

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Colonel Richard E. Oliver**

**Tiburon, California**

**July 6, 2006**

**Bombardier, B-17**

**02/22/1942 First Mission to Rabaul and  
On Return Crash Landed in New Guinea**

**435<sup>th</sup> Recon Squadron, 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group**

**50 Missions**

**Plane Found and Being Returned from Guinea**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is July 6, 2006. I am interviewing Colonel Richard E. Oliver by telephone. His address is 39 Reed Ranch Road, Tiburon, California, 94920. His phone number is area code 415-383-1659. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Colonel Oliver, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. First off, do you have a middle initial?

Colonel Oliver

E as in Edward.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give it to the person to read and sign but since this is by telephone let me read this and make sure it is satisfactory with you. "Agreement read." Is that okay with you?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I would like to do is get an alternative contact, a daughter or son or someone because we have found that after a couple of years sometimes we try to get back in touch with our people and they have moved or something has happened and we have trouble finding them. Is there someone we might contact in case we can't get you?

Colonel Oliver

I'm trying to think. My daughter, her name is Karen Braughton, 5455 Pine Hill Road, Sebastopol, California 95472. Her phone number is 707-823-6732.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Colonel Oliver

June 29, 1920.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Colonel Oliver

Weleetka, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Colonel Oliver

I had a brother but he was killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the war?

Colonel Oliver

He was killed back during the war but not in the service. He was in the service but that isn't why he was killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Colonel Oliver

Banker.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Colonel Oliver

We didn't have it very hard.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. Your father was able to keep employed during the Depression?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Colonel Oliver

In Weleetka.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Colonel Oliver

It must have been 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Colonel Oliver

I just worked around there for a while. Shortly after that I joined the service.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Colonel Oliver

December of 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you decide to go into the service?

Colonel Oliver

I don't know; just one of those spur of the moment things. It looked like we were going to be in a war.

Mr. Misenhimer

What branch did you go into?

Colonel Oliver

In the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Air Corps?

Colonel Oliver

I just happened to be where they were signing people up and I said, "I'm ready."

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you want to go into flight training or what?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you want to start reading that, that will be fine.

Colonel Oliver

I enlisted in the U. S. Army Air Corps as a Private on December 20, 1939. I was assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 7<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group at Hamilton Field, California. In late 1940 the group was transferred to Salt Lake City, Utah. In November of 1941 the group received secret orders to proceed to Plum. The code name of Plum we later discovered was the Philippines. We left Salt Lake City on December 5, 1941 and flew to Hamilton Field, California. We were to depart on December 7<sup>th</sup> but the war intervened. Part of the group took off on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and was arriving in Hawaii during the Japanese attack. We were still in Hamilton loading up the planes to depart that night when word was received. We were then ordered to fly the planes to Sacramento and later to Muroc Lake, California for dispersal and then return to Sacramento. During the first week at Sacramento the planes were taken away from our crew supposedly to be picked up by bomb crews that were in from Hawaii. We were sent by train from Sacramento to Tucson, Arizona to pick up equipped LB-30's, Liberators, for overseas service. These were the same type of planes which were being used by the British. We flew from Tucson to Dayton, Ohio by way of Shreveport to pick up additional equipment and have guns installed. We proceeded from Dayton to Tampa, Florida on the first leg of a journey to the Philippines by way of Africa. Our orders were changed in Tampa after six planes had taken off. We were ordered to proceed back to Hamilton Field by way of Denver. We departed from Hamilton Field on January 15 and arrived at Hickam Field on January 16<sup>th</sup>; 13 hours and 5 minutes of flying time. We left the U.S. at night and arrived at 7:00 the following morning. We departed Hawaii on January 22, 1942 about 1:00 in the morning. We had a large box of emergency rations, canned food, shotguns and mosquito nets. I've

got the names of the crew; do you want them?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir that will be fine.

