

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK
AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT C. OLSEN
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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TRANSCRIPT BY

BRIAN OAKES

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Dr. Robert C. Olsen on August 8, 1994, at New London, Connecticut, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Robert Lipschitz: Robert Lipschitz.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Why did your parents immigrate to the United States?

Robert Olsen: They came to the United States because, ... [of] course, there was the Depression here, but, I think there was a depression worldwide, ... and, in Norway, jobs were scarce, and lots of people left Europe during that time and went to Ellis Island, and then, scouted off to different parts of this country, because this was a growing country then, in spite of the Depression. Maybe this was prior to the Depression. ... This was prior to the First World War, I think.

KP: Why did they settle in New London?

RO: My father came to New London because he had a cousin here who worked for the Merit Chapman Scott Company. ... He was there and my father got a job at the Merit Chapman Scott Company ... when he was a teenager. ... His father had been a ship's carpenter in Norway and traveled all [over] the world. He died in South America. So, my father was a farmer, a sailor, a fisherman, and a carpenter, and he came to work here as a carpenter, and another fellow also named Olsen taught him to be a deep sea diver, or a hard hat, and so forth. ... So, he worked for them for a long time. He was the foreman of the carpenters when they built that red lighthouse you can see right out there and they built lots of these docks and bridges around here. ... In about 1920 or '22, he and a friend established their own building business and built several houses in this neighborhood and he remained in his own business, building, repairing, and remodeling houses until he died.

KP: He never retired.

RO: Well, semi-retired. ... I told you I had a brother who went to Rutgers, who was two years older than me, graduated in 1940. He was a chemist. ... During the Second World War, ... he became a colonel in the Chemical Warfare Service, out in the Pacific. ... My mother died young and my father, being a Norwegian immigrant, didn't have lots of American friends. So, [he] was pretty unhappy, of course, with the death of my mother, but, I had a younger sister who was home, and she continued to make a home for my father, but, she died real young, too. She died when she was twenty-three, when I was an intern, ... died of a ruptured appendix, back in those days. ... I was an intern, and it was easier for my brother to quit his job for a while, and come back, and help my father, which he did, and he got to like the business, and he gradually took over that business and made it a much bigger business. ... My father continued to work for him until he died. My father only knew how to work. ...

KP: Did he ever go sailing?

RO: Well, he'd go out with me, occasionally. In fact, I used to own a sailboat before I took up

golf and he'd go out with me, occasionally. ... Occasionally, we'd go fishing on one of these party boats that we use here, all those white things you see out there, lobster pots. ... He still had an accent when he died, but, he did run a business, and was well-liked around here, and so forth, helped to build up this end of town. When I was a child, this part of town, where I'm living now, was mainly a summer resort area, with ...

KP: Bungalows?

RO: ... Not bungalows, big houses, bigger than those you see over there. They were all summer houses, too. ... There's one over there that looks like a castle, ... like Newport. You've heard of the Pavilion? and so forth. It's a mile or so from here, a huge place. We call them summer shacks, but, they're really mansions, I'll tell you, and, down here, there were some large houses. There's a chapel up here. You had your own chapel, and you had your own little hotel, up the corner here, and then, there were bungalows, in addition to the hotel. ... This part of town was built from the 1930s on. [It is] still ... being built up. So, that's how come he came to New London, and my mother had a friend in Mystic, ... on the edge of Mystic, toward the mouth of the ... Mystic River, and it's quite an art center, now. ... She had a friend who worked there. So, when she came ... to the United States, she went to Mystic, until she got her own job, over there in one of those houses, [then, she] met my father. I'm not sure where they met, but, [it was] around here, could have been down around Cape Cod, because he helped to build the Cape Cod Canal, too, but, anyway, they lived here. ... When I was two years old, they decided [that] they'd made some money here and [they] wanted to go back to Norway, which they did, bag and baggage. Even those great, big, old kitchen stoves you hear about ... in these antique shops, they took that along, but, they stayed there for less than a year and came back. I don't remember going there.

KP: They came to the United States with the intention of returning to Norway.

RO: ... They liked this place better and came back in less than a year. ... I don't remember going or coming.

KP: Did your father ever talk about it?

RO: Oh, sure. You see, he was the oldest of twelve children, and some of those brothers came over here, and helped, and worked at this same place, and, when they made enough, they went back and got married. ...

KP: They resettled in Norway.

RO: Yeah, and they were all quite successful. Some were farmers, teachers, clergymen. One stayed here, went to Columbia, and became a dentist, and practiced in Brooklyn, and went to Norway, and retired. ... He has since died, but, his wife is still alive over there. So, that's how these people came from Norway as immigrants in the late '10s. ... [It] must have been in the late '10s, because I was born ... in 1920, you see, so, they probably came [around] ... 1910, something like that.

KP: Was there a large Norwegian community in this area? How large was it, compared to the other ethnic communities in New London?

RO: I would guess the biggest community was Italian and [the] Irish [community] was big. Norwegians, now, off the top of my head, I'd have to think [there were] between twenty-five and fifty families.

KP: It was relatively small. Most of your friends were not Norwegian when you were growing up.

RO: No, oh, no.

KP: Were most of your friends Italian and Irish?

RO: No, ... and, you know, American, you know, Irish, English. ... My father told me [that] there were more Norwegians in Chicago than there were in Norway, so, a lot of Norwegians went out to Minnesota and Wisconsin. ...

KP: Many also settled in Brooklyn.

RO: ... My uncle was a dentist down there. He had mostly Norwegian patients and he spoke Norwegian well, you see. He advised me to go to medical school there.

KP: Was Norwegian spoken in your home as a child?

RO: No. My parents did, occasionally, and, therefore, I could understand lots of Norwegian. I think there were some Norwegian things that I might not have understood, but, they even spoke in mostly English, even though it wasn't great English. It's certainly not like it is today, where they have bi-lingual education and so forth. My English might not be as great as someone whose parents were natives of the United States, not Indians, but others, Anglo-Saxons, because all I heard was sort of broken English at home, but, it wasn't a primary [language]. I never spoke in Norwegian. I knew a few words, but, that's it. I couldn't read it, either. My father [received] ... letters from Norway and he had the Norwegian newspaper that's published in Brooklyn, still is, called the (Nordistitlen?), I think. He could read it, but, I couldn't read it, nor could my brother and sister.

KP: English was your only language.

RO: Absolutely, except for French.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your father's business?

RO: Okay, as far as our life was concerned, I didn't know there was a depression. ... Of course, the Depression hit New York City, around Wall Street, terribly, but, here, lots of people lost their

house and their real estate, and the banks took them over, and, since my father was in that business, these houses had become quite run down, and he was fixing houses for [the] banks. [He] didn't get paid much. ...

