

John M. Olsen Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: This is Mark Cunningham. Today is November the 20th, 2014. I'm interviewing Mr. John M. Olsen at his home at 1818 Wycliffe Drive, Houston, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Johnny, right? You go by Johnny?

JOHN M. OLSEN: Yes, I do.

MC: First off, I want to say thank you for your interview, doing the interview with us.

JO: My pleasure.

MC: But more than that, I thank you for your service to your country.

JO: I consider it a privilege.

MC: It's an honor to interview you guys. So let's start right at the beginning. When were you born?

JO: I was born November the 9th, 1926.

MC: You were the young one.

JO: In Sabine, Texas.

MC: Sabine, Texas. OK, so you're a native Texan.

JO: I'm a native Texan.

MC: And, what was your parents' name?

JO: My parents were Matt and Annette Olsen.

MC: OK. Do you have siblings, or did you have siblings?

JO: I had two brothers: one named Albert, one named Charles.

Both were -- no, Albert was a veteran of World War II and Charles was a little bit younger; he came a long a little bit later. They have both passed away. I'm the only remaining member of my family.

MC: OK. Where were you on Pearl Harbor Day?

JO: I was at a -- I was coming home from a movie, and I was at a service -- just walking through a service station in Beaumont, Texas -- that's where we lived at the time. I was 15 years old, and I heard the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, and I thought, where's Pearl Harbor? I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. But I very soon found out.

MC: So you were 15 at the time?

JO: I was 15.

MC: OK, that would put you about, what, a sophomore in high school?

JO: Actually, I was a junior. I graduated when I was 16 years old.

MC: OK. And, when did you go into the service? Back up -- yeah, go -- when did you go into the service?

JO: Well, I graduated from high school in 1943, in May, and I turned 17 in November of that year, and I wanted my dad to sign a paper so I could go in the Navy, but he wouldn't. He wouldn't sign. So, I mean, there's several things took place, but in February of 1944, after taking the Air Corps examination for cadets, I went into... I thought I was going into the Air Corps, but from the time I took the test and before they decided they had enough active members, and I went into the Air Corps enlisted reserve, in February of 1944. Then we got -- you know, it was quite a disappointment, but there wasn't anything I could do about it. So I waited awhile, and we had a letter from the Air Corps telling us that, if we wanted to, we could sign up for the ASTRP -- not the ASTP, but the ASTRP, which is on -- what is it? Anyway, it was a reserve program. They'd send us to college; we'd be in uniform; we'd live in barracks. We'd do everything like the military, but we wouldn't get paid. But all our meals, all our college, everything would be paid. So, I decided to accept that program, and on June --

MC: Did you have to go into the Army after you got out?

JO: Supposedly, we would go; this was the same as the Air Corps cadet training. Supposedly, we'd go from there right into pilot training. But, I was on -- I decided to accept that,

and on June 6, 1944, I was in D-Day. I was in the railroad station at Fort Smith, Arkansas, because they were sending us to the University of Arkansas. And went on to the university, and we had just regular classes, college classes, but we also had military training at the same time. After a couple of semesters there, some of us were getting antsy, you know. We're just going to school, and the war's going to be over and we're not -- that sounds kind of silly, but that's the way we felt at the time. We were just kids. The war's going to be over and we're not going to get there. And we go to town in uniform and all the people in Fayetteville, Arkansas, knew that we were there going to school, you know. And they'd say sarcastic things, like, "What are you going to do, square root the Japs?" That kind of trash. And some of us got to thinking what we wanted. We wanted to get on active duty. So, with a lot of complaints going on, we got a letter from the Air Corps telling us that we could resign from the Air Corps and this reserve, and just go into straight Enlisted Reserve Corps, ERC, and they would send us to active duty in a very short time. So there was 255 of us in that program at the University of Arkansas. A lot of guys were saying they wanted to do that. But at the end of the day when it actually happened, in December of 1944, there was

one guy standing out there while all the other guys went to classes, one guy that actually accepted that transfer. That was yours truly. And you know, they said, "Well, you'll be sent to do whatever you're best suited for." But we knew we were going for the infantry, because that's where they needed people. So they sent me home and said, "You'd be" -- that was in December -- "you'll be hearing from them shortly." Well, on January 22, I went to Fort Sam Houston and was on active duty (inaudible). I was on - - entered active duty on January 22, 1945.

MC: Active duty, and you were doing...