Colonel Oliver

The crew consisted of First Lieutenant Norris Whittaker, Pilot, Second Lieutenant Herbert Felton, Copilot; Aviation Cadet Robert Felling, Navigator, Sergeant Art Foster, Engineer, Corporal Earl Rayburn, Assistant Engineer, PFC King Nichols, Assistant Radio Operator, Corporal Mike Michaelski, Radio Operator, Corporal Richard E. Oliver, Bombardier. We arrived at Palmyra Island at 7:00 a.m. on January 22. We stayed in the Marine quarters. We departed at 5:00 a.m. on January 23<sup>rd</sup> for Canton Island. We became lost and headed back to Palmyra but were unable to find land of any kind. When we were about out of gas we spotted a destroyer. We later found out that it was the USS *Preston*, number 379. Months later I heard she was sunk in the Battle of Savo Island. The destroyer was convoying a freighter. We didn't know whether they were Japanese or American nor did they know whether we were Japanese or American. About 5:45 p.m. we crash landed in front of the destroyer's bow. All survived except Rayburn. Nichols died a week later in Hawaii. Michaelski received a crushed arm and was hospitalized until October 17, 1942. The destroyer proceeded to Christmas Island and remained there a week while the freighter unloaded and we recuperated. A PBY took those most severely injured back to Hawaii. The remainder of us returned to Hawaii on the destroyer arriving there February 6<sup>th</sup>. The personnel on the destroyer told us that instead of landing in the trough of the waves as the pilot was intending to do, the wave broke right under the tail throwing the nose down and the tail up and we went in doing 120 mph. The crew on the

destroyer said that all four engines tore loose, the tail broke off and the wing section turned upright in the water. I was jammed in the navigation bubble and finally managed to break myself out of there by sinking down far enough to get under the broken part of the plane. I was the last person picked up by the destroyer's lifeboat and was in the water for 45 minutes to an hour. I got on the destroyer wearing part of a shirt, torn pants blood stained and no shoes; lucky to be aboard. After returning to Hawaii on the destroyer the remainder of the crew was admitted to the hospital. I was patched up and determined to have only cuts on my head and broken ribs. My feet were taped up and I was allowed to leave the hospital. On February 10<sup>th</sup> I was assigned to a new B-17 crew. The members of the B-17 crew were First Lieutenant Frederick C. Eaton, Pilot, Second Lieutenant Henry M. Harlow, Co-Pilot, Second Lieutenant George D. Munroe, Navigator, Staff Sergeant Clarence A. LaMieux, Engineer, Sergeant Russell D. Crawford, Assistant Engineer, Waist Gunner, Sergeant John V. Hall, Radio Operator, Tail Gunner, PFC Howard A. Sorenson, Assistant Radio Operator, PFC William Schwartz, Waist Gunner, PFC Oliver, Bombardier. We departed Hawaii on February 11<sup>th</sup> about 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Misenhimer

The plane that crashed; what kind of plane was that?

Colonel Oliver

It was a B-24 Liberator. We arrived on Christmas Island at 7:00 a.m. on February 12<sup>th</sup>. We departed about 2:00 a.m. on February 13<sup>th</sup> and arrived on Canton Island about 11:00 a.m. on February 13<sup>th</sup>. We departed about 1:00 a.m. on February 14<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Nadi, Fiji about 9:00 a.m. on February 14<sup>th</sup>. About the 16<sup>th</sup> of February we flew a patrol mission out of Nadi. On February 19<sup>th</sup> we departed Nadi about 4:00 a.m. arriving at New



