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Interview with

JOHN T. OLCOTT
U. S. NAVY
USS MAURY

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

JOHN T. OLCOTT

Today is April 28th, 2004. My name is Floyd Cox. I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War. Here in Fredericksburg today to interview Mr. Jack Olcott concerning his experiences in World War II and I want to take this time to shake your hand and thank you for your service, Jack, during World War II.

MR. OLCOTT: You're welcome.

MR. COX: It was young people like you that made it available for us to be here talking today; this is from the heart. To start with, if you would, I'd like to start with a little background about your childhood, where you were born, when you were born, if you had brothers and sisters, and what your dad did.

MR. OLCOTT: I was born in Mott, North Dakota. It's still in existence but just barely.

MR. COX: Population:

MR. OLCOTT: About eight hundred now. I had one sister a year and a half younger than me that just died a couple of months ago up in North Dakota. My dad was originally from Wisconsin. He got a job after World War I where he was in the navy and his family had some lung problems. So they wanted him to have an outside job so I guess he went to Minneapolis and got this job with Northwestern Bell. They sent him out to North Dakota that's how I ended up being from North Dakota.

MR. COX: What year were you born?

MR. OLCOTT: 1922.

MR. COX: What was the date?

MR. OLCOTT: November 5.

MR. COX: November 5, 1922.

MR. OLCOTT: Right.

MR. COX: Did you go to school in that little town?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, all the way through high school.

MR. COX: When did you graduate?

MR. OLCOTT: 1939.

MR. COX: What did you do after you graduated?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, my mother was very sick, had cancer and was in the process of dying, and I stayed home and did cooking and cleaning and everything until she died around the end of 1939. Then in 1940 I applied to go into the navy went up to Bismarck, filled out all the papers and finally got called probably early spring sometime of 1941.

MR. COX: You elected the navy because your brother was an ex-navy man, is that right?

MR. OLCOTT: That's right, absolutely right. I had a good friend that was going to college up in Dickinson and was in the North Dakota National Guard that was getting called into federal service at that time. He'd come down to Mott and we'd shoot pool and stuff. He'd come down there and, "Oh, why don't you come with me? We'll have a ball together."

MR. COX: He's talking about being in the army then?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, yes. Army National Guard and I said, "Well, my dad said the navy is better because you always got a hot meal, clean place to sleep, and so on. No, I don't want to go in the army." Later on the North Dakota National Guard got called out to the Pacific and the 164th Infantry was the name but the very famous outfit. They were the

first army troop, as far as I know, that relieved the marines on Guadalcanal. In fact, this friend of mine, this same friend, got killed on Guadalcanal, sniper got him.

MR. COX: What was his name?

MR. OLCOTT: Richard Skartgudte. The Legion post in Mott is named after him, a World War II veteran.

MR. COX: As you went into the navy you elected to go in the early part of '41. Where did you go through boot camp?

MR. OLCOTT: Great Lakes.

MR. COX: Was that quite an experience?

MR. OLCOTT: Oh, it certainly was, but you know we had all these little chiefs that were just called back into the service and had retired. They were very strict with us and as long as you didn't cross them. I can especially remember one that taught us about the mechanism of five-inch gun out here. How the recall mechanism works. We had to be able to draw all that out. I went to ordnance school after boot camp and this guy, I tell you, it was springtime and he didn't want anybody sleeping in his class. So he caught some of these corps cadets. He'd kind of prowl around and go over to the blackboard and pick up an eraser and he'd get close and go pomp and let them have it. But overall those guys were very friendly and a lot of them would come into the barracks at night. Oh, they had an office in there and if they were staying over they would come out and BS and tell us what the weather was like out in the street. After that school was over I was assigned to the MAURY which was at Pearl Harbor at the time.

MR. COX: How do you spell the MAURY?

MR. OLCOTT: MAURY.

MR. COX: USS MAURY.

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, DD401. That means that's the hull number. So I went aboard ship and...

MR. COX: How did you get out to Hawaii?

MR. OLCOTT: By transport, transport ship.

MR. COX: Remember the name of it?