KP: However, he was able to find steady work.

RO: Steady work, constantly, yeah. He didn't have enough money, I don't think, to send me off to Rutgers, but, ... that was never discussed. You know, going to college was not part of their financial planning. We had to go to high school, but, college was rare, and more wealthy people went, and I went to Rutgers because my brother did. ... He got a scholarship and so did I.

KP: What do you think would have happened if you and your brother had not received scholarships? Do you think that you might not have gone to college?

RO: ... That's right. We might not have gone, ... but, I did well in high school, you see. [In] the high school I went to, everybody had to take a college preparatory program, including four years of French.

KP: Was the curriculum any different because it was a technical school?

RO: Instead of having a study hour, we had two hours in various kinds of shops and mechanical drawing, but, otherwise, [we had] four hours of regular college preparatory courses. ... I was quite surprised, when I got to college, to find that lots of kids hadn't had these things, going to schools where they had only electives.

KP: Were you surprised?

RO: Yeah. I was exempt from the chemistry finals ... when I got to Rutgers, mathematics, and so forth, algebra. ... The weakness in New London was English and we all had to take six weeks of special English when we got there. Speaking of the population here, we had a big Polish and Russian population here, too. That fellow I showed you, with the picture of my brother, he was Polish. Now, back in those days, Polish guys were athletes in the boxing club. I don't know if you remember the seven blocks of granite at Fordham. You've heard of that? Fordham and NYU had the toughest football teams in the country. Fordham had the seven blocks of granite, the nick-name. They were all Polish and [a few] Italians might have been thrown in. So, they were really tough football players, good basketball players. ... We lived out here. Nobody had cars then. ... There were two cars in high school when I went to high school, and that's downtown, and there was a trolley that came around here.

KP: Did you commute to school on the trolley?

RO: ... Well, I went to an elementary school a mile from here, and we walked back and forth, [and] walked back and forth at lunch time, too. When we went to high school, the trolleys were gone and there was a bus [that] we used to take it. ... You came down Pequot?

KP: Yes.

RO: The next street that parallels Pequot is (Montauk?), which is a really wide street, and that's where the trolley went, because the tracks went in two directions. It's where a huge beach we have down here in the south, called Ocean Beaches, about a mile from here.

KP: I think I saw that from the train.

RO: No. ...

KP: Maybe I am thinking of another beach.

RO: You might have seen Rocky Neck, out by the houses.

KP: That is probably the one I saw. What was your brother's full name?

RO: ... Martin Tobias Olsen, [which] was my father's first name, Tobias.

KP: Why did your brother choose to go to Rutgers?

[Editor's note: Dr. Olsen has asked that the following list of alumni of both Rutgers College and his high school be included at this point.

Al Griswald ("Al Griswald helped me [get into Rutgers].")

Al (or Ted) Lundwall ("Lundwall got killed during World War II.")

Don Saxton

Pall Bednoz (short for Bednarzick)

My brother and me

A boy named Osinsky the last.

End of addendum. Oral history resumes.]

RO: ... There were several before him, too, see, and, therefore, I think that the people in the athletic department and the recruiting department, every college has this department, where they go looking for students, they were in communication here with the school. There were three high schools here, see, this technical one, then, one all for boys, and one for girls, and most of the boys who planned to go to college, and some of the girls, went to one of those two schools. I went there because my brother went there, and, of course, as far as those technical things, my father did want us to learn some of those things. Hey, you know, Kurt, that scholarship I had was the biggest one Rutgers had. It paid tuition and fees, which was around 450 dollars a year. ... So, I imagine [that] my parents couldn't have afforded to pay for my college [education], ... no, since we had all this done. They worked anywhere in the summer, and I had enough money, and I worked at Rutgers, in the fraternity house, and the library, and stuff like that.

KP: Is that how you were able to pay for Rutgers?

RO: Yeah, along with summers.

KP: When did you decide that you wanted to become a medical doctor?

RO: ... When this recruiter from Rutgers asked me what I wanted to study, I told him pre-med. My mother used to have me read books about certain doctors, and she was interested in that, and she read a lot about vitamins, and health, and so forth. I don't know how they learned English so well. They worked for these wealthy people who insisted that these girls be dressed properly, and be paid properly, and [be] clean and neat, ... know how to set a table properly, how to dress properly, and so forth, and ... learn how to speak English, ... even down in Newport there. Have you ever been to Newport to see those huge mansions down there?

KP: I have read about them.

RO: That JP Morgan had and so forth? Well, you know, this was good for the economy. ... Do you know when Labor Day is?

KP: The first Monday in September.

RO: The first Monday in September, and do you know how it got its name and why it was important? ... It is the only day off a working man got, with pay, in a whole year. In other words, they didn't work on Thanksgiving, see, but, they didn't pay them on Thanksgiving, either, and same with Christmas, and other holidays, and so forth, if they wanted to take the day off or something, but, Labor Day, you had a day off with pay. That's one of the ways the world has certainly changed. Now, it is just another long weekend. These long weekends are taking over.

KP: You played football for two years. Why did you wait to put your emphasis on swimming instead of football?

RO: I started swimming in my first year. In the first place, my brother and I did both, anyway. I swam across this river when I was eight years old, so, swimming was our thing. So, we were swimmers and football players in the winter. Well, I had a misunderstanding with the coach in my second year and I quit then. I didn't want to quit, but, in a way, it's lucky I did quit. You know, he mistook me for my brother, but, my brother was a senior, you see, and he wasn't what you'd call a starter. ... We played both ways then. He played enough and got a letter, but, in [his] senior year, he knew that he didn't have much future in football, and, therefore, you know, he wasn't quite as serious as, say, I was at the time. ... The coach mistook something that I did for what my brother did and he put me on the JVs, boom. ... I tried it for one day and there was an assistant coach who taught us how to play the game illegally. ... "This is not for me," pulled without being seen and stuff like that.

KP: You decided that you would concentrate on swimming at that point.

RO: I simply stayed. Yeah. I just stayed with swimming and it probably worked out for the

best, because I'm not very big, anyways, and I was a tackle.

KP: Pre-med is a difficult major. How were you able to balance your athletics and your academic work? You were also working quite a bit.

RO: ... I told you that I was ... good at chemistry and good at mathematics, because I had it in high school, and, therefore, my freshman year, I got As in those things, and was exempt from the finals, and so forth. ... Since I was so scientifically inclined, let's say [that] most of the scientific subjects were not very hard for me.

KP: You had a harder time with English.