Caledonia about 3:00 p.m. We departed New Caledonia about 6:00 a.m. on February 20<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Townsville, Australia at about 3:00 in the afternoon. On February 21<sup>st</sup> we flew about 400 miles inland to Plon Curry. February 22<sup>nd</sup> we returned to Townsville. About 11:30 p.m. on February 22 we took off on our first mission against the Japanese base of Rabaul, New Britain arriving over the enemy base at about 6:30 a.m. We had been instructed originally to make two passes at the target and drop the bombs in train, one after the other. While we were over the target the pilot instructed to drop all bombs. I released the bombs in the train but they failed to release so we went back and made another run and dropped all the bombs in salvo, all at once, on the transport and the docks. We were intercepted by nine Japanese Zeroes and went through considerable antiaircraft fire. We were pursued by the Jap planes for about 45 minutes. Two were shot down and another probable. Our plane suffered considerable damage but no injuries to personnel. We reached the eastern coast of New Guinea with only a few minutes of gas supply and made a forced landing. No one received serious injury. During the crash landing Lieutenant Munroe was hit in the head and thrown into the door from the radio room during the landing. After we landed we took one of the life rafts out of the plane and started loading it with the few emergency rations that we had. We thought we could pull the raft after us through the water. What looked from the air to be a nice green grassy landing field turned out to be a swamp of about four feet of water and kunai grass which was razor edge sharp and grew anywhere from 10 to 12 feet tall. By standing on the wing of the plane we could see a considerable distance. We spotted some trees in one direction which looked like our most likely destination to reach dry ground but it was the direction away from the ocean. We were afraid to head towards the ocean for fear of the water

getting deeper. After we gathered up what we could from the plane that we thought might be of use to us we started dragging the raft and using machetes to cut a path through the swamp. I don't think we went more than 50 yards before it was evident that we wouldn't be able to cut a patch that we could guide that raft through. So the decision was made to abandon the raft. We gathered up items that we could carry that we thought would be of use to us and started out chopping a patch through the kunai grass. Initially the water was only up to about our waist but at times it would get deeper and deeper and sometimes you would be standing under the reeds while you tried to cut with one hand. We thought we would never reach the area where we could see the tops of the trees. But we cut a good part of the night and most of the next day before we got to where the trees were. When we got there it was a real disappointment because instead of being on dry ground these trees were in about 18 inches of water. It was almost evening so we decided to see if we could finally get a little rest. The food, what little there was, had gotten wet and that was worthless. We had a little bit of water in a canteen. Somebody had thought to bring parachute silk along so we could cut pieces of it and wrap it around our heads to try and protect us some from the mosquitoes. We had already taken our socks off and put them over our hands as gloves to protect us from the mosquitoes and to try to help keep our hands from being cut to ribbons from when we were chopping through the kunai grass. We sat down in the 18 inches of water and leaned up against trees and tried to sleep. The mosquitoes were absolutely terrible; the biggest, loudest things I've ever seen in my life. Swarms and swarms of mosquitoes that just nearly drove you crazy. We didn't feel like we had slept any but I'm sure we must have dozed off some during the night and at least got a little rest sitting down. In the morning we decided that we had better see what we

could find through the trees. Going in different directions we found this little clump of trees; we found what looked like a definite river current where the water was clear of kunai grass and it looked like we would be able to float down to the mouth of the river into the ocean. We took machetes and started cutting trees down to make a raft. We had a couple members of the group, Schwartz and another, I've forgotten who the other was that couldn't swim, so we cut down several trees and decided that we would try to tie them together to make the raft. Somebody rolled one of those trees off into the water and it immediately sank. They were all waterlogged which was quite a shock to us. We kept rolling the ones that we had cut into the water and finally one would float close to the surface. So we determined to use that and let the two that couldn't swim hang on and the others would pull and push the log along to be able to get them through the swamp. Several of them at this time had to take their shoes off so that they could swim. They tied the laces of the shoes together and put them over this tree. The ones that were hanging onto the tree were supposed to take care of the shoes but unfortunately it didn't turn out that way. The log turned and the shoes were lost. I think Crawford lost his and I believe Harlow and Schwartz shortly. What had been this open water disappeared right into a clump of kunai grass. We had to abandon the log and go back and pick our way through with machetes, dragging ourselves along hand by hand where the water was over our heads. We continued on this way all of the third day and that night. When it got dark we had the idea that we would cut a bunch of this kunai grass, the tops of it and pile it in piles so that we could crawl up on these piles and sleep. So everybody cut piles of kunai grass and built it up as high as you could and then you would get up on it and you would sit down up there and you would go to sleep. Then two or three or five minutes later you