MR. OLCOTT: No, I don't. I've been on several of them. We got to Hawaii and it was a wonderful place. We weren't getting much money but it was just full of sailors and soldiers and marines and everything and it was a lively place. You had to start out with the sect gang because everybody started out in the sect gang and then you were supposed to eventually become a striker in one of the gangs. Well, then the navy sent out an order that said if you've gone to school you must be assigned to that gang. I said ordinance school. I could have been a fire control man or a gunner's mate or a torpedo man. Well, they could use torpedo men so this other fellow I was with we both got assigned to be torpedo men which was good . If I had to stay in the sect gang eventually I might have had to climb the mast and I had refused to do that. This mast was a little place up there with a little thing is going to go like that, not me. We had quite a time then. There was an old chief on there we used to call sand pan, just as good natured. Everybody was just so nice, they really were. You could tell it was a happy ship. We had an old, old captain.

MR. COX: What was his name, do you remember?

MR. OLCOTT: Homer Smare. Then come along getting into the fall of '41, December, and they told me they wanted me to go to torpedo schooling. Went to torpedo school at Pearl Harbor at the submarine base and the guy teaching it was a chief. He was Chinese

and the neatest man you ever saw in your life. His pants all had to be creased perfectly, shoes shined, and get a haircut every week or two all that kind of stuff. So he was giving us ??? and a pretty good guy. There again ??? ship, you see, so one of the things I really want to talk about today is because I have a little different experience than the rest of the guys on the MAURY because December 7th I was in Pearl Harbor, they weren't. They were at sea.

MR. COX: The ship was at sea at the time?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, ship was at sea. One of the extra curricular things that we had to do was to help out with some of the guard duties and stuff like that. They were short of marines. So then December 7th, being in this guard detail, for one reason or another, I don't know, another fellow and I were assigned to sentry duty when Admiral Nimitz took over the fleet. I was looking all over here for a piece of a good picture of that. It mainly was all officers. We were two enlisted men with our rifles, you know, on each side of the officer.

MR. COX: Unarmed?

MR. OLCOTT: Probably. Anyway, that was really something to see him actually take over. We saw Admiral Kimmel give his little talk and then Nimitz gave his little talk and everything. We were there. All the others were officers off all the ships and we were about the only enlisted men there. It was kind of unique.

MR. COX: It definitely was. You're talking about December 7th, I'm sure you remember exactly what you were doing when the attack on Pearl Harbor. Tell me a little bit.

MR. OLCOTT: Sleeping.

MR. COX: You were sleeping.

MR. OLCOTT: We had the twelve to four watch. We had sentry duties and I had been on duty from midnight to four in the morning and was in the barracks. Beautiful barracks there with great big porches we called them Lanias(sp?) Sleeping late out in the fresh air all screened in. Shortly around eight a.m. here comes the chief running and "We're being attacked. Get the hell out of here." It was a submarine base and there was not much but watch, so we had a couple of submarines in and the guys rigged up a machine gun, couple of machine guns, on the islands, you know, and they were firing at planes. I don't know if they ever hit anything. We could see all the fires and everything over where the battleships were. We were right across from that. We did what we could for the guys that were being recovered because they had lost everything they had. A lot of the sailors at the base gave them their clothes, stuff like that so they'd have something. So these guys were all oil soaked after being in the water. Really it was quite an experience. I had a saying that if anybody ever fired at me or anything because the Japanese did not attack the submarines.

MR. COX: Thank goodness for that.

MR. OLCOTT: After that was over and I guess it was about a week after, maybe a couple of weeks after, that Admiral Nimitz took over the fleet. In the meantime they were using us, oh, we got more guard duty than we could stand and these guys were really crazy. Every night there were guns going off these guys just screwing around, you know, and especially officers. There was a certain amount of resentment at the officers for allowing that to happen. We really scared some of them because if they were walking

around at night and didn't have the password right away, ??? shoot, you know. We were tough cookies, I tell you.

MR. COX: I bet you were.