JO: They sent me to Fort Sam Houston for assignment somewhere. And, you know, we were hoping -- I was hoping -- it'd be something like the artillery. They told you, as I said before, "wherever you're best suited."

MC: When was this, '44?

JO: This was in January of '45. And you know, the war in Europe was just about over, and things were pretty hot in the Pacific, with Okinawa and Iwo. And now, we knew that, you know, that they were going as cannon fodder. It just - - we knew that's where we would be going, because we were going to the infantry. But the cadre sergeant there at Fort Sam says, "You can forget about all that stuff about 'where best suited.'" Says, "You're going to be going to

the infantry." So sure enough, in about a week, I was sent to -- it was Camp Hood then, and sent there for supposedly 15 weeks of basic training.

MC: What did you think of that?

JO: You know, it was pretty rough, but after you are through it and all, it wasn't that bad, as long as you did what you were told. You just do what you're told and don't get cute, and... One [little?] thing that happened right after -- I hadn't been there hardly any time, and I had a weekend pass. (laughs) And they came to use to see my girlfriend and I went back -- they had something they call Travel Bureau then, people would, if they were going away, a soldier wanted to go, they let him ride with them for a small amount of money. So I did that and left here to Houston and headed for Temple, the guy told me. Well I'd been tired from the basic training and all, and I fell asleep. And first thing I know, [you got?], "Say, soldier, here we are!" "OK." I grabbed my gear and jumped out of the car and he took off. And I looked up, I was across the street from the Waco bus station. (laughter)

JO: [I have?] 60 miles [and two?]. I had my pass, ended at midnight; I was 60 miles in Temple; I needed to be in...

MC: Fort Sam?

JO: No, at Fort Hood at midnight.

MC: And where was Hood? Hood's in...

JO: Temple, near Temple. And so when I got the [orderly?] room and I was going to sign in, it was 2:30 by that time. And some guy that was in the previous cycle said, "Oh man, don't sign in at 2:30." He said, "They don't check these things; just sign in at midnight. They'll never know." Oh, OK, you know, he's been in here awhile and he knows. But I go down to the bulletin board the next morning, there's my name up there for KP. So I go around to the first sergeant: "Why am I on KP?" He said, "Come on, Olsen, I'm not stupid." He said, "I checked the book at midnight; your name wasn't on there. I checked it this morning, and there it is." Says, "You're on KP." So that was my introduction into not following the rules. (laughs) But we had our -- pardon?

MC: OK, after basic training, where?

JO: Well, before -- I mean, we had 15 weeks, supposedly. Well, right at the end of 15 weeks, they extended it two weeks. So we actually ended up with 17 weeks of basic training, and the last month was all bivouac. Killer's college, really.

MC: What's killer's college?

JO: That's where you're actually going through infiltration courses with live ammunition.

MC: OK, crawling under.

JO: Crawling under. And they had this village set up where, you know, you'd go through it and torch the popup and you had live ammunition, and, you know, having to learn to be quick to identify the target and shoot it [and everything?]. So then we finished up basic training after 17 weeks, and we thought we were on our way to overseas. But then Congress passed the resolution, some sort, that if you were under 19 years old, they couldn't send you overseas into combat unless you'd had six months of training. Well, there was quite a few of us that only had four months of training. So they sent us this way: "You're not going overseas now," and they sent us to Camp Howze, Texas, which is up near the Oklahoma border. It's near Paris, Texas.

MC: OK, and that was in the wintertime, right?

JO: That was in -- no, that was -- let's see. We finished basic training, so now it's in July or -- June or July, the summer of 1945. The war in Europe was over, but the one in the Pacific was still going strong. So we were supposed to be there for another -- till we had six months of training. But I was in the training one day and I heard a couple members of the cadre saying, "Hey, you know those kids they just shipped in here, they're supposed to get the

additional training?" Yeah, what about it?" "Well, we're not going to have to mess with them. They're going to ship them out next week." So I went back and told my buddies that, and they said, "Oh, no, man, we're going to be here till the" -- but it turned out that that rumor was true. Within a week, we were on our way to Fort Ord, California. And we spent 10 days in Fort Ord, and they put us on a ship.

MC: Remember the name of the ship?

JO: USS *Starlight*. Put us on the ship, dressed in winter uniforms -- and this was in July. And we thought -- well, we thought all kinds of things. Surely weren't going to the Aleutians or somewhere like that; wasn't anything going on. But I guess it was just that, whoever observing these troop movements, it was just to confuse them, because we weren't at sea very long. They told us we were going to the South Pacific.

