nicest guy. I was pretty good at it. I was always pretty good at athletics. I played softball, earlier.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: Played shortstop.
- John: Before you went into the service?
- Olson: No, afterwards. Yea.
- John: Okay.
- Olson: Yea. I was in Madison. I got on a softball team for Bees Tavern. I wonder if you

remember Bees Tavern, on Park Street?

John: No, but —

Olson: Years ago, we won the league championship.

John: Hey, that's great.

Olson: Yea. Major league. Yea. We had quite a team. Yea, I was shortstop, and, yea, when we got to Shanghai, I didn't want to be no MP, and I got to work with a colonel that ran an officer's club.

John: Oh, okay.

Olson: And I got a picture of that, someplace. And this big building, swimming pool, tennis courts, dancing on the roof, and it's all painted, you know, war camouflage, and that is where I met Major General Chenault. That is when he chewed me out. And I wore them, too. Because he said he'd be there the next day. I better have them on. He didn't have nothing to do, either, at that time that he was there. I met his wife.

John: She was Chinese?

Olson: Was she ever! From the old school. Her feet were bound, even.

John: Oh, yea?

Olson: Remember how they —

John: Yea. I've never seen it. I've heard about it.

Olson: Yea. She came that way.

John: Did you meet any of the Flying Tigers?

Olson: No. That I know of. I think, most of them, if they were around, they wouldn't have said anything. They were pretty quiet that way, amongst themselves. But Chenault, I just didn't like him. When you take one look at him, you don't like him.

John: Oh, yea?

Olson: Oh, he was a rough looking thing. Looked like he had every disease in the book. I

shouldn't say that.

John: That's okay.

Olson: Yea, I didn't like him, at all. Of course, when you get chewed out like that —

John: Oh, yea.

Olson: It wasn't very nice of him. What the hell? All I was doing, I was selling little pamphlets about like that, that you rip off, and it costs five dollars for each officer. They get steaks, they get music, they get their drinks. You know, our government and the Chinese government paid for everything else. It was a beautiful place. I had that, and when that was coming down a ways, they were asking for volunteers to take Nazi sympathizers out of China. Take them back to Germany. And I got on that detail.

John: Okay.

Olson: We parked outside the white cliffs of Dover, and then we went into Bremerhaven, Germany, and got rid of all these people.

John: You came back by boat?

Olson: By boat. Yea. I spent eighty-one days on the water, being in the Army.

John: Ah, Nazi sympathizers in China. I didn't —

Olson: Yea, they were Hitler's people. They were over there, and the Chinese didn't want them. It wasn't us. It was the Chinese. They didn't have boats at that time, not very many. Chinese didn't have nothing.

John: I had never heard of that. That's interesting.

Olson: Oh, yea. We took them. Men, women, everything. We took them all. Had no problems. I know, they told us, make sure our guns were loaded, and that. Hell, we weren't four days out on the ocean and we had fired every piece of ammunition we had, at barrels and everything else. You know, you're young. You don't know nothing. And we had no discipline officer.

John: I remember, as a kid, there was a German POW camp outside of town, in Ohio. But there was no problem at all. They didn't want to go back, that was for sure. They had them working farms.

- Olson: Yea.
- John: Did you spend much time in Europe then?
- Olson: Ah, a couple of weeks, there. We got a pass and, of course, we got picked up as soon as we did because we had summer clothes on, and over there it was cold.
- John: Okay. Okay.
- Olson: We got some ice cream they had. That was the first time we had ice cream in two and a half years. Yea. And that was it, and then we came back into, I think it was New Jersey.
- John: Okay. Fort Dix?
- Olson: I think so. And then they took us from there to Fort Sheridan, and discharge.
- John: Okay. Ah, when you think back, some of the things that come back, from driving the truck on the road, any —
- Olson: Yea. Some of it, I don't know if it is, do you take any of it off of there?
- John: Oh, yea. Don't worry about it. You should hear some of the interviews.
- Olson: Yea, well, because I didn't hate the Chinese, or anything else, but they were a nuisance, you know. Trying to get things from you for nothing. Or steal from you. But the guys, you won't believe this, probably. But, those six-by-sixes, they had the gun mount inside the cab. Now, you set those guns there. Well, these guys, oh, I don't know what the hell is the matter with Americans. No wonder they don't like us. But they'd either with their gun, or they'd get a crow-bar, or something, and they would stick it in there. And wait. And they'd be walking along on the Burma Road, because there was a lot of people walking. They'd stick that through the mount and the cab and hit them on the back of the head, and knock them over. Most of them went over. If they didn't, it would have killed them, anyhow. You know. Of course, we weren't going very fast. I seen that, and, boy, I didn't go for that baloney. That's what I said. Some of our boys are pretty bad.
- John: Oh, yea. I know. I saw some sights. Ah, again, I don't know anything about the Ledo Road, or the Burma Road. But, you started out from where?
- Olson: Lashio.
- John: Lashio. Okay.