MR. OLCOTT: So then after maybe a month or so the MAURY came back into port, torpedo school over and go back aboard ship. So I did and I was there in time to go on the first raid the MAURY was on out to Wake Island. The Japanese had already taken it so we were shelling over there. I think maybe we shot down a water tower. It was the damnedest thing, we were all gung ho. There was a fishing boat or patrol boat over there and we were shooting at it with a five inch. The shell would go right through it and it wouldn't explode because it was wood. The Japs, whether they were sailors or whatever they were stopped in the water and then they passed word. We never did loud have speakers on that ship. Everything was through the pocket. Stand by to pick up survivors and our guys thought he said stand by to pick off survivors. Some of the guys had Springfield rifles you want to run over to the side and shoot those guys in the water. About that time just about when that was happening, a plane comes down on us. It wasn't a modern dive bomber or something, it was maybe some kind of a shipboard plane and not very fast, but anyway it was diving on us and it dropped a bomb. That captain was a smart cookie. That ship leaned over and it missed us by about fifty yards, first experience getting bombed. I think after that they said, "Well, you'd better come out here and join the other ships." I think that the boss was right. He was our squadron leader on twenty-five inch guns but we didn't have the anti-aircraft guns. ??? So that was the first time for me to really see it in action aboard the ship. Of course, the other guys that were there on December 7th never saw the action either because they were with the

ENTERPRISE. We went out and \??? All kinds you've got a list of all the places we were and all the battles we were in and probably the most traumatic of them all was in the Solomon Islands. We were there right from the beginning. The ENTERPRISE ??? the number in the morning. The first attack we had a couple of aircraft carriers in close and they were going over there and bombing them, the air strip on Guadalcanal before the marines landed. Then after they landed we just went back and forth all the time between Espirito Santos and New Caledonia and up to Guadalcanal. I don't know if you read the history, the navy kept all of their big ships out of there and the only things that were going was destroyers and mine sweepers. We were in quite a few actions up there off of New Georgia and a lot of places.

MR. COX: With the Japanese fleet?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, they were bringing reinforcements down and we got into some really scrapes there.

MR. COX: Describe one of them for us.

MR. OLCOTT: Just a little side—this old guy, we called him an old guy we didn't know if he was old or not but Washing Machine Charlie would come over every doggone night and move around and anti-aircraft guns would be shooting at them coming over. We were sitting there having a booze tied up in Tulagi which was the navy harbor across form Guadalcanal. They said now put on your helmets and I remember I got nicks in my helmet from that shrapnel falling from army guns. We never did open fire or anything but a lot of it dropped on us. Later on we were in battle out in the gulf, we called it iron bottom bay because there were so many ships sunk there, and we were in some of those actions where they sent the destroyers in first and the cruisers came in after us. We're

just creeping along, just scared the hell out of you. Like two o'clock in the morning and just as black as the ace of spades and you can't see anything and these ships are going slow. We always felt in danger when the ship was going slow, moving that's fine. Chances are they're not going to hit us and that's true. All through the war we never got hit. We were in one of those actions where the MINNEAPOLIS got hit with a torpedo and the NEW ORLEANS got hit with a torpedo from the bow. Both of them got their bows blown off. The MINNEAPLIS back past the number one turret was all gone. The guys on the second turret were all fried. You know how fried chicken smells cooking, that's just the way it smelled.

MR. COX: Even though you were on a different ship you could smell the death.

MR. OLCOTT: Yes, well, I'll get to that. The NEW ORLEANS lost both its first two turrets gone and they said for us to pull the NEW ORLEANS up a creek, which we did. They had a little creek there and then they put trees over the top of NEW ORLEANS and we supplied them with water. Couldn't take a shower for days and days and days.and I still got scars from all that crud. I had one that had to be operated on last year from that, we used to call it jungle rot, who knows what it is, but it was just because we couldn't take a shower for a month and staying there and keeping the NEW ORLEANS afloat with power and water. After awhile I suppose a tug came along and got them out of there. They rigged it all up so that they could get it back to the States and put a new bow on it. PENSACOLA also got hit right in mid ship. There was just blazing and blazing and they wanted us to go out and help the PENSACOLA, go alongside, and our captain wouldn't do it. We said right then and there, there's a captain that's on our side because you're just silhouetted and we didn't know what was happening. Of course, we found

out later that the Japanese had these big eighteen-inch torpedoes that they could fire from miles away. They were better than ours, way better than ours. When ours did hit something it wouldn't explode.

MR. COX: That's what I was going to ask you, in any of the action you were involved as a torpedo man, did you launch?