MC: OK, now, *Starlight* was a troop ship?

JO: Yes, it was a troop carrier. USS *Starlight*, carried around --

MC: How long were you in that ship?

JO: Twenty-one days.

MC: And where did you end up?

JO: We ended up in Manila.

MC: OK, now how were the conditions on that ship? Was it...?

JO: Well, they were kind of tough. I mean, the food and -- [one?], the showers. You could only take a fresh water shower during various restricted times. But you could take a saltwater shower any time -- but anybody's ever had a saltwater shower, knows that's not worth a darn. So, but, the tough part was, you know, our bunks were down in the very bottom of the ship, and we just couldn't live with that. So we weren't out at sea more than one or two days, and we started sleeping on deck. But, you know, you kept getting rain squalls, so you'd have to grab everything and go below. But some of us, a group of us, about eight or ten, found that there's a captain's launch on the deck.

MC: A what?

JO: Captain's launch, a small boat. And there was room under it that we could get under there and sleep under there. So we hauled our gear under there and stayed. We'd take turns going to eat, and so forth, and we spent the rest of the trip under there. So, that wasn't too bad. I mean, you know, it was sleeping on steel deck, but (laughs) cot's not much better. So, and then we arrived in the Philippine islands in late July.

MC: OK, now is that where you got into this Recovered Personnel Detachment?

JO: Yeah. We first went to just a replacement depot, and we were only there a few days, and they called out a group of us. They told us, based on our Army general classification test and some other things, and they selected -- at that time, there was about 250 people sent to the 29th Replacement Depot to form recovery teams to be sent with the invasion of Japan. As the troops, combat troops, secured a prison, we were supposed to take the prisoners of war, get them back to the --

MC: OK, now I read a little bit about it. Did you do any of that in Manila? Did you see any of the POWs that were captured in the Philippines or the --

JO: Well, we had [when to know?], not before I went to Japan but after we came back from Japan, we were stationed out at Clark Air Force Base and they still had Japanese POWs working out there. They had some POWs when we were at the replacement depot. In fact, when we --

MC: These were American POWs?

JO: No, I'm talking about Japanese POWs.

MC: But when you were in Mani--

JO: There were no -- I didn't see any American POWs till I got [home from?] Japan. And we were only at that depot a few days. We got all of our assignments and our equipment and

everything, and our orders. We had our orders, except we didn't know what date we were going to invade. But --

MC: OK, so you were in Manila preparing to invade Japan?

JO: Right. We had our orders. We didn't know anything about who we'd go with, or anything that told you, but, "You're going to be with invasion forces and you'll get the details later. But you're going to be teams of four enlisted men: one of them is an interpreter and one officer" -- that he'd lead the team. We'd have a Jeep; we'd have machine guns all manned -- we were really well-equipped. They had gave us all watches and everything. This, for you know, just a private in the Army, that was -- (laughs) that's kind of unusual. But then on the 6th of August, war ended. They dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and we thought, well, man, now it's over. But the Japs didn't quit until they dropped the one on Nagasaki, and then they quit. I can remember the day they dropped that first one. I was in the mess hall and the PA said, started announcing, that they had just dropped a bomb on Japan that was the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT. You know, I'm 18 years old. I had no idea, but boy, I knew TNT was tough. Twenty-thousand tons of TNT. Well, you know, it was a real disaster for the Japs, and when they dropped that second one, they quit. And so, then, very soon after -- well, I guess near the end

of August, I think, on about the third week in August, they load us on a ship and we went to Japan.

MC: What ship was that?

JO: The USS *Botetourt*. B-O-T-E-T-O --

MC: (laughs) USS what?

JO: B-O-T-E-T-O-R-T [sic].

MC: OK. As a part of the occupation.

JO: Pardon?

MC: Part of the occupation force.

JO: Right.

MC: So you were some of the first guys that got into Japan after the war ended, is that correct?

JO: Right. The only ones that were there ahead of us were the ones that jumped in, like the 11th Airborne, those people. But, we sailed into Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. And while MacArthur and all the Japanese dignitaries were on the *Missouri*, we went right by it, and our troop commander had us all lined up on the starboard side of the ship, [so that?] --

MC: You were actually at the surrender? You were in the harbor -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JO: Right when they were signing the papers.

MC: That's pretty neat.