would wake up gasping. The kunai grass would sink down and your head would be underwater and you were trying to breathe water and you would wake up. So we eventually just stood and leaned on those piles. It was during this period that J. V. Hall that was just ahead of me, turned to me and said, "Dick, let's go down to the mess hall and get some ice cold canned tomatoes." I said, "That sounds absolutely delicious." As thirsty and hungry as we were, I said, "Where's the mess hall?" He said, "Right back behind you there." I turned around and we could both see the lights of the mess hall, and the lights looked just exactly like the lights of any mess hall that we had ever seen. We both turned and probably would have turned down that path and died but somebody behind us saw what we were doing and stopped us. Harlow had been out of his head for several days probably due to heat exhaustion. He didn't have that much hair and I guess the sun had gotten to him. Generally the rest of us were in fair shape. There were other cases of hallucinations but they didn't last; we didn't stay out of our heads. I haven't mentioned the leeches but they were absolutely terrible. We were all just covered with leeches that were anywhere from one to two inches long and were black and slimy looking things that were just driving us crazy. We tried to get them off as best we could by burning them off; slicing them off with machetes; just anyway. They were so disgusting that they just had us in misery all the time we were in the swamp. The morning of the last day we were in the water in the swamp, J. V. Hall and I were cutting in the front of the group when we thought in the distance we heard something that sounded like chopping. We were petrified. By this time we only had two pistols and as I recall two machetes. We proceeded cautiously down what looked like a pathway. We had just shortly before this come out to dry ground where for the first time since we crashed we

were not actually in water. Our legs and feet had all turned white and puckered like your hands do if you have them in dishwater for several hours. Our feet and legs all looked like that and some of them had started to get ulcers. We were all cut from the kunai grass and all in all not in too good of shape. We proceeded on the best we could. Some were limping along worse than others. The ones that didn't have shoes had it pretty tough walking anywhere at this time. We got on down to where we came to the edge of a clearing. We could still hear this chopping sound. When we came out into the edge of the clearing we saw a native chopping on a tree on the other side of the clearing. It turned out later that it was a sego tree that they chopped and got the insides of it out and cooked it to eat. The native that saw us was about as frightened of us as we were of him. We knew nothing other than that we had heard that all the natives of New Guinea were headhunters and cannibals. We finally proceeded on and he finally came back out of the trees. He had another native with him. They didn't speak English and we didn't speak anything else but by sign language, we were trying to talk. We finally got them to know that we were tired and hungry and thirsty. He led us on to his village. The village must have consisted of eight or ten huts and quite a few people. They really were a primitive type people; there is no doubt about it. They didn't speak English. The one that was supposedly the head man apparently had had contact with white men at sometime in the past but I doubt most of them had seen a white man before. Anyway, they built a big fire and cooked some little tiny roasting ears that were I guess three to four inches long. They were as delicious as anything I've ever eaten in my life. The first real food that we had in four days. They also cooked some of this sego. When it was cooked it looked like jelly on the outside but I found out to my distaste when they passed it to us to eat that it made your mouth pucker