MR. OLCOTT: We fired torpedoes twice, once on the port and once on the bow. My station was on the port side and the battle of Bella La Vela where six destroyers at that time the whole thing is you might have gotten some of this suspicious tubes, maybe you wasn't using the destroyers right. They were just using us alongside with the cruisers and going through all the damage of the cruisers. All it did was lose the cruisers, see? A lot of cruisers we lost; didn't lose many destroyers. Finally we got the real expensive guys like Ollie Burke and people like that. They knew that the Japanese used destroyers; we could use destroyers. We just go like the bat out of hell. He was saying thirty-one knots works. Well, this one time Bella La Vela probably one of the first times they used destroyers exclusively, no big ships at all. There's part of a bay there and it faces three of us on one side, three more on the other side and here the Japs come sailing in there with all these guys on destroyers, oh, probably four, five or six of them. I don't know how many but they come in there and the three on our side fired. I got to fire my tube that time. So that was eight and the other two they were all sixteen torpedo destroyers. So that was three times eight and that was twenty-four of those in the water. Well, we hit the Japs and they didn't know what hit them. They never fired a shot. Wonderful, just wonderful! And once our torpedoes had hit we knew they were ours because our executive officer was a real nut on all of this stuff and he timed them and he knew when

those things were supposed to be hitting from when we fired. Then the other three over on the other side opened up with a five-inch, all those five-inch shells curving in there and then after that, after the ships went down, then we switched gears. All these Japs died in the water. A lot of noise, probably seaman, pretty cruddy stuff and right about then one of our feed pumps went out on the ship which meant we couldn't go any faster than fifteen knots. Then they decided we'd better get the hell out of here. The whole opposite part of it and we eventually got back to Tulagi which was our home base and they fixed the feed pump. One of our engineers on that ship took that feed pump apart while we were under way and got it fixed to where at least it would operate partially. All his hands were in cuffs. He eventually got a medal for that.

MR. COX: Describe if you will, Jack, when you're getting ready to launch torpedoes that you were responsible for, kind of go through how it works so the person listening to this will know maybe a hundred years from now exactly what your job was.

MR. OLCOTT: Upon the bridge there was two torpedo directors, one on each side which would let the two by two box with a sixteen powered telescope on the top so these guys up on the bridge would look through that telescope. Later on when we had radar they would say what the bearing was and they would train this thing on and it was hooked electronically to the tube so the torque one controlled the two port tubes and the starboard one controlled the two starboard tubes. It wasn't linked hydraulically but it was linked electronically whereas there would be a dial down in our tubes that wherever that director went we had to match up. It was just a needle like this, if that needle went there then you had to move your needle over to match it up. So that moves the tube so you are on the exact same bearing as the director was. Then when they wanted to fire, they had

these switches up on the bridge, the captain gave the word to fire. Then they would close the circuit and each tube had like the powder part of the artillery shell was full of powder, there was about maybe a foot and a half long, about so big around about two or three inches around filled with black powder and when that was ignited it would build up in the back of the tube and expel the torpedo. So, of course, that's what happens. Now this guy Fisher that you interviewed today, too, he was our chief at that time and he would be behind whichever tube was firing with a mall and ready to whack at one if the damn thing misfired. It never did.

MR. COX: When would the torpedo arm itself? Once it left the tube how did it propel itself and how did it arm itself?

MR. OLCOTT: The torpedo, the ones we used at that time, were a combination of compressed air and steam, alcohol that burned and turned the water into steam and there was two turbines in there, one go this way and one go the other way which provided the propulsion for the propellers, two propellers, one going in each direction.

MR. COX: Did they arm themselves as they hit the water?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, the bottom of each warhead, and by the way we had nine hundred pound warheads filled with RDX which was an explosive that was developed by the British and would drop it on the Germans as bombs. They are more powerful than TNT. In the bottom of each one is a plate like that two by two plate, let's say, that screws up into the warhead and inside of that there's a mechanism that is attached to an impeller which is in the water. When the torpedo is fired there's some wires, we had a safety wire on each one, that would pull off so that there was nothing holding that impeller from running. There was a mechanism in that impeller that was connected to a detonator that