JO: We were going right by the ship, and I'll say 1,500 troops standing up there at attention while we went by it -- and I don't know if there were 1,500 on that ship; this was on *Starlight*. But anyway, the troop commander had us stand attention and told us what was going on, you know: "There's the *Missouri*. MacArthur and all the Japanese dignitaries are over there right now, signing the peace treaty." And we docked in the -- here's Tokyo, here's Yokohama, and then the bay is like this. Tokyo and Yokohama are not that far apart, but we docked in Yokohama. And one thing that impressed me was, the bay just had a lot of baby, what they call "baby flattops," that -- baby small aircraft carriers --

MC: Japanese.

JO: Japanese, that were sunk in the bay, you know. They had been bombed and sunk in the bay. So that was -- we went to Yokohama and almost the day we got there, we started our work. Well, I guess not for the first couple of weeks. [I mean?], the first couple of weeks, we went outside the barracks, or where we were [poured?]. They weren't barracks; they were just old, bombed-out buildings. We had --

MC: Were any -- fresh water or anything like that?

JO: Yeah, we had water, but we didn't... Yeah, we had water and stuff.

MC: But you're not on a ship; you're on shore, and --

JO: We're on shore, and we don't have any fresh food at all. They're doing the best they can with rations, but then they're heating it up, so it's -- you're not eating cold stuff. But we were on them for about two weeks. We were on just military rations: K-rations, C-rations, D-rations...

MC: Bunks, or sleeping on the floor, or what?

JO: Oh, we had bunks. We had bunks in this building. I don't know what the building had been before, but, now I vaguely remember how -- no, we had bunks, for sure.

MC: What about the destruction? Did you see the bo--

JO: You know that Yokohama was -- a lot of buildings were flattened and all the debris -- when we got there, they had already cleared out the Japs. They were very good about clearing out the debris as soon the building was bombed, and contrast that with Manila, where the Filipinos were saying, "You bombed it; you clean it up." There, even when I left Manila a year later, all the bombed-out buildings were still about like they were when we got there.

MC: OK now, this -- you're in Japan for occupation.

JO: Right. Now the Japanese --

MC: Was this group, this Recovered Personnel Detachment -- were you processing American POWs?

JO: No, our particular team was processing Allied prisoners of war. We went --

MC: So that'd be everybody.

JO: Yeah. In fact, we went up to, for the most part, we went up to Sendai.

MC: To the what?

JO: Sendai. S-E-N-D-A-I. It's up on northern Honshu, up in the northern part of Japan. And the prisoners, they had left their camps, a lot of them, and come down to the harbor. And we were on USS *Rescue*, which was a hospital ship, and we processed a lot of prisoners. You know --

MC: Not just Americans.

JO: No, these were all, almost all -- well, we had -- the Americans that we had were some civilians, construction workers that were captured on Guam. Excuse me. They, of all the people we repatriated, they were in the worst shape of any that I saw. They, guys that weighed 200 pounds, were down to 135. They were malnourished. Their knees were just, be a big knot [for them?]. And you've seen some pictures of malnourished people -- that's the way they were. Their legs looked like sticks; their knees, a big knot. They'd been tortured. They had people on the ship

interviewing the ones that knew of any atrocities, and they'd bring them about and those that knew, they'd interview them, record it, and all that thing. You know, they'd do things like, if they got a sore on their arm, the Japs would soak cotton in alcohol and put it on there and set it on fire. That's how they treated it. They'd also did water torture, where they'd stuff a water hose down their throat, pour all the water in they could possibly stand, then beat them on the stomach until they killed them. They'd also -- [I don't know?]. One guy told that they'd stood a fellow out -- and it was very cold in northern Japan -- and stood him out in the cold and threw water on him until he froze to death. That's the kind of thing they did.

MC: And you're talking to all these guys and they're telling you these stories?

JO: Well, I sat there and listened while they were telling them to the officer, military officer that was recording it for whatever reason.

MC: And what were you doing?

JO: Well, I was doing the paperwork and so forth, for repatriating the guys. Like, we had 140 Chinese soldiers that we were processing. Most of the soldiers were in good health, but they came aboard the hospital ship because that

was our -- it was our staging area, you know. And we'd get them onboard, arrange for transportation, and they'd take them to --

MC: Now, did you ever get into the actual POW camps? Did you see any of those?

JO: No, I didn't get into any of the POW camps.