- Olson: And that came down, and then it branched into the Burma Road, because, I think the book has got it in there. There was a movie on it the other night. I think they ran out of money, and didn't have enough men to keep that road going when they called it the Ledo Road. And they just quit. And it ran into Lashio, and this camp. Malaria Camp, we called it. I tell you what, just about everybody had malaria. Not me, I never got that.
- John: When you would start out from Lashio, how far was it that you drove? Hundreds of miles?
- Olson: Yea. Mileage didn't mean too much. You went by the days, because you couldn't go very fast. And I don't think any of us ever looked at a speedometer. You know, for the mileage. Sixty, seventy, eighty miles, maybe. Be a couple of days, because, oh man, it's funny any of us got any of our stomachs left.
- John: Yea. Pounding.
- Olson: Kidney trouble.
- John: Yea, those old rigs were, there weren't any springs.
- Olson: And if you drove a Jeep, it was worse yet, because they were so short. That Jeep, was that a rough rider.
- John: Yea. What about, like living. Eating.
- Olson: Most of the time we had C-Rations. While we were training the Chinese, they wanted us to switch cooks.
- John: Oh, yea?
- Olson: And the first day, they were going to have chicken for us. And they threw the whole damned chicken in. They killed him, but threw the whole damned chicken in there, and the feathers. Oh, what a smell, you know? And we had to put a stop to that. Jeas, that was terrible. And they used to get mad at us because when we cleaned a chicken, the inner works and everything is gone, you know. They'd take it out, but they would strip the insides of the innards, you know, and wash it out. They fry that and eat that.
- John: Different.
- Olson: Yea. But we wouldn't get in on that. And when we had fish, they didn't even scale

them, and they'd leave the head on. The did take the innards out, but then they cover it, steam it. I know, we were invited out to officers clubs all the time, Chinese officers. Because they thought we were something. Boy, that was awful eating. But, other than that, I mean, we got GI food once in a while, when we got to our own camps.

John: I see.

Olson: Which were darn few. And there were darn few men in them, too. There wasn't an awful lot of soldiers. Ah, after I think, after we made our first run, I think, the colored, they used an awful lot of coloreds to drive those trucks.

John: Okay. Well, did you just make one run up and then stay there?

Olson: That was it, yea.

John: Okay. Okay.

Olson: I imagine if you wanted to get back, you had to fly back. Because the Himalayas, Christ, I flew over them, and I'll tell you, oh.

John: I've never seen them. I've seen the Alps, but never —

Olson: Oh, the C-47s, they have to fly, first, you are up so high you can hardly see the mountains and it wouldn't be two minutes later you are looking up at the mountains.

John: Up at them, yea.

Olson: And you are freezing. You had to wear oxygen, and I have a friend, or had a friend, he died now, who was county police officer, by the name of Gerald Booth. He used to be on these runs where they were hauling the Chinese from India back to China. And he'd start out with maybe forty of them in a plane, or something, and end up with maybe five or six left. They'd play games and they'd jump out the door.

John: Oh, boy.

Olson: He used to tell me that. I don't know if it was true or not, but I believed him. Yea. Gerry was quite a guy.

John: What about medical support, things like that? Were there doctors, hospitals, over there?

Olson: Oh, we never had any, that I can recall. I don't know of anybody that ever went. We had first aid guys, you know, but they are just tag-alongs, most of them. No, we had no — back where the battles were, Burma, before I got there, I understand they had regular setups — hospitals. They have a name for them. Like a portable hospital.

John: Yea.

Olson: We didn't. I never saw one. I never heard of one.

John: And then, when you got up there, they gave the trucks to the Chinese?

Olson: Yea. They gave everything to them. We were very — and that was the Nationalists that they gave it to.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

John: Yea.

Olson: Oh, I wish I had that book. I could show you the pictures, yea. The road, and I could show you the territory where I took off and where I finished up. It had all of them. Of course, these countries have different names now.

John: Yea.

Olson: I can't remember them.

John: It was just a bull-dozer road, then? Up over the mountains?

Olson: Oh, yea. That is where they used to, oh, your biggest snakes you ever saw came out of there. Those pythons, Burmese pythons, see it on television. Oh, God, they were that big around. They'd swallow a human, you know. Oh, God. Yea, the mosquitoes were terrible. That monsoon is really something.

John: So then, after you left there and took the Nazis back to Germany, did you come back and get out at Fort Sheridan?

Olson: At Fort Sheridan, yea.

John: Okay. What did you do after the war?

Olson: After the war? Well, for one thing, I got stupid and got married.

John: We all do that.