would go off into the torpedo so that if it hit anything off it goes. Now, there's a big controversy because the things were not exploding. They had told us when we went out to just use your normal settings. These things were originally supposed to have a magnetic mechanism in them that would just go under the ship and explode underneath the ship rather having to hit it and just break the back of it. The only trouble is it didn't work. Anyway these guys had given us orders to just use our normal settings which were as I remember one of them would be five foot and another one ten foot alternating like that. I think we set them all on about two foot. Our guy Fisher there and the torpedo officer had decided that all these things were running way deep, maybe it was because when we got these big warheads filled with that British RDX they didn't get them adjusted right or something. All these things were going too deep and go right underneath them. The submarines had the same problem but that night they all worked, thank God. So it was a pretty exciting time. After all that was done up in the Solomons we had some interactions up by New Georgia and Bougainville up in that area. After that was all over we went back with the fleet. We were pretty much with the ENTERPRISE all of the Pacific War.

MR. COX: Providing what they called screens?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, we were in the screens but besides that pretty much all the time we had plane guides. In other words, they're going to launch planes, they turned the carrier around into the wind, you see, and we had to be ready to go at any time. That officer upon the bridge if he didn't get that on the ball and say well, the carrier's turning we gotta do it right now and put two more boilers on the line cause normally cruising you only use like two boilers but you had to have the other two ready to go anyway. There

we were behind and I read some of the stuff now that we picked up something like fifty three pilots or airmen out of the water. That was our job. We kind of got peeved; they always sent ice cream over to us and we didn't have ice cream makers. We did get some later on but at that time we didn't have any. I think maybe our guys were so good at it that the carrier always wanted us be at the plane guard so that they'd get their pilots back if anything happens. I've seen them come right down the deck and over the side and right into the brink. Crazy things happen. I've seen a plane come in on the ENTERPRISE dropped it's bomb and nothing happened. It didn't go and got down ready to land the bomb went on an exit course right on the flight deck. So we were involved in everything that was happening up until '44. The new carriers started coming to the fleet and we were task force thirty-eight or fifty-eight whichever one. If one admiral had it, it was thirty-eight, if it was Admiral H??? it was fifty-eight and it was kind of funny. It was really very boring because really we were very over powered. The United States had something like twenty new carriers plus the old ones yet plus all these converted ones and we really had it. It was kind of funny because we used to talk about the World War I guys that,well, that guy over there he had shell shock and this and that. Guys were having trouble in their sleep and there were no shells or no shocks or no nothing but they were having trouble so they invented something new, combat fatigue which was just bored. We steamed over 500,000 miles and when you think of most of us going fifteen or twenty knots that's a helluva lot of miles. Our boilers and everything were not in very good shape because we didn't have adequate maintenance and there was a crack that went all the way around the ship, mid ship. Every time we'd go alongside a

repair ship or dry dock or something they would weld it up and we'd get to sea and it would open up again.

MR. COX: Did you take on water from that crack?

MR. OLCOTT: A little bit, not much, very, very little. I don't know. We were just very lucky. I was the worst casualty they ever had on that ship. I still got a little piece of shrapnel in one foot.

MR. COX: Oh, you did.

MR. OLCOTT: Yes.

MR. COX: And got a Purple Heart?

MR. OLCOTT: Oh, yes.

MR. COX: Tell me how that happened.

MR. OLCOTT: It was at the battle of Santa Cruz and we were under air attacks from the Japs and we were running along firing at them. All the ships were firing, of course, shooting down a lot of Japanese planes and I was just on deck. I really didn't have anything to do with it because I had never had a gun station but we were in charge of the torpedoes and the depth charge. That was our responsibility and if you're under air attack you're not going to us either one of those. We didn't have much to do so I was on the port side and they were firing at somebody out the port. I thought a better place to be would be over on the other side and I was starting to run over to the other side of the ship and all of a sudden I looked down and my shoe was full of blood. What the hell! So I went to mid ship there where we had a large torpedo shack where the doctor was stationed, too, and we had a ready box there where we kept these things that propel the shells that propel the torpedoes. We kept them in there separate locked up and sitting

there. They shot me up there and gave me a shot of whiskey and said, "Okay, now just stay here and we'll see what happens later on." They never did do anything more because that shrapnel was down in the ligaments there and the doctors were scared to go digging around in there. I had asked about several times and they said leave well enough alone unless it bothers you. Well, it didn't bother. I never did do anything about it.