MC: I did a little bit of reading. Let me ask you a couple of questions from what I read. What was this "Operation Blacklist"?

JO: You know, that's... I'm not exactly sure, [something?] about that myself. I'm not exactly sure --

MC: It had to do with this program, though, right?

JO: It had to do with this program. I think that, you know, when we were in the replacing depot in Japan -- I mean, in Manila, they told us, and they had names of 38,000 Allied prisoners: American soldiers, Australian, and civilians. They actually had names that the Japanese had furnished to them, and that was that blacklist. But it ended up being like 45,000 instead of the 38 they told us initially. I never really heard it referred to as a blacklist, but I know that the people that we processed at Sendai -- and Sendai is where that big tsunami was, you remember? A few years back, it just wiped out a big part of Japan.

MC: Yes.

JO: That's where it took place. But, it's an industrial city. A lot of coal mines in there, and a lot of these guys were working in the coal mines. So we had Greeks, Filipinos, Chinese, one Swiss couple; so it was just a mixture. Some of the people that were there had been on holiday in the Mediterranean, and they were sunk. The holiday ship they were on was sunk by an American -- I mean, a German sub, and why, I don't know, but then they were shipped overland to Japan and held as prisoners in Japan. Quite a few -- I don't remember how many there was, but we were...

MC: You guys had to provide these guys, these prisoners, with clothes, medical... Were you involved in that?

JO: It was our job. Actually up there at Sendai, I was just there, and other parts of our team were also, because I was just there by myself. So we had to work with the -- well, with the captain of the ship and then later, when I was in a [newer?] part of -- [outside?] of Yokohama, I had to work with the Army units there. Practically had to beg to get things for these people, because, you know, if you have a commander and he has a certain supply and he's limited to that supply, and it's for his troops, and you're going on saying, "We need blankets and clothing for these guys," he doesn't want to give it to you because he's not going to get it replaced, probably. So I didn't even get -- I

remember it was in -- when I got back from the -- off the hospital ship, they sent me out to a place that they said at the time was a Japanese (inaudible) West Point, the training area and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

MC: For the Japs?

JO: -- and all, and we had a lot of those Allied prisoners, were there, and I had to see that they were fed and clothed, and then arranged for their transportation. And they went from there, to Manila, and then home, with --

MC: OK, now, how long did all this take? How long did it take to get those 36,000, or 38,000 troops processed?

JO: That thing you read probably said they were all, [all there in?] three weeks.

MC: That's what it said.

JO: But I was in Japan for two months, and I was --

MC: And you were repatriating Allied prisoners of war?

JO: -- the whole time. I guess they, probably, the actual prisoners of war, the soldiers and all, they probably got them out first, you know.

MC: But these were civilians, and they got caught up in the war, just the wrong place at the wrong times, type thing?

JO: Yeah, and like, we had a group of Indian students that were captured in China, and they were making them go to school, training them for the use of the Japanese, whatever they

were going to assign them to. We had some Filipino students that were the same way. I don't know; the Indian students, about 30 of them, and about the same number of Filipino students. I don't think they were quite in as big a hurry to get them repatriated as they were the soldiers, the ones that were actually taken in combat. Because I left there, I left Japan and on November 4, 1945...

MC: You'd been there --

JO: For two months.

MC: Two months?

JO: Yeah.

MC: How did you leave?

JO: Ship flew on a DC-3 from Atsugi Air Base in Tokyo to the Clark Air Force Base in Philippines. [As?] we landed on Okinawa to refuel -- if you're familiar with a DC-3, you know it wasn't a great flight. (laughs) But you know, [in the?] Air Force, they just have these, sort of, not benches, but webbed seats along the long -- both sides of the airplane.

MC: Not exactly a comfortable flight. (laughs)

JO: Not exactly first-class.

MC: That's a long flight, isn't it?

JO: Pretty long. I don't remember how long it was, but I know we had to -- we left Tokyo, had to land in Okinawa to

refuel, so, you know, it was a pretty long flight. I don't know how long it is. It was a long flight. And then when we got to the Philippines, for awhile after we got there, I heard the Recovery Personnel Detachment was still a unit, that didn't really have anything to do, you know. So, the CID --

MC: CID, what's that?

JO: Criminal Investigation Division. They had some work that they had to care for, and they needed somebody to do it. So there was a group of about 15 of us that, from this Recovery Personnel Detachment, that they made investigators. Said, "Today, you're a rifleman; tomorrow, you're an investigator." (laughs)

MC: OK, now what were you investigating? War crimes?