RO: English, and we had to take Shakespeare and we had to take some electives. ... In the *Targum*, ... every year, they would vote [for the] course that was the easiest on campus, and, one time, it had accounting, and I took that, and you know what? I flunked that. ... If the swimming coach hadn't spoken to the professor, I would have gotten an F in that. ... I got a D. So, you know, swimming took maybe an hour, an hour-and-a-half, sometimes two, a day, that's all, and that, ... primarily, started at Thanksgiving time and we finished either in January or February. So, swimming didn't interfere with our subjects much, and most of our swimming meets were on a weekend, and we'd go to Lehigh, and Lafayette, ... Philadelphia, and West Point, we didn't go very far, by bus. We didn't go to California. No, we did go to Florida every winter, at Christmas time. We'd have a big pool show and make enough money, so that we could go to Fort Lauderdale and practice and train down there in salt water, by the Swimming Hall of Fame. ... Of course, we didn't have any of these big bridges and didn't have Route 95 down there. We'd drive down there, and a few of the parents, two of the parents, let us borrow the family car, and we'd drive down there, take turns driving, drive twenty-four hours. ... We had quite a nice house, something like those, right ... on the ocean over there, for maybe thirty or thirty-five dollars a week. We'd live on oranges and coconuts and go out to dinner one night a week [at] some inexpensive place and Fort Lauderdale, then, was about the size of Mystic. You didn't come through Mystic, but, it's a pretty small town. Florida was a pretty small state and, actually, Florida was pretty small even until the '50s.

KP: What else strikes you about your trips to Florida? Was that the furthest you had traveled at that point in your life?

RO: ... Yeah, and we stayed there for ten days. What else strikes me about swimming?

KP: Did you travel any further than Florida while you were in college?

RO: Oh, yeah, yeah, we didn't go any farther. Actually, the football team came up here, at Providence, and played Brown on Thanksgiving every year, but, that was the longest trip we had. Otherwise, we didn't go any farther than Philadelphia and New York. We swam against Columbia, and NYU, Lafayette, Lehigh, Princeton, Franklin and Marshall, ... Penn State. We used to clobber Penn State. It's funny. The coach of Penn State, you see, was a Rutgers graduate and head of the English Department down there. ... He just died recently, a nice guy. So, I

remember all those trips, but, they were just short ones, by bus. Florida was ... quite an undertaking. ...

KP: You probably took Route 1 all the way down.

RO: Oh, yeah. I told you, I had a condominium in Daytona Beach, and right next to Daytona ... is the Ormonda, which is where old John D. Rockefeller used to go. They used to race cars. ... They didn't race so much against one another. That beach is twenty-some miles long and, when the tide goes out, it's just like a highway. ... John D. made that his winter home, so to speak. ... Ormonda is quite a nice place, where they built it, can't tell them apart, really, but, they just got a new library there, and they have some old pictures on the hallway coming in. ... They were taken in the early '50s, when there wasn't a house down there. ... Now, it's Holiday [Inns], and motels, huge condominiums, and so forth. So, Florida has been built up since the '50s, the early '50s. I can't tell them apart.

KP: When was the next time you went back?

RO: ... Oh, I went back my junior year. Now, it was the year between 1940 and '41. We stayed there on Christmas and New Year's, '40 and '41, and then, the next year, I went between '41 and '42, so, it was right after Pearl Harbor. Then, I graduated.

KP: After you graduated, when was the next time you went back to Florida?

RO: My children grew up and I remarried about twenty-five years ago, ... twenty or twenty-five years ago. We used to go there in January for a week or so.

KP: Were you surprised by the changes?

RO: [Florida had] grown quite a lot. ... Twenty-five years ago would be 1970 and that's when I found out that Florida is not the tropics. ... In January, we almost froze to death. When I was in college, it was always warm. We went swimming in the ocean, but, I wouldn't dare go swimming [then]. People said, well, you had to go farther south, and, once, we went to Key West. It was just as cold there. When we got back, I had encephalitis, about two weeks later. I was unconscious for three or four days and it took me about three or four weeks after I got out of the hospital to learn how to walk. ... So, from then on, we went down to one of the islands for ... our January vacation, but, now that I know that Florida gets cold, I still have a good time there. I play a lot of golf and it's warm enough for golf. I just bring some warmer things to wear, occasionally.

KP: At Rutgers, why did you decide to stay in the ROTC?

RO: Okay. Until the Second World War, we still had a depression, so, the whole time I was at Rutgers, you see, the Depression was still a problem. ... Lots of guys stayed in advanced ROTC, since they felt that they could at least get a job, ... as well as there was some prestige with getting into the advanced ROTC, because they didn't take everybody. That's another reason I went to

medical school. ... So, lots of my friends applied and, therefore, so did I. So, I just followed along, as far as that's concerned, and I did enjoy it, you know. We didn't expect to go [in]to the war as soon as we did. Pearl Harbor changed that. ... That happened in December of 1941, a few months before I graduated, and when they did that, most of the guys in Rutgers left right away. They either joined [up], some were drafted, I suppose, but, off they went. ... I think that Rutgers was pretty low on students during the Second World War and this is one of the reasons it became a state university, I think. At the time, nobody had ever heard of Pearl Harbor. I hadn't, but, I was listening to the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants in a football game, including ... a local guy who I played football with, against, in high school. He played for the Brooklyn Dodgers. They interrupted that game to announce this Pearl Harbor thing. It certainly changed the world. I wouldn't be surprised if Franklin D. Roosevelt had something to do with it, to end this depression, to get us going, ... because the Depression was then over. Everybody had a job, everybody.

KP: You were commissioned as an infantry officer after you graduated.

RO: I might have gotten it in the Medical Administrative Corps. ... Somewhere, I was told by the Army that, and I don't remember whether one of my teachers down there told me, in the ROTC, it must have been, because I never met anybody in the regular Army until I went in, later, ... since I had been accepted to medical school, where we had applied in our third year, you see ...

KP: You applied as a junior.

RO: Everybody did. They told me that they needed doctors more than they needed second lieutenants in infantry, so, they changed me to the Medical Administrative Corps Reserve, which is where I stayed.

KP: You mentioned that you became a leader for Major Johnson, who you had met at Rutgers.

RO: Yeah. He had a son that went to Rutgers, too. I think he was a class behind me, but, I started medical school. You see, we finished medical school in three years [in] those days, cause we went to medical school [in the] summer and winter, and, therefore, in July, the first of July, I think, of 1942, just finishing college, we started medical school, down there in Brooklyn. Man, was it hot. I thought I'd made the most terrible mistake in my life when I went down there, into the hot box. ... Anyway, I was a civilian then, until somewhere in my sophomore year, when this ASTP was started, and the Air Corps came and took over the whole school, ... except for a few people who didn't pass the physical. ... We had a couple of girls in our class, too, and the Army had ASTP, ... which means Army Specialized Training Program, and a few of the guys went into the Navy, and I think they called that V-12. ... We had to go up to Camp Upton, in Long Island, to spend a week or so, to become indoctrinated into the Army as privates first class.