MR. COX: You've still got it.

MR. OLCOTT: I've still got it. It's funny sometimes I go to the doctor and take an x-ray of everything but this leg. Two years ago I started going to the VA in Phoenix. They really give you a going over. Anything you can imagine there they're on it. They take all these x-rays and what's that? It's a piece of shrapnel. I haven't had any bad effects from any of it except they took those dog houses, we called them dog houses, off the tubes and gun three was firing right over our heads. We didn't have cotton, we didn't have ear plugs, we didn't have anything and my hearing is really bad. I've got hearing aids in both ears. I'm sure that was part of it. I never tried to claim anything on it. The country's been so good to me I wouldn't want to do anything to hurt the country, sure wouldn't.

MR. COX: Let me ask you this, Jack. Were you ever subject to Kamikaze attacks?

MR. COLCOTT: No, I got off the ship just before that. After the Philippines was over they sent me back to torpedo school again, San Diego. I got out of that, that was in '44 I'd say, and I thought maybe I'll get to stay in the States. Then they said, if you've been in the States ninety days out you go again. I'd just been three and a half months. Off you go. So where did I go? New Guinea. Never did anything useful again. There were six of us torpedo men that had been in school together. They sent us to Hollandia, New

Guinea, which was a thousand bed-space hospital with no patients because the war had moved on. So they put us in the post office which was a beautiful building. It was a stucco building all screened in and balconies around to keep the sun off and it was a wonderful place. Our job was to forward all the mail to people that were in the hospitals state hospital seventeen Hollandia or whatever and they stopped there and they had all moved on. So our job was to forward all that. That was pretty complicated. Where did they go and this and that? We would go to work at seven o'clock in the morning and by seven thirty we were done for the day. There were money orders to sell and all that kind of stuff but we were torpedo men. You had to have a post office rate to handle any money. They didn't allow us to handle any money. So we had all the rest of the day to just laze around and there was a little crispy sam dunk, maybe a little pool just for the nurses to go swimming or something like that. Well, we used it and after six or eight months being there and not doing much we got transferred to a submarine base in Subic Bay in the Philippines which was a sub base that had moved up from Sydney, Australia, to Subic Bay.

MR. COX: I'd like to go back, Jack, when you were doing this post office business, if you will, did you miss being at sea, being a sailor?

MR. OLCOTT: Oh, yes.

MR. COX: Even though you had a kind of a plush job not doing much?

MR. OLCOTT: Right.

MR. COX: That's what I'd heard. Once you're at sea you start longing for the sea.

MR. OLCOTT: Everybody wants to be in the fleet. They want to be in the fleet. It doesn't matter what kind of a soft job, they want to be in the fleet. That's all there is to it. It's basic, a certain spirit to it.

MR. COX: You went to Subic Bay. Tell me about that.

MR. OLCOTT: They brought all these torpedoes up from Sydney, Australia, and there was thousands of them. A great big shop and they had all these guys there and we were taking all these torpedoes. They were still in boxes from the factories and taking them out of the boxes and hauling them over to the shop. Then we'd give them what we called the pre-firing routine or something just to see if they worked and so on and then put them in racks. The same way there was all these warheads, these 900-pound warheads, and it took ten or twelve of those on a truck and trucked them over to the torpedo dump where they were keeping all that stuff. I even got to drive the truck once. Of course, I couldn't figure out the damned shift, I'd never driven one of those things before. Well, look at that plate on there, it shows where low is and all that stuff, so eventually you get the hang of it. It was quite a base and all these thousands of torpedoes to handle. The war ended while I was in the Philippines. I was a regular navy guy and had signed up for six years and I still had six or eight months to nine months or something like that to go. What's my points? How long you've been in the navy and how much of it was at sea and all that kind of stuff. And out of all these thousands of guys on this base, I was the third highest of them all. I was a regular and I had to stay. It didn't make a damn bit of difference. The Philippines were in tough shape then and we got to go down to Manila occasionally. I was in Manila the day the Philippines got their independence. Interesting thing, I rode

down with the captain and his executive officer. Isn't that something? Why they ever do things like that? The navy always seemed to take care of their own guys.