Olson: Yea. That lasted a few years. I drove a truck for Farm Bureau, a feed truck, and hauled, we also hauled flour to bakeries all over Wisconsin. Did that, and then I drove a truck for blacktopping, for asphalt, for the highways of the city of Madison. That there on Midvale Boulevard, I worked all that down through there. I just drove the truck. Of course, they are a lot better now than they were back then. But, then I worked for A&P. I ended up being, well, they sent me all over the state to set up stores. They would take pictures, and that was the way you set it up. If there was eight rows of ketchup, you have eight rows of ketchup. You put that in the store.

John: Okay.

Olson: I did that. I think I got \$40 or \$50 a week.

John: Yea. When you came out, you had the GI Bill. Did you ever use any of it?

Olson: I tried to, but I didn't — my family was so poor. I went to Chicago, to electrical school, and I lasted about a month and a half, and I give \$20 to one of my buddies, so he could carry on. He never did pay it back. Yea. And he went on. He made it. But, that is the only thing I ever used it for. That GI Bill was all right, but it wasn't all right for me, because my parents needed something real bad. I mean, they had nothing. There was three of us boys that went in. And they took \$22 from each one of us, the government did. And then they put it, I think it was \$37.50 the parents got from each one of us, from the government and us. And that is what my mother and them lived on. My step-father at that time was hauling mail from the depot to the post office, and they just, no union, he couldn't get nothing. Plus the trucks he had were all broke down, and everything. So, raised turkeys.

John: Oh, yea?

Olson: Oh, God, smelly things! Yea. We had to live.

John: Yea. Anything with vets organizations? The VFW, or the American Legion, or any of that?

Olson: I used to belong to both of them, but I got awful disappointed. All three of us brothers did this, but everything was the Olson boys do it. And then everybody else takes credit. And we had to take time from our families, and that, and it just got, I think all three of us quit eventually. My oldest brother was a major, ended up being a major. And Bob was a marine. He got shot in the hip on one of the

islands over there, Japanese islands. No, it was just, financially, that is why I didn't get a chance to get on anyplace. We took care of our parents at that time. It ain't like it is now.

John: Ah, these are just questions I ask a lot of people. Reunions, getting together with guys you were in the service with? Anything like that?

Olson: No.

John: Neither have I. I just got a Christmas card from a guy, and I don't know how he got my address, from Denver. That I was in with. That was forty-five, forty-seven years ago, yea. Okay. Going back to your early times, your basic training and that. When you first went in, a kid out of Wisconsin, adjustments to the military life, any problem with that? Discipline?

Olson: Not really. I'm a great one, that is what I joined up for, that is what I should be doing. So I did everything they said to be doing, except I got in trouble once. And that is because I would not eat that God-darned goulash. I'll up-chuck it. I wouldn't eat it, and the mess sergeant caught me when I was trying to get rid of it. And so I ended up on a lot of KP for about two weeks. But, I am telling you, that is the best life I ever had. That was the best food and they were really great to me. It wasn't like the stories say it is so bad. At least, I didn't think so. No, the only thing we had, and I shouldn't say it, but it has been on TV too. We had an awful lot of Mexican people. Of course, being horses, horse —

John: Sure.

Olson: And I can tell you. Fights, with razor blades and knives. It was, if you stood in a chow line and they wanted to get ahead of you, I'd just let them go. That's not the way it should be, but that's the truth.

John: Yea. Oh, I know.

Olson: And, other than that, I made all their team sports. Geez, I went up to, when I was at Fort Sheridan, I got on their baseball team as a shortstop, and we went up to Camp Douglas, and played the team up there. And they had, I don't know if you remember a guy by the name of Cecil Travis. Used to be the third baseman for the Washington Senators. They pushed me out in the outfield because the center fielder we didn't have, and that was me. And he hit a high fly ball and I lost it in the sun, and I stayed with it, and glunk! And that was on Thanksgiving Day.

John: Got it on the nose?

Olson: Got it right smack. Jesus, my eye was all here. And I rode all the way from there

back to Fort Sheridan with ice packs on. So.

John: You say you took your horses over with you?

Olson: Yea.

John: What did you do with them when you got your truck?

Olson: Oh, they'd just leave everything. They'd just leave everything. The Army is great at that. Expense means nothing. But so many of them were lost. Most of the, I would say, ninety percent of the animals they took overseas were mules. Because for pack. And they are more sure-footed, walking in the mountains. There is a bunch of those pictures, I think, in that book. That is why it is too bad —

John: Yea. If you ever get that, I'd like to see it.

Olson: When I get a hold of Gary, I'll tell him to have Steve, because he is way up to Crystal Lake. You know where that is. Yea. And I never get up there. Been there a couple of times. Gets warm weather, I'll move around but over there, I've only got one lung. So I ain't going to fart around. Yea. Mules, I'm telling you, and you know a mule can outrun a horse.