KP: You had been commissioned as an officer. How did you feel about your rapid demotion?

RO: Actually, I was pretty happy. In the first place, I went to medical school for free. In the second place, there weren't any dormitories or places to eat there, so, ... I got paid [for] room and

board and, also, ... enough money for meals, too. ... Actually, I got married. So, I thought this was great business, ... but, with this Major Johnson, ... of course, [I was] surprised to see him there as our ... commanding officer. I did help him organize all of the troops, to, you know, get [them] into parades, and march, and stuff like that. ... I think there were some of the guys in that Navy thing, V-12.

KP: Did you wear your uniform every day?

RO: Oh, yeah.

KP: Did you fall out into formation every day?

RO: Yeah. Every day, we had roll call at, you know, seven-thirty in the morning. Now, Major Johnson had already left when this picture was taken, down in Brooklyn. This was probably me here, up in front. ... I don't know how some of these guys got to go in the Navy and some in the Army, to tell you the truth. I think it happened in lots of medical schools, possibly even in colleges. I'm not sure about colleges. Yeah, we didn't have the communications like we do now. We had radio. We used to listen to music. ... We didn't get to see television until sometime after the Second World War. As a student ... involved in these scientific things, you know, I didn't read the newspapers hardly, either. Nobody did. So, that's how ... I never knew how the Navy got some of these and the Army the others. The majority were in the Army and we didn't know much about it, because, when we graduated, we became civilians again, because the Army didn't want us until we had interned. So, you had to intern for, actually, nine months in the United States, because we went into the Army a little early, before the year was over, and went to a general hospital to become indoctrinated into the Medical Corps. So, when I ... finished interning over there in New York City, at the Lenox Hill Hospital, I went to the Milton D. Baker General Hospital, down in West Virginia, it's not too far from Washington, and all I did was skin grafting there.

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RO: Then, we had more military training in San Antonio, where we stayed six weeks. ... Going down there, in the first place, let me tell you that, when I went to the Milton D. Baker Hospital, I got a ticket to go down there in a Pullman car, with my own room and the whole works, a real, first class Army officer. ... By the way, that ended during and after the war, railroad use, ever since we got airplanes. In the Second World War, we didn't have any jet planes. They were all airplanes, but, anyway, you know that Newark Airport was the only international airport in [the] New York City [area]. They'd built LaGuardia when I was in medical school and JFK a long time after that, but, anyway, on the way to San Antonio, Texas, there was a railroad strike. ... We got to St. Louis and, bing, all the trains stopped. So, they had to empty all the soldiers out of this train, I think the train had nothing but soldiers in it, and [they] took us all to some place called Jefferson Barracks, I think. [We] stayed there for two or three days, 'til the strike was over, and then, we went down to San Antonio, where there was more military training, and, also, some officers in the Veterinary Corps, [who] taught us a lot about sanitation and things of that nature. They were good teachers. I didn't know that they were knowledgeable about things like

sanitation, and meat inspecting, and things of that nature. ... After that, they had trains going ... to the West Coast or the East Coast. We didn't know which way we were going. I got on a train that went to the East Coast, and, you know, we went in a huge train, but, half of us had to stand up [for] ... one night and two days, I'm not sure, a long time. I was one of those guys standing up. I thought it would never end, and we got to Camp Kilmer, and, ... by then, I had a small child. She must have been one year old by then. We rented a little cabana on what is Route 1, up near Metuchen. ... The showers that were up on top of the hill, inside the cabin, ... the water would run from the shower, down the driveway, ... into the gutter of this main drag. Do you know where Howard Johnson's used to be, ... at a traffic circle outside New Brunswick?

KP: Yes.

RO: ... I think it was Route 1, but, New Jersey had a different number for it. ... The water from that shower went right down there. ... This was my first introduction to what old soldiers did about whiskey. Some of these fellows who were in the Army before the war were now older, and had become sergeants, and then, had been commissioned as officers. They were being shipped over ... where we were going, also. ... I didn't know where we were going. I didn't know where I was going 'til I got there. Anyway, the first morning [of] being in this great, big barracks, I woke up, and I looked over, and there was one of these old guys. He swung out of bed, opened up his chest, and pulled out a bottle of whiskey, and tipped it right up. I almost got sick, right then and there. I met him later, ... when I got to Italy. So, I got taken on a train [from] there to somewhere in New Jersey, ... one of those big docks there on the Jersey side of the Hudson River, and I ended up in Italy for ... a little over two years.

KP: What were your duties in Italy?

RO: When I first got there, I had a little dispensary where we had sick call. ... My little dispensary was at a port of embarkation, and it had two dispensaries, one that took care of kids that were coming and going off the ship, and I had a black battalion of truck drivers. I barracked across the street from them, and I had sick call every morning, and then, was available the rest of the day, if they should call me. ... I took care of all their inoculations and stuff, and then, once a week, I'd go and inspect their barracks for sanitation, and garbage cans, and bathrooms, and toilets, and then, there was a lot of venereal disease. [I would] get these guys lined up, you know, the whole gang, to see if they had venereal disease. If so, [I would] pull them out and treat them. That's what I did in Italy, I mean, in Leghorn and (Livorno?). ... I also helped inspect these guys who were going home and helped to inspect the guys who were coming in. They had about four doctors in this ... whole replacement battalion, it's called.

KP: At that point, you only treated American soldiers and sailors.

RO: Yeah. There were no sailors, just soldiers. A lot of them were coming down from Trieste. Trieste, in Yugoslavia, had certainly changed before ... during the Second World War and, now, it's being changed again.

KP: Were most people going home or did you have two-way traffic?

RO: Two-way traffic, just as many coming as going, because we had the 88th Division up there, ... still up there, in Trieste, and then, there were other stations all around Italy with fewer people, and there was an Air Force base down there, and ... the Navy down in Naples. ... I stayed there, ... and then, I was transferred down to Rome, where we had a little hospital, and that had an administrative group in the Army there, as well as a ... graves registration. They had both Italian civilians, plus, a lot of soldiers that went all through the countryside getting stories from the natives about where they saw somebody being killed, or put in a hole, or places where they had a bulldozer dig a great, big hole and toss in a lot of them. ... They did this quite thoroughly, I think, and [they were] identified mostly by dog tags, but, a lot of them only with their bones and teeth, and so, there were ... lots of undertakers who were officers in the Army, who were involved ... in identifying the individuals. ... Then, the family of these soldiers that were found, ... our military personnel found, their family had a choice of either having them buried over there, in these huge military cemeteries, or ... they could have them shipped home in a ... nice casket with a flag, all done very nicely. ... Even if only a few bones went into that casket, it was identified and treated just like any other casket that had a recently expired person in it, and those cemeteries over there, and there were several in Italy, are maintained very well. So, that's what I did, and then, as more and more soldiers went home and more doctors went home, too, I ended up ... being the only doctor around, and then, some civilians were starting to come over ... there, in 1948, people from *Time Magazine*, reporters, and more people from the embassy. ... I bought a little jeep for fifty dollars and the Army let me have a little private practice on the side. ... I took care of the ambassador, and some of these movie people, and some of the people from the *New York Times*, and the *Herald Tribune*, and *Time Magazine*, and so forth. ... The movie guy who was most famous, I think, and a couple actresses, I took care of a famous actor and his wife, [do] ... you know the guy who was a director and an actor, a fat guy? ... He's the one that scared the whole country. ...