MR. COX: What rank were you at this time?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, I was a torpedo man 2nd. I did take the test while I was at the shop for 1st class and guess what? I got a perfect score but they never did a thing because it was a submarine base and I was not a submarine sailor. So that's what I ended up the same at the end of six years as I was at three years, 2nd class. But even at that, I was not mad. If I got transferred everywhere I'd go the receiving station would say oh, you're right out of the rank, you can run the barracks. Oh, tell everybody what to do and all this stuff. You get pretty good at it. I never did get all the time off I had. When my six years was up, you were supposed to get a month's leave every year, I had four months leave coming. The navy paid me for everything fair and square, meanwhile it took days. There was a lot of black market stuff going on. It was kind of a strange deal because the captain we had the admiral came up from Manila like say on a Saturday for inspections, says, "How many guys you got here that are eligible to go home." And they said, "Oh, up to one thousand." "I want them all off the base Monday." That base went just like five thousand people down to a hundred of them, a hundred of us left. They put me on this base fleet force so I was a master at arms. We had all these guys out on sentries and everything. Filipinos would come over there at night tried to steal this and steal labs and we'd roar around on these jeeps with the lights on, tooted at anything that moved. It was a helluva time.

MR. COX: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the atomic bomb had been dropped and what were your thoughts at that time?

MR. OLCOTT: Thank God, it's over. Thank God it's over. And I still fight with anybody that says we shouldn't have done that. I think President Truman was one of our best men. He was a tough cookie, he was an old army man and he knew all about all this stuff. We just loved Truman. The war then was winding down or wound down already and had to dispose of stuff. I often wonder what happened to the thousands of torpedoes. They probably took them out to sea and dumped them.

MR. COX: Speaking of torpedoes, I've wondered this before and maybe you can answer it, did a TBM torpedo plane, did they use the same type torpedoes that you might launch from destroyers?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, I'd say the same principal but the navy differentiates between them like for instance submarines have mark 14 torpedoes, we had mark 15, so we're the same diameter but the internal parts of the 14 was probably a little shorter because they were short on space and stuff like that but basically they'd be the same. And then, too, if that's not part of the war, they were going to all of this electronic stuff, that's why I say when I get transferred around, I was a steam torpedo man. They had no more use for us except aboard destroyers that still had those kind of torpedoes. Submarines were using electronic torpedoes and they had electronic technicians to take care of it.

MR. COX: After the surrender agreement, you were still over there?

MR. OLCOTT: Oh, yes, I was still in the Philippines.

MR. COX: Then where did you go? Did you come back on your ship?

MR. OLCOTT: The Maury was gone back by that time. It was absolutely worn out. I told you it had steamed five hundred thousand miles. It was just worn out. It only lived about six years or so.

MR. COX: Decommissioned?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes. They found that big crack all around in the New York Navy yard and said it's not worth fixing. I figure it's that way at the end of every war, just all kinds of stuff that's very urgent one day and scrapped the next.

MR. COX: So after the surrender agreement, tell me what happened to you. Where did you go and why?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, I stayed there until, let me see—my enlistment was up in December of '46, so I guess about summertime they said we're sending you back to the states and they sent me to coast guard station on Ford Island underneath the big bridge and that's where I got discharged. I had all that leave coming, four months leave coming, they paid me for all of that. I got home, went back to Chicago and got back there about October or November. You know there's a lot of things about the climate. I had a bed bug bite on my left foot that wouldn't heal. I got torpedo oil in it or something and the doctor put hydrogen peroxide on that and all kind of stuff, but it never would heal over. I got back to Chicago and in two weeks it was gone. It was just hot and humid and just wouldn't heal there. I've seen a lot and done a lot of things. We didn't really get to that many interesting places. Honolulu was our home port for years. We did get two weeks in Wellington, New Zealand. Again, I was an ordnance man and I was standing gangway watches to watch over the ships. One night it was supposed to be port side was liberty, half the ship could be gone at a time. Well, this one night at midnight I covered the whole ship from one end of it to the other and counting officers that were on duty with me there was three of us on the ship. It was a safe area and everybody was ashore and

there was a pug right on the dock. Oliver Littleton Docks in Wellington, he was a big shot in British supplies, I guess.. That was a quaint experience.