John: I didn't know that.

Olson: Yea. We had races, and the mule won every time. But, oh, are they stubborn.

John: Yea, I guess so. "Stubborn as a mule," is what they say.

Olson: Yea. Recreation, if we didn't play ball, the Army always had sports equipment around for the guys. And, you know, just about anybody can play ball. You might not be any good, but you can play it, you know. And, as far as, I wouldn't go out hunting, and a lot of them went out hunting just to kill animals. That didn't interest me. And I still don't hunt. I never have.

John: I fish, but I don't hunt.

Olson: Oh, I fish. Gary has me going to that Namacoggin up there. Oh, crappies about that big.

John: That's great.

Olson: You can hardly pick them up.

- John: When you think back to it, what kind of stands out most in your mind after all this time?
- Olson: Well, probably driving on that damned road.
- John: I can believe that.
- Olson: And, of course, training these troops, oh, you had to be awake. You didn't know, but if we were using live equipment, because you didn't know what these jerks were going to do. There was a few boys who got a little blew up by them. And, I really had the life of Riley that most service men, or anybody else, would love, running that officers club. With this colonel. He was from Flint, Michigan. That was about all I know. I lived in a place they called the Astoria Hotel, and, my God, I was on the thirteenth floor, and Chinese women would give you baths, clean and polish your shoes, clean your clothes, I mean, bring you food to you. And I didn't drink or smoke, so I didn't have that problem. And I didn't mess with the women, either. I don't know why I didn't. I guess my mother. I did enough of that afterwards. No, that was living. I mean, that was really beautiful.
- John: I had a cousin that was in the CBI, and he was in the infantry. And he was in some pretty deep, he was in this fighting. But I don't know much more about what he did, or that. He came back a little strange. Everybody said that Jim was kind of different.
- Olson: Well, boy, I'll tell you, see, back then, I know the country's all different now, but back then, those natives, oh, they'd come running down the street with their honey-buckets, as I call them. You know what they are?
- John: Yea, I spent a year over there.
- Olson: It is just strange. They'd come up and ask you, American baby? They want an American baby. Oh, bull shit, they had every disease under the sun. I was scared. I didn't even want to, the Army did that to me. In fact, I don't think I got all the way over it, even with my, I've been divorced twice, that's enough. There is no thirds.
- John: Yea. Well, this is quite a story.
- Olson: Well, I didn't. Oh, I wish that book was around. Because, oh God, at this point, you can see right down the road where we went. You can see where the fighting that some of our boys got in on, on the Burma Road, where they got behind the lines and just disrupted and they booby-trapped their trucks, and that. We got pictures of that all in there. It's nice. It's real good.

- John: Yea, I'd like to see it.
- Olson: If this hadn't come up so soon, but as long as you see Gary once in a while.
- John: Sure.
- Olson: I'll get him to get that book. He mentioned it, because when I called him yesterday. And he mentioned it. He asked Steve about that book, and he has got it. He's going to bring it in, but he never does. If I have to, I'll make a trip there someday. Just to have something to do. A good day, a warm day. I'll get it. There is a little scribbling because my youngest one from another marriage, when he was a baby, or small, he did some marking in it.
- John: I know. They do that. Okay, anything else you want, that you may have skipped over? This is quite a story, you know, when you —
- Olson: I don't think it is much.
- John: No, but for someone who hasn't heard it, I think it is amazing. You know, that whole effort, it was done by kids that left home and went somewhere, and did whatever had to be done. It's quite a story. I think I mentioned this finance officer, and he never left the States. Well, he went to Japan after the war, but, he said, you know, there was no glory in it, but if it hadn't been for us, nothing would have been paid for. I figured, you know, that's right.
- Olson: Yea, I can understand that.
- John: He left home, and left his family, interrupted his college. He was going to college at the time. Yea. That is an interesting story. Well, let me wrap this up and I don't know who, I or someone, will type this up. And I'll make sure you get a copy of it. Okay?
- Olson: Oh, that will be great, because Gary will be questioning me. Where do you meet him all the time?
- John: Feiler's Tavern.
- Olson: Oh, Feiler's. Yea. He just told me the old man died.
- John: Yea, he just died. Yea. They went to Yuma. They got there, and he went to bed, and didn't get up the next morning.
- Olson: Yea. I just seen him. I didn't know him. I met him that one, well, Gary had a little Christmas party up to his place. I was there too early. They told me to be there at

four o'clock, and I got there at two. So Gary couldn't sit around the house that long, so he took me down there.

John: Yea, it's a nice place. Good food.

Olson: Oh, yea, I been there many times. [Some unrelated matters.]

[End of Interview.]