KP: Orson Wells.

RO: Orson Wells. He was there. I took care of him for a while, and I can't remember the name of the other people, but, during the time I had this little practice, I saved enough money so that when I got home, in December of 1948, I had enough money to buy a car, my first car, and I bought a brand new Ford [for] 1600 dollars. [It was] a good car ... which I kept for quite a while. ... Speaking of this jeep that I had, instead of taking a ship home from Italy, I requested to take a ship home from Germany. ... I intended to drive through Europe and go and visit my grandmother in Norway, she was in her nineties, then, and see some of my father's brothers and sisters. ... One of my mother's sister's husbands got in this lighthouse service which the Coast Guard now does, taking care of buoys and things. It was November, and, as we got up into Northern Europe, it got pretty cold, and I had a daughter, then, and my wife and two children came over shortly after I got to Rome, and we were in this open jeep, which was partially closed, and a soldier had come along with me to help me ... [with] a trailer full of gas cans. ... By the time we got to Paris, my daughter, who was about two by then, got kind of sick. So, we got her to an Army hospital in Bremerhaven, Germany, where she had pneumonia. So, she stayed there a couple of weeks. ... So, we never got to Norway.

KP: You stopped in Germany.

RO: Yeah. I couldn't leave Germany with her in the hospital alone. She lives up the corner here. One of her sons just graduated from college. ... When I got home, I had already arranged to have a surgical residency down in Portsmouth, Virginia. So, I went home just before Christmas, and then, the first of January, I went down to Portsmouth, Virginia, where I had the surgical residency, a year-and-a-half, and then, came back to New London. [I] was a surgical resident here for a year. So, I had quite a lot of training in surgery and [was] a pretty good surgeon, a very good surgeon. I'll show you some pictures of the operation table. [laughter] ... After this residency here, then, I bought a building, where the trolley used to run. I bought a building that had my office on the first floor, and rented out an apartment upstairs, lived with my father for the first year. In those days, doctors didn't make anything. The second year, I had to borrow some money to pay my income tax and it took me three or four years to pay that back. So, all this business about all the money doctors make really isn't quite true. I have quite a nice house here, I don't know, a nice one anyway, yeah. My father left me a little bit of money. ... The place I bought in Florida, I rented it out, and I bought it in 1977, and I later rented it ... for twelve years all year round. I don't really know, as Hillary Clinton thinks, about all these doctors being so wealthy. ... Up until recently, most doctors were poor.

KP: When you started out as a doctor, how many house calls did you make?

RO: Quite a few. Mornings, I made house calls. If I wasn't operating, then, I'd make house calls. Now, Greater New London here, we only have, maybe, 30,000 people here, but, [on] the other side of the river, we're the closest hospital, going west to New Haven. So, Yale is right down there, forty miles away, and we're the next one. There's one in Middletown, then, there is one in Norwich, fourteen miles up this river. I used to make house calls, ... then, go across the river, see those areas over there, including Mystic. I spent a whole morning on house calls. An office call was four dollars, and a house call was four, and, you know, you didn't get paid. ... You could also get out of bed at [night for] nighttime calls. ... As soon as we got Medicare, paperwork became quite luminous and we didn't even have time, although, I did make house calls as long as I was in practice. I just retired two years ago, because some of these old people really couldn't get out of their houses, so, I had to go see them. All doctors still do that to some old patients who they know. They feel responsible for them. However, [for] some of the specialties that require more extensive testing and so forth, they might have an ambulance bring them to the emergency room, where they'll see them. ... What Hillary Clinton says about some people not getting care, I can say that it's now fifty-two years since I started medical school and I don't know anybody who was turned down because of reasons of money, nobody, the biggest operations, the worst cases. ... The difference with Medicare was that we got paid for taking care of the people we took care of for free. So, in New York, in Brooklyn, in all those places, in order to be on the staff of a hospital, you had to agree, and sign, that you would take care of the indigent for free, too. ... We also trained young doctors for their residencies and interns, but, you see, they all go to teaching hospitals now, because they don't have any free patients there. They are all on Medicare or something like that. However, in our office and so forth, there were people who didn't pay us. Medicaid or welfare, ... they don't pay as much as we do. ... I've got a computer printout, you know, about that long, with a check for \$1.95. So, all [of] these things

that Hillary Clinton said are really not true and everybody is taken care of quite well and comparably, even these transplants that cost so much and people are out raising money. I don't know who the hell they are raising money for. Nobody pays these guys. Once you work for a place like Yale or any teaching institution, they're on salary, and no matter how much or little you do, you get so much a year, and whatever is collected, the school gets. ... They don't get enough to support the [hospital]. ... They have endowments, and they have fund drives, and all this kind of stuff. ...

KP: You lived by the shore in the New York area before going overseas. Do you remember having any blackout restrictions in the New London or Brooklyn areas?

RO: Yeah. ... They really called them brownouts. ... There were lots of civilians who were out all night, watching for airplanes, and I know there were these brownouts, but, for all practical purposes, the blackouts really didn't bother me. If somebody hadn't told me, I wouldn't know we were having them, because there weren't as many lights around then as there are now. They weren't as bright, either, even the cars. Those lights, if I think back, ... that we had on [the] curvy, country roads were scary. However, I do remember rationing, and, you know, they'd ration the meat, and butter, coffee, sugar, I don't know. What else?

KP: You did not have a car at the time.

RO: When I was in medical school? ...

KP: Yes.

RO: No. I'll tell you, my brother graduated in 1940 [and] went to work as a chemist here for (Platinum Whitney?). ... He got a new car, a second-hand Ford, and he was called to active duty, ... before Pearl Harbor. This New England National Guard was called to active duty and went to a brand new Army camp in Florida, called Camp Blanding, near Jacksonville. ... When I brought him down, I went through a town named Blanding. Once, coming back from Florida, in 1941, right after Pearl Harbor, we stopped in Camp Blanding to visit my brother for awhile. In my last semester at Rutgers, after swimming season, I got a job at the (Calco?) Chemical Company, which is right up the river, out [in] Somerset. What's the first town?