like you had eaten alum. I had taken the first one and tried to get the other fellows to not eat one but everybody was too frightened of the natives not to do what it looked like we should. Everybody sat there on the log eating this stuff that puckered us all up. They had a hut that they had us use for the night that was built up on stilts up off the ground that I guess was eight feet or more above the ground. They built a big fire underneath so that the smoke would come up through the floor of the round tree limbs that the bottom of the hut was made of. They had made a very uneven floor but when we laid down on it we immediately collapsed into sleep. That night it felt like a feather mattress. Sometime during the night I woke up and I was lying on my back on the floor of this hut and the firelight was coming up from the bottom and dancing around inside. I opened my eyes and looked up and I was completely surrounded by natives that were squatting around on their haunches all around me in a circle. I thought to myself, "They're getting ready to kill me and maybe have killed the others already." But I laid there and they didn't move and I didn't move. I finally got up enough nerve to get up on my hands and knees and crawl through a small opening where two of them were sitting side by side. They made no attempt to bother me so I kept going and looked around and here everyone of us were surrounded by a group of them just sitting and staring at us. They were just curious as to what a white man looked like. I woke up some of the others to tell them I didn't know what was going on. They said that at least they could tell they weren't going to kill us and eat us so I guess then we all went back to sleep. We woke up the next morning and tried to communicate to them that we needed to get to the coast. But again we never knew what they understood and we misunderstood frequently what they were trying to indicate. There was a river right by the side of their village. They had dugout canoes that had been

made by burning out the center portion of trees. We thought they had told us that boats came up and down that river every day but it was soon apparent that there hadn't been any up there in a long time, if there ever had been. They loaded us into three or four of these canoes. Two or three of us to each canoe and started down to the river mouth. We hadn't gone too far before they had to stop and chop logs where trees had fallen across the river. So that reinforced the fact that there hadn't been any boats up and down there in a long time. After quite an extensive journey we reached the mouth of the river where these natives turned us over to another tribe that was down there. That was where we met Alan Champion. He was the Australian Magistrate for the area. He and the natives had come down from Buna when he heard on the radio that we were missing in this swamp at New Guinea. On the way down he and this native had caught a huge kingfish which they cooked for us. That was the most wonderful fish that I have ever eaten. They loaded us in a launch and took us back to Buna. We spent the next ten days in Buna and almost ate Mr. Champion out of house and home with the nine of us descending on him. He had limited rations for himself anyway. In a few days most of that was gone and we were primarily trying to fill up on ripe bananas that we could find and coconuts. Mr. Champion had radioed Port Moresby that we were there and we continually hoped that a flying boat or something would come to pick us up but nothing did. Instead we received word by radio that the Japanese had landed at Lae, New Guinea just north of us and might be expected to land in Buna. In fact some of the ships were seen that day off the coast of Buna. We were told we were to head inland to get away from the Japanese. So with the assistance of some of Mr. Champion's natives we headed inland to a Church of England mission. We spent three days getting there and stayed there several days. During this

period most of us had already started coming down with malaria or did then. We were told then to leave the mission and head back to the coast to get a boat back to Port Moresby. When we left the mission I thought I could walk but I went about 20 yards and collapsed. They had to carry me in a sedan chair with four natives; two on each end of it. It was a real torturous ride. If you've never been on one; don't. The terrain in New Guinea is very steep up and down to begin with but to be in one of those chairs on two poles is sheer agony. Of course you ache all over from malaria to begin with. We even had to cross rope foot bridges that were only wide enough for one person and to be carried across one of those in one of those chairs was an experience that you would rather forget. We got down to the coast. I don't know where we went first. The boat had been destroyed. We got out of the boat that had taken us down to the tip of New Guinea to an abandoned town on the little island of Samurai. We stayed there several days until somebody picked us up in another small boat. While we were at Samurai a half caste native knowing we were without food came in during the night down below the house, again these houses were built on stilts; we were all upstairs asleep and they came in and shouted "Fresh meat, Tabada, fresh meat." Tabada meaning boss. We went down and looked and sure enough here he was carrying a quarter of beef over his shoulders. We got everybody up and started cooking as fast as we could. We all ate too much, too fast and we were all sick. We had found some dried apples, a little sugar and some flour that had been left behind when people left these houses. I attempted to bake a pie but because the apples sat overnight it all fermented. Nobody would have any except Harlow who said it was delicious and he ate the whole thing. Another boat then picked us up at Samurai and finally took us back to New Guinea where we got back to Port Moresby on April 1<sup>st</sup>. We