JO: No. (laughs) No, there was some amendment to the [Incident?] Persons Act, that allowed for guerrilla fighters in the Philippines to be paid like soldiers that three and a half years that the Japanese occupied the Philippines, if they could prove that they were actually guerrilla fighters. Then our job was to check them out, find out if they really were, or, the guy himself or his widow or his family. So we had to go...

MC: So this was after you'd moved back to Manila?

JO: This was after, back in Manila, and we're stationed at Clark Air Force Base in some barracks that they were no longer using because they'd practically emptied that place. And we were -- I was, at that time, I was a private, and I was a corporal when we got back, because I was technician fourth grade before I left there. But they issued us US buttons, that we put a US button on and we didn't wear any rank, so that we could come and go and nobody knew what our rank was. The reason for that was because we could get into places. They'd think we were officers or something. They would allow us into places. We'd walk up there and says, "Hey, I'm a corporal"; it's "Get lost," you know. So we just wore US buttons. In fact, I notice on my service record that one of the things they say was, "issued the US lapel button on" whenever date it was. And so we'd go in there, our commanding officer would assign a case to us, give us the name of the guy, tell us what little information they had, and then we'd go all over Manila and northern Luzon, trying to find -- checking libraries and so forth, trying to find information on (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MC: Was there enough information that you could actually validate?

JO: It was pretty sketchy. You mostly had to go by interviewing the neighbors and people that knew them, and sometimes, you know, you'd find -- I remember one guy claimed he was, well I guess he was, a colonel in the Filipino Army, but he was also a collaborator. He was, he claimed to be, a guerrilla fighter, and he was collaborating with the Japanese all the time, and, you know, we found from interviewing several people that knew he was feeding the Japanese information, also, you know. He didn't get his money, I guarantee you. And this went on to -- we were doing that for a pretty good while. And then I guess the officers decided we had too good a deal, so they took over the investigation part and made us just the drivers for the officers, and that's what we did till we were waiting for a trip home, which we got in October of 1946. Another ship, and I can't remember the name of the ship I came home on.

MC: So you came home on a troop -- you went over on a troop ship, came home on a troop ship?

JO: Right.

MC: Where'd you land?

JO: San Francisco. And then troop-trained to San Antonio. So we were mustered out in San Antonio, and --

MC: And when was that?

JO: It was in October of 1946, but I didn't actually get -- my discharge says December 6, 1946.

MC: OK, so you were in two years? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MC: You went in '44?

JO: Little bit more than two years. Because they count them. I hadn't counted on [it?], service from the date I went, even though it was reserve duty. I counted, for whatever reason, two years and something. Two years plus. [Went and?] added 12 months over the two overseas bars on my uniform, so that's 12 months. I was overseas more than 12 months, but they only [use?] six month [thing from us?], you know.

MC: Now, you're looking back on those days today, it's been -- a lot of years have passed. What are your thoughts?

JO: Well, you know, I thought I was really glad to be there. I was glad that I had -- at least I didn't get into combat. I was glad of that, because I was a little guy. I weighed 138 pounds and I was five foot eight or five foot nine inches tall. I'm much shorter than that now. But my worry was -- we had pretty good basic training and all, but this was when I was first getting into the islands, you know.

MC: So you would have been, when you got out, you were around 19, 20 years old?

JO: I was 19 when I got out, yeah. And turned 20 just very soon after I got out. But I was worried about hand-to-hand combat; that's what bothered me. I wouldn't mind, you know -- we're out here, 150 yards shooting at each other -- I wasn't scared of that. (laughs) Maybe I should have been, but I was only 18 years old. I wasn't scared of that, but boy, the thought of having to lock horns with a Japanese soldier that was trained in judo -- it didn't appeal to me at all. And then I'd gotten injured in killer's college, and I was, when I left to go overseas, I was limping. And my mother was really worried about that, but I said, "Oh, by the time I get there I'm going to be fine." But, and then, I'd like to say, and no I didn't get into combat, but I felt like I did do something useful. You know, I'm proud of the fact that I was there by the *Missouri* when that treaty was signed, and --

MC: It was a heck of a job to bring these guys back, people back into (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) POW camps for, what, three and a half years?

JO: Some of them more. And here I was, I was a year and a half out of high school. Eighteen years old. I didn't know "sic'em" from come here.