KP: Bound Brook?

RO: Yeah, Bound Brook. It's the Calco Chemical [Company]. I worked there on the second shift as a chemist. I did a lot of chemistry in pre-med and we had to take ... regular chemistry and organic chemistry. I was never good at organic chemistry, too much imagination, and quantitative analysis, and then, qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis is where you find out how many milligrams is in this or something. ... It's almost like cookery, but, it's quite exact. Qualitative ... was a thing with a lot of imagination and I wasn't good at that, either, because they gave you a sample and just said, "Find out what's in it." ... At Calco, I worked in something like quantitative analysis, to see if these samples [were] okay and ... [that] these huge vats and so forth contained what they should contain before we'd ship them out. I did that, but, I had enough

gas for that. They hadn't even started rationing, yet, but, when I got married then, in 1943, my wife and I then took a train to New London. We got married down in Flushing and went over here to Watch Hill, which is in Rhode Island. It's just a short one, and we had enough gas to get back [in] this car of my brother's, and we were going to rent a sailboat over there, but, no, you couldn't go out in a sailboat, because, you know, there were nets across the river here, steel nets, I can show you the rings over here, and then, this other, little island.

KP: Are they still there?

RO: ... Yeah, huge rings. If you want to walk over there, I can show you a couple of them, where they had these nets, so [that] the submarines couldn't get in as well. ... They wouldn't let strangers out into the sound or anything. So, in order to rent a sailboat for that day, over there in Watch Hill, I had to get permission from the Coast Guard, and the nearest Coast Guard place was in New London, but, I didn't have enough gas to get the fifteen miles from there to here and back again. So, I had to take a train over here, and walk to the Coast Guard place, and get permission, and [take the] train back. ... Since I didn't have a car then, gasoline was never a problem for me, and there weren't many cars, but, for other civilians who were not enrolled in anything military, then, gas rationing was certainly a problem.

The other things, you know, like butter, and sugar, and so forth, in that neighborhood of Brooklyn where we lived, we knew the grocer. ... People are closer in big cities than they are here, you know. I've maybe spoken to the people across the street here, you know, ten times in the twenty-five years I've lived here, ... but, down there, in that neighborhood, we knew everybody. ... This grocery store used to save things for neighbors and my wife could get anything she wanted. Strangers, I think, might have [had] difficulty going in. They were starting to have some supermarkets then, but, not many. [You] went into a grocery store and ... [got] things that were rationed and [you got] enough [of] ... any of the certain foods that were rationed.

...

I had a problem with rationing over in France. When I was going up to Norway that time, I had a trailer full of these gas cans. You couldn't buy any gas anywhere, but, when we ... almost got to Paris, we ran out of gas. ... A couple hundred yards from where we were, there was a house with a gas pump, and we pushed the trailer up there, and we stopped the car, and ... we filled our gas tank, and then, when we turned to pay her, she didn't want the money. She wanted the rations and we didn't have any, you know. She siphoned all [of] our gas right out of there and, luckily, there was an Army station not too far from where we were. ... They came over with some gas for us. I had had French for four years in high school, and I picked up Italian quite easily, but, French is certainly different from the French I had in school. I couldn't understand anything in France. ...

Actually, you know, I lived in a fun time, in a time when nobody had a car, and before television, and before air transportation, and before anybody had any money, [because of] the Depression thing. ... I worked for fifteen cents an hour, and ten hours a day, six days a week, in summer vacations, ten bucks a week. I saved money. ... When I was an intern at Lenox Hill Hospital, ... we didn't get paid much. We worked, you know, seventy, eighty hours a week. We worked all

day, and then, every other night ... and every other weekend. So, then, we'd work all day Friday, and not Friday night, but, Saturday, Saturday night, Sunday, Sunday night, and then, all day Monday, and then, had the weeknights off, every other night, during the week. ... The subway in New York was a nickel, and I could hitchhike from Rutgers and get a ride through the Holland Tunnel, you see, and then, get on a subway to take me all the way up to the end of the Bronx, where Route 1 was, and hitchhike up there for a nickel. While I was interning, I did sell a pint of blood once every couple of months for thirty dollars. ... That's what I had to [do and it] worked [out] pretty good, but, the hospital did give us a white uniform to wear. They gave us food and a place to sleep.

Beer was a dime, and most of the taverns, you know, they'd have what they'd call "happy hour," now, but, they would have a hot lunch, almost, on the bar, [with] pea soup, and meatballs, peanuts, and all this other stuff. If you bought a beer, you could help yourself to that stuff. Beer for a dime. So, we got along, and, actually, then, our values are different from yours, and I think that we appreciate the value of money more, because there wasn't any around. I know I heard that in Germany, before the war, that a person could go to a baker's shop with a wheelbarrow full of money and that'd buy a loaf of bread. ... So, inflation, it's sort of scary. ... We've seen so much of it. We have three nuclear power plants, three or four miles from here, called Millstone, ... serve a lot of New England, and they [are] paid a walloping salary, and ... there were 122 laborers out there earning fifty grand a year. I'd see them in the emergency room with hundred dollar bills sticking out of their pockets. ... Even now, if I get a hundred dollar bill, I hide it. ... It has been a fascinating time to work, with all these interstate highways and everything.

KP: Which advances in medicine really stand out in your mind?

RO: Okay, a lot of people would say antibiotics, you know. We didn't have penicillin when I was a medical student, and then, we didn't have it for civilian use until after the war, because, while you could get special permission for a special case from Washington, you could call or write in[to] the hospital for penicillin, ... most of it was used overseas there, when it first came out. ... I think that the most remarkable thing that I have seen is a CAT scan. I don't know, have either of you ever had a CAT scan?

KP: No.

RO: The CAT scan is really no more difficult to you than a chest X-ray. You've had that.

KP: Yes.

RO: [For] a CAT scan, you lie down and they push you through kind of a tunnel. [Do] you know why they call it a CAT scan? Do you know what C-A-T means? It means Computerized Axionic Tomography, and, therefore, that X-ray thing is whirring constantly, run by the computer, and it slices the person up, you know, about that thick, and you see everything through the head and their arms, any part of their body, even the whole body, if you want, but, usually, you'd restrict the parts. So, you know what salami looks like when you run it through the machine and each piece is different. Well, it's the same with a CAT scan. Therefore, we can see

things with that that we could not see before, even with an operation. It's farther than we can reach, you see, in the brain and other places. ... This MMR thing is just a slight improvement. ... It notices things that a CAT scanner doesn't and, therefore, I think that this CAT scanner is the most remarkable thing that has happened since I've been in medicine, ... plus, you know, polio vaccines, [as well]. There was a lot of polio when I was a student, and then, the next most remarkable thing was anesthesiology as a specialty.