were there overnight and then a flying boat took us back to Townsville, Australia. Most of us went into the hospital. Some of us were in there two weeks and then given a week to ten days recuperative leave. This ends my tale of my early flying days in World War II. I felt very fortunate to have survived the two crashes which occurred a month apart on January 23<sup>rd</sup> and February 23<sup>rd</sup> particularly when men were killed and badly injured in the first crash. After World War II I stayed in the service and went on the Eniwetok Nuclear Test in 1948 and 1949 and was in the Korean War in 1951 and 1952 with an Engineer Combat Battalion. I later commanded this Engineer Combat Battalion. I finally retired from the service at the end of December 1969; 30 years after entering the service on November 8, 1939. During my service I was awarded the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Air Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, five Unit Citations and numerous other campaign and battle decorations. The service was good to me and I enjoyed the years I spent in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was very good. There are questions that I want to ask you to fill in some blanks. Let me go back and talk about your basic training. What all did you do in basic training?

Colonel Oliver

We didn't have basic training like they have now; at least I didn't. You were just trained in the unit you were in. I was being trained as a gunner. They were going to need some bombardiers and I was one of two or three that had college and they wanted to know if I wanted to be a bombardier. I said, "Yes." So they trained me as a bombardier there in the squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use the Norden bomb sight?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I thought most of the bombardiers were officers, was that true or not?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you were not an officer, is that correct?

Colonel Oliver

I wasn't to start with but I was commissioned in 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your basic training was not what we think of as basic training today but it was training to be a bombardier, right?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now your original training was on the B-24, is that correct?

Colonel Oliver

No, on a B-17.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you transfer to the B-24?

Colonel Oliver

When they took our planes away from us and sent us to pick up the B-24's to take to the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you crashed in that one B-24.

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, you got back to Port Moresby on April 1, 1942, then what did you do the rest of the war?

Colonel Oliver

I flew missions. I didn't fly until the 23<sup>rd</sup> again. I just flew missions all over the Pacific area down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you started flying again on April 23, 1942, right?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What outfit were you in at that point?

Colonel Oliver

It was the 435<sup>th</sup> Recon Squadron. Then we were all part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was out of where?

Colonel Oliver

The 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group but it all came out of the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you stationed when you were flying those missions?

Colonel Oliver

Mostly in Townsville, Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were some places that you went to on some of those missions?

Colonel Oliver

Just all over that end of the Pacific down there; Guadalcanal and Rabaul.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many missions did you fly?

Colonel Oliver

I've got the record somewhere but I think it was 50 something.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were all in B-17's?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said that you were a recon squadron; did you all do reconnaissance rather than bombing, or did you do both?

Colonel Oliver

Both.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would your reconnaissance consist of?

Colonel Oliver

Mainly looking for the Japanese to see where they were going to hit next.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do follow up after bombing missions to see how effective the bombing was?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You bombed Guadalcanal then prior to the invasion on August 7<sup>th</sup>?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about some of the other Solomon Islands; New Georgia or Bougainville or some of those?

Colonel Oliver

There was the Battle of Savo Island that we were involved in.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were bombing the Japanese ships at that point?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force?

Colonel Oliver

I guess it must have been.

Mr. Misenhimer

General Kenney?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

The crew that crashed into the swamp; did you stay with that same crew when you went back to flying in April of 1942?

Colonel Oliver

You flew with different crews in those days. You didn't stay just in one crew.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular that you recall from those missions there?

Colonel Oliver

No nothing in particular.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the mission where you crashed going to Rabaul; how many B-17's were involved in that?

Colonel Oliver

I think there were nine but two crashed and ran into each other on the runway during the storm while taking off. Two of us got to the target area. I don't know what happened to the others. It was too long ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

Only two of you got there then?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said that you were commissioned in 1943; tell me about that.