MC: You knew it as a lifetime opportunity, once in a lifetime happening, for sure, right?

JO: In fact, I was at this place I said was a Japanese West Point, and my officer contacted me, and he said, "You need to come down here to Yokohama, because one of your teammates is out here trying to" -- he had those 140 Chinese soldiers quartered in a school out there, and he said, "They're very unruly and they're difficult to deal with, [Oley?] just" -- his name was [Oleson?]; they just called him Oley. "He's having a hard time; he just ain't making it. So you've got to come down here and help him." And those guys, they were difficult. They would go to chow and they ate mostly rice. Think it was in a bowl. That's what they wanted, and that's what they got, and they ate most of it with their hands. They'd throw it all over the place and they didn't want to clean it up, you know. I guess they thought once they got out of that prison camp, they didn't have to be told to do anything.

MC: OK, and these were Chinese soldiers, right? Chinese soldiers taken prisoner by the Japanese. Those guys were very lucky to be alive.

JO: Absolutely. And they were treated very harshly while they were in Japanese prison camps, but then some of them got mad at us and told us we treated them worse than the Japanese did. They wanted to set their own -- you can understand, they'd been in such strict rules for three and

a half years or four years. They didn't want to be told what to do. They didn't want to get up in the morning, and they didn't want to be told to get up. So you couldn't [run them?]. We didn't have any -- we couldn't use force, or anything, so you just had to cajole them and you just had to kind of talk them into doing the right thing. And they didn't speak English! And we didn't speak Chinese. So that was difficult, but we managed.

MC: I got one question. I want to back up a minute. The note I got, you used an acronym called A-F-I-N-E-S-P-A-C. What is that? Or somebody --

JO: A-F-W-E-S, AFWESPAC headquarters. MacArthur's headquarters. A-F-W-E-S-P-A-C. AFWESPAC headquarters.

MC: OK. And this was all under the command of MacArthur, right?

JO: Right.

MC: This whole thing.

JO: Yeah, in fact, it was --

MC: Hold on a minute, let me --

JO: Oh, OK --

(break in audio)

MC: OK, what you got? Oh, this is your discharge.

JO: Yeah. Headquarters, Recovery Personnel, Armed Forces Western Pacific. That's the AFWESPAC.

MC: So that was... Separation center, Fort Sam Houston,
December 4, 1946.

JO: Right. But I was already -- I'd already been home a month
by December 6, so, even though it says that. And that
other acronym that I used earlier, I said I couldn't
remember what it was, it was Army Specialized Training
Reserve Program.

MC: OK, now there's one other thing I want to go back and ask
you. I read that Halsey's fleet was involved in some of
this stuff out there, wasn't it?

JO: Yeah, but I don't know to what extent, unless the hospital
ship that I was on was probably part of Halsey's fleet.
And there were other hospital ships too, operating. [And
they?] just had hospital ships at Yokosuka, but they [did?]
-- you know, they had these prison camps all over Japan,
and...

MC: I read somewhere there were 140 prison camps. They
estimated 140, 38 -- but now I didn't understand. That
38,000, was that Allied prisoners or was that US prisoners,
you know? You remember?

JO: The 38,000 there, they first told us about was supposedly
Allied prisoners of war. That's everybody. And I think
the 45,000 which was the final number, I think that also
was --

MC: Allied?

JO: -- inclusive of all the Australian, British, American...

MC: Well, I think we've pretty much got a pretty good view of your military service.

JO: Yeah, I hope so. [You know?], for the use of my family, I wrote a whole history of my service, had quite a few pages, but I did it for the family and there's things in there that, you know, wouldn't be interesting in this sort of thing. This kind of interview is better, it says what I did and...

MC: OK. Well, you will get a copy of this.

JO: OK. Will this be...?

MC: CD.

JO: A CD, oh, that's good, because then...

MC: Will be a CD. Now, I don't know when it's going to be, but you will get it. Let me go ahead and end this tape. I want to say, first off, again, thank you for your service, and thank you for doing the interview, on behalf of the museum.

JO: A lot of people thank me for my service, and I consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to serve my country. You notice, my serial number is 1A228370. It doesn't have a three in front of it; I didn't get drafted.

MC: (laughs) You volunteered.

JO: Nobody in my family -- and my father was in World War I -- nobody in my family ever got drafted, not that that matters or is wrong with being drafted. But like I say, I couldn't wait to get there. I don't know why.

END OF AUDIO FILE