Until the Second World War, nurses would decide [that] they would like to go into anesthesia, and they would give anesthesia, general anesthesia, in an operation, and this was certainly limited anesthesia. ... When I was in Portsmouth, Virginia; the chief surgeon was one of the original members of the American Board of Surgeons. ... When I got out of the Army, it was the first time I had ever heard of the American Board of anything and it was too late for me to take six years to become a board surgeon. However, I worked with one for a year after I finished my residency here, so, I had a lot of training. ... That guy was probably one of the better surgeons in that part of Virginia, around Portsmouth, and Norfolk, and so forth, but, he never left the operating room after taking out an acute gall bladder on some ... fat person, or an emergency hysterectomy, or something like that. ... You know, the gall bladder is down near your backbone. Hysterectomy is way down in the pelvis. [He] never left ... two or three clamps that long on something bleeding down there and, two days later, he'd sneak one out, ... the next day, take another one out, and so forth, 'cause anesthesia didn't give him enough relaxation to get a good look at him. ... Anesthesia also made it possible to do this open heart surgery and a lot of this brain stuff where we have to keep the person alive. ... To do open heart surgery and bypass the heart, you need to have a heart-lung machine, which is quite a thing, a machine that oxygenates a person's blood. It's really not very hard. ...

Surgeons really never hurt anybody. Surgeons really never hurt many people. Now, anesthesia did. I told you, my sister died of a ruptured appendix. She didn't die because a mistake was made during the operation. She died because, you know, these tubes that people have in their nose, to keep the stomach empty and so forth, well up there in the lung, they weren't doing it at that time, and, in New York, we were. I spoke to the guy ... about doing it and he said, "Well, it's a pretty good idea," or something like it. ... Well, we were visiting her in the evening, a day or two after the operation. We lived a mile away, I've always lived around her, and, by the time we got home, the phone was ringing, and my sister had died. She had thrown up, and ... she wasn't able to expectorate this stuff, and, therefore, aspirated her vomit. ... So, she died of aspiration and you don't hear that anymore. Occasionally, anesthesia might make a mistake, but, I think that we have all these specialists who can keep people alive so that surgeons can work for awhile, and then, lower their temperature and so forth. It was quite remarkable. That's right.

KP: Over the course of your career, it became easier to perform surgery. You have more options.

RO: People could also do more of this open heart stuff and cardiac surgery in general, which was unheard of. They can fix aneurysms now. They couldn't fix aneurysms until, maybe, fifteen years ago. Antibiotics, you know, the germs found a way to live with them. This is why there are more antibiotics around now. So, I can't keep up with them, because there is something new

coming out almost every month, because of these germs having become resistant to other antibiotics. So, antibiotics have prolonged a lot of lives, but, probably not as many as you would think. Now, with antibiotics, people have become less careful about their hygiene and things of that nature. Now, you hear about this crazy strep thing that people have, [where] their muscles are gone. ... In the first place, ... a lot of the germs are immune to antibiotics, but, also, I think that these people are more casual about their hygiene. ... I've seen people in my office that are dirty as underwear, they haven't bathed in weeks, it looked to me, ... [and] in the emergency room. I think that's one of the things in our society that has led to this, rather than the antibiotics. ... Most streps are the easiest things to kill with an antibiotic.

KP: How important was your military experience to your overall medical training? For example, in West Virginia, you learned how to graft skin. Did your Army medical career point you towards the kind of surgery that you wanted to do in your practice?

RO: Well, skin grafting was good. I was probably one of the best skin grafters around here, but, we don't do skin grafting here anymore. They ... go to burn centers now, and we all have to know it and so forth, but, burn centers do it all. ... Otherwise, since I got to Italy after the war was over, the fighting was over, I was really not involved with wartime injuries, and, therefore, [I] was involved with the sicknesses that the military had, plus, their families, because some of their family was coming over. So, therefore, I did get some experience as a family practitioner and so forth. I did learn something from the other doctors, who were young, but, who came from a different part of the country, like my roommate, [who] was from Arkansas. ... There were other guys that came. I learned a lot from them and I learned a lot ... in our campground. ... I also found out that New York was not the only place to practice medicine, but, the only place that medicine was any good.

KP: What did these doctors from other regions teach you? How did they improve your skills and abilities? What did the doctors from Arkansas teach you?

RO: They just talked about ... the way they were taught to treat something and diagnose something and, really, that's about all. ... Sometimes, the same, sometimes, differently, and their whole attitude was a little different. ... It was enough different from New York for me to feel quite confident in what I had learned. I actually didn't learn anything in the military as far as taking caring of patients was concerned, except that skin grafting.

----- END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

KP: This continues an interview with Robert C. Olsen on August 8, 1994, in New London, Connecticut, with Kurt Piehler and ...

RL: Robert Lipschitz.

KP: In many ways, you were a general practitioner for the Army. When I spoke with the MacDougall brothers, they mentioned that when they started out in general practice, they delivered babies. Did you deliver any babies in the Army?

RO: Not in practice, not in practice, however, ... there weren't that many civilians in Italy, and they were all older, and there were no infants born. ... I don't know of any Army person, or a wife of an Army person, who had a baby anywhere where I was. ... However, obstetrics was a big part of this medical school and Dr. Beck taught it. He wrote one of the books that was used commonly in some medical schools in those days. Since Brooklyn was such a huge city and it has only one medical school, we spent a lot of time delivering babies, oddly enough. ... Down in Virginia, I was a surgical resident, but, the nights that I was on call, I was on call for everybody, and, therefore, I delivered some babies down there. ... When I got to New London, as a resident, ... we had residents who did that and did other specialties, besides surgery, here, and ever since I came back [to] New London, it has been a specialist's town, and, therefore, no general practitioners deliver babies here or take out tonsils. Everybody was involved in a specialty. It's a Yale affiliated hospital and a good number of the doctors here, who trained here, went to medical school there.

KP: Is that why you chose to specialize in surgery?

RO: I chose that because I was good at it and liked it. I also chose general practice because it's my hometown. I really liked surgery, and ... I'm a good surgeon, but, I really wasn't a specialist. ... Since I was a general practitioner, I couldn't make a living just doing surgery, because none of the other general practitioners or internists would refer any cases to me, because, after they got well, they would still come back to me. They wouldn't go back to them. So, I didn't do as much surgery, say, as a fellow who did just surgery, but, I did enough, and I had enough of these free cases, and kept my hand in it all the time. ... [This] being my home town, I really didn't feel I should specialize here, because I couldn't turn anybody down [for] anything when they called, because so many of these people knew me or somebody in my family, or was a friend of somebody like that, and so forth, and I just couldn't say, "No," to them. ... I enjoyed general practice, too, and, actually, this is one of the things that's wrong with medicine the way it is. You just can't get a doctor when you need one. These people can get a doctor when they need one. They also knew when I was off. They didn't call me on Sundays and, you know, after the first few years, they wouldn't call me at night. ...

It's been great. I hated to quit when I was seventy-two. ... That's when I needed a computer to send bills to Medicare and Medicaid and I didn't think I should learn how to use a computer, a man of my age, particularly. Maybe I should have. ... Another thing is, I only operated on people who I knew and, therefore, nobody has ever brought a suit against me. ... I'm not saying that I want a suit or anything like that. A suit was never brought against me for malpractice. Oh, if a stranger came in, I was able to judge if that person was cranky, or sick, or so forth. ... I took care of three generations in some families and some of these families that were large, they might be, with the offspring, ... [about] one hundred patients. ... If some of those patients' word got around in the family, [that] the other one would bring a suit against me, I think all those people would talk to them and say, "Hey, we're all going to lose our doctor." So, that was an element. So, nobody ever brought a suit against me. I enjoyed general practice and I enjoyed general surgery.

KP: Why did you return to New London?

RO: I never thought I'd come back. I even thought I might stay in New York, because I thought that that was the only way to practice, but, after being in the Army and talking to these guys, like the fellows from Arkansas, [I changed my mind]. ... His father was a physician in some small town down there, and so was his grandfather, and they loved it, and people loved them. ... I never thought I'd come back here, because, [as] I told you, I lived in this part of town, but, there, I used to cut my lawn, take out the garbage, tend the furnace, deliver the newspaper, and all that kind of stuff. I really ... wasn't sure that they would like to have me as a physician, but, another thing was that, after I got out of town and went to West Virginia, and New York, and Brooklyn, Virginia, and Texas, and a lot of places on the East Coast, and all over Europe, I never saw a town quite as beautiful as this. If you look around here, ... I couldn't wait to get back here, and all of these suspicions I had about people not wanting to come to me very often [were groundless]. ... The reason I did my last year of training ... here was to find out how the medical community would take to me, also, and I got along with them well, too, but, then, nowadays, I couldn't do both of these things. It's against the rules of the hospital. I [would] have to do one or the other and I had to have my boards, you know. People do not practice in this hospital without their boards in any specialty or [without] being eligible to pass their boards in the near future. ... "If you do not pass, then leave," and if you don't have people in the hospital, it's pretty hard to exist around here, anywhere, unless there is no hospital. That isn't true in the Northeast, I don't think. So, I'm very happy that I came back. I think this is very beautiful here. I have a lovely place in Florida, but, when the time comes where I can't play golf and be as active as I am, then, I would sell that place in Florida, and come back here, and ... live all year long. I love it here. I've always liked the water and boats. I was a swimmer and so forth. I raced sailboats here and I loved it.

KP: Had you thought of making the Army a career?

RO: When I was a physician?

KP: Yes.

RO: No. That would be just like the physicians are becoming now. Uncle Sam is running medicine. That's another reason [why] I retired. They had these thick books on the diagnosis. ... They also had a book with 7,000 diagnoses in one book, and then, 7,000 procedures in the other. ... I can't even find some of the diagnoses in there, in these books. Well, military medicine is the same way. My rank was a captain, okay. A major who was not a physician could push me around a little bit, and so, I didn't care for that.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Olsen asked that the following addendum be included here.

I placed this in to describe Mitchell College.

A family lived here for a lifetime, a huge family that lived on an estate. The land went from the river, where there was a 300 to 400 yard front, about a half a mile or a little more, all the way back to a place in Waterford, including a woods. They gave it to Mitchell. Their home was

Mitchell. They were going to start it in 1938, but, it's the year a hurricane hit here, so, it started in 1939. I was the doctor for almost the whole time I was in practice, forty years.

End of addendum. Oral History resumes.]

... My office was close enough so [that] I didn't have an office on campus, but, I would come to the office, occasionally. I would go down there to the dorm. That college, you know, starts at the river and goes all the way to the Waterfront Tunnel and that used to be a private summer home for some people who had a farm here, named Mitchell. ... Anyway, most of these kids should have had a physical exam by their own doctor at home, but, a few of them arrived here without it. ... They would usually send them up to me, or if they wanted to go to somebody else, they could, and I remember one case who went to [the Air] Corps and ... his grades went down, so, he wasn't qualified to stay there much longer, and they sent him here for rehab, and (Eric Colby's?) a good school. There, again, they had only a college nurse, and, when I was with them, I fixed some swollen glands in his neck that were much harder than usual, ... and I thought he had a serious problem. If he was a local person and a patient of mine, I would have, you know, biopsied one of his [glands], but, I didn't do that to the college kids, because most of them came from, you know, New York, Long Island, or New Jersey, Massachusetts, well, this area. So, I sent this kid home to have this checked out. A few days later, the nurse says, "He's back. The doctor said he was okay." He lived in New Jersey. So, I said, "Hold it, send him back. He can't stay here with that." He came back another time, so, this time, the third time, I called up his mother and said, "You better change doctors." So, she took him over to Columbia, you know, and they took one these [glands] out, and the kid had Hodgkin's Disease. He's fine now, I guess, as far as I know, but, the nurse up there told him he was okay. ... I know the nurses at some of the colleges. Every time a kid gets a sore throat, they give him penicillin, which is terrible, because this is how most germs become ineffective against penicillin, strep, [for example]. ... The results of strep culture, we can get, now, in ten or fifteen minutes, and, if they have strep throat, we treat them, and, if they don't, we watch them. ...

There was another kid, from New Jersey, by the way, from down around Camden, who was home for Christmas, and, during Christmas, he had a girlfriend from New London, and he had a bellyache the whole time he was down there, and his mother was a nurse, and she worked for a group of doctors who were internists. Well, one night, when I was up at the emergency room, they called me, because this kid from Mitchell had come in with a bellyache. I looked at him, and he looked like death warmed over, and, obviously, he had a ruptured appendix and peritonitis, and I thought [that] he shouldn't be up there on that night. I called up his mother and she said, "He's been in [to] see Dr. So-and-So," who she worked for, these guys, "at least three times and, each time, his blood count was normal." ... You know, you just can't go by a blood count with appendicitis, but, anyway, I told her that he still had a ruptured appendix and needed an operation, and I thought that I would assist. ... I would need her permission on something like that. ... Finally, she talked to the doctor she worked with and said, "Have the chief of surgery see him." Well, an orthopedist, who happened to be a brilliant guy and was the chief of staff