Colonel Oliver

I got a direct commission.

Mr. Misenhimer

As a Second Lieutenant?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what date; do you recall what month it might have been?

Colonel Oliver

I thought I would always remember those things but you don't. It's been too long ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the fact that you were a bombardier and the bombardier position called for a Lieutenant, is that why they gave you a direct commission?

Colonel Oliver

I don't know if there was a direct relationship to that or not.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you continue to be a bombardier after you were commissioned?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your plane ever seriously damaged on any of your missions?

Colonel Oliver

Not except for those two that we crashed.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean the ones that didn't crash. Were they seriously damaged by antiaircraft or enemy action?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your crew ever have any casualties on any of those missions?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

The plane that they are bringing back; is that the one that you all crashed in New Guinea?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have a name?

Colonel Oliver

No but somebody named it the *Swamp Ghost*.



Mr. Misenhimer

But that wasn't it there?

Colonel Oliver

No they didn't have names then like they did over in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your flight the first time and your first mission you crashed both of those times, right?

Colonel Oliver

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Clarence LeMieux was the Engineer and then I have another name of George Munroe.

Colonel Oliver

He was the navigator part of the time. Actually he was a pilot.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crashed into the swamp what was his position?

Colonel Oliver

He was the navigator.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have they brought this plane back yet?

Colonel Oliver

No. I had heard that it was pretty close to coming but then I heard the other day that it had been held up again but that they had gotten it loose from the people over there and it was going to be on the way shortly.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened to you in World War II?

Colonel Oliver

(laughing) I think that's about enough.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was quite an experience. I agree with you on that. Then you stayed in the Air Force.

What did you do in the Korean War?

Colonel Oliver

I was with an Engineer Combat Battalion in Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't in the Air Force then?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you transfer out of the Air Force?

Colonel Oliver

After I came back I wanted to still be in the service. I got a chance to stay in the National

Guard in Idaho. I joined this Engineer Combat Battalion and went to Engineer school.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in Korea?

Colonel Oliver

Mostly we built roads and airfields.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went over there when?

Colonel Oliver

I've forgotten when I was there but I think for 15 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Townsville, Australia, were the local Australians friendly to you all?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Colonel Oliver

Pretty much so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any experience with the Red Cross?

Colonel Oliver

Not much except they sold me a toothbrush that made me mad.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the Salvation Army?

Colonel Oliver

I didn't see them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Colonel Oliver

I saw a couple.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any big names?

Colonel Oliver

Yes but I don't remember who now, it's been too long ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Colonel Oliver

I've heard of her, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you didn't actually hear her on the radio?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall where you were then?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you come back to the States from overseas?

Colonel Oliver

I don't even remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, did you have a celebration?

Colonel Oliver

I guess we did; everybody else did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember where you were then?

Colonel Oliver

I was in a B-17 and we were flying somebody home that had been hemorrhaging or something and we were flying them home.

Mr. Misenhimer

From where?

Colonel Oliver

Probably from Peyote, Texas or there at Topeka, Kansas. I've forgotten where I was at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did some transporting of some people then?

Colonel Oliver

In an emergency like this one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever use your GI Bill for anything?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had reunions?

Colonel Oliver

I used to go to some but I quit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which outfit was that?

Colonel Oliver

That was with the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out in 1969 what did you do then?

Colonel Oliver

I moved to California and went into the real estate business.

Mr. Misenhimer

As a real estate broker?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you do that?

Colonel Oliver

Maybe ten years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have your own company there?

Colonel Oliver

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever join any of the real estate franchises?

Colonel Oliver

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time in World War II?

Colonel Oliver

Not really. It's just been too many years and I've gotten too old.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay. Well I want to thank you for your time today and that was quite an adventure you had over there. That was very interesting; I'm glad you had that written up. That was a big help.

Colonel Oliver

You're welcome.

*(end of interview)*

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