MR. COX: What did you think of the New Zealanders?

MR. OLCOTT: Wonderful, wonderful people.

MR. COX: Australians?

MR. OLCOTT: We never did get to Australia.

MR. COX: I've heard they're about the same.

MR OLCOTT: We've had experiences with the Aussies up there at Pearl Harbor and we'd make a date with them to drink beer over at the stage beer hall. The navy took care of us. There was an Admiral Nimitz recreation center in Pearl Harbor that could literally be thousands of sailors there at one time. It was a huge place; everything you could think of including a great big huge beer hall. This guy Fisher and I in one afternoon drank fifteen bottles of beer each and we were trying to make it sixteen and they closed the window on us.

MR. COX: Did you walk away?

MR. OLCOTT: Yes.

MR. COX: Sober?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, but I've had so much fun and now this guy Fisher. I kept track of him for over sixty years. After the war he went into the air force and he was stationed over north of Japan in some of those islands radar installation and he was an air force man, transferred over to the air force and in supplies and all that kind of stuff. We have seen each other every couple of years or something like with reunions and all that stuff or

just drive over to his house. He and I went to Hawaii together two years ago. He wanted to see it.

MR. COX: All the high rises, it's changed a lot hasn't it?

MR. OLCOTT: Oh, yes. I've been going all the time. For awhile I was going every year. We had a travel agent in the office and that was this Japanese company, Pagoda Hotels, they had two hotels right across the street from each other. You could get over there on Northwest planes and have a month there, sometimes we'd stay six weeks, for about fifteen hundred dollars. Give you a room, the Japanese office, grocery store a block away, you could wheel your groceries up in the elevator and then leave the cart down and they came and picked all the carts up at night. It was a wonderful time and it was right in the middle just north of that big ??? shopping center. It was about four blocks down from where we were staying or you could walk down town or you could walk to Waikiki, it was that close, just a wonderful location.

MR. COX: Let me get back to during the war, did you meet any notable people post war, any admirals or Halsey or Spruance?

MR. OLCOTT: No.

MR. COX: Just the occasion when you were there when Nimitz took over at Pearl Harbor. I just wondered. I've heard some wonderful stories of experiences guys have had with Admiral Nimitz like picking up a hitch hiker and so on. I understand he would do these type of things. So after you got out of the navy and went back to Chicago, what did you do then?

MR. OLCOTT: Well, I relaxed for awhile and we had a new baby in the house and she liked all the neighbor men better than she liked me, could you beat that? She was sixteen

months old before I saw her. We're great friends now but it was different then. One day I saw a thing in the Chicago paper, the Sun Times, I guess, that they were having down at Columbia College the defense department was testing ex-GI's for aptitudes and so on, help you out, steer you in the right direction. I went down there and I always had a thought one of the big things was I wanted to be a watch maker or something like that. They gave me all these agility tests and the guy said, "Well if you had to depend on yourself you'd starve to death." He told me I should go into accounting or something like that which I did. And it turned out that guy was from Headington, North Dakota, the next town over from Mott, like forty miles away. He knew my name. Of course, he saw my former address on my papers where I was born and all that stuff. He took me out to lunch and everything, very nice GA guy. So I went from there to business college and started in. After a couple of years of that I found a job with a packing house and the guy took me over there and you know what he got for pay, a ham. The William Davies company was a Canadian company and I was pretty good with figures and eventually that's what I ended up. I went from there to more schooling and stuff like that. I liked packing houses because it's very fast and none of the figures are great; the weight of everything is always changing. You get a car load of stuff today, it weighs one thing, you weigh it tomorrow and it'll be something different. That appealed to me and the company I was with, John Morrell &Company, which I stayed with until I retired. They were very insistent on having their figures fast. I always say fast and approximately correct. That big a ??? didn't keep track of the pennies, we don't even write pennies down. Everything is just dollars, weights and dollars, keep track of that weight.

MR. COX: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences during World War II?

MR. OLCOTT: No, I think we've pretty well covered it.

MR. COX: I want to take this time to tell you thank you for two things, taking your time to do this with us today and number two once again thank you for your service to our country.

MR. OLCOTT: Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

MR. COX: You're welcome.

Transcribed March 21, 2008, by Eunice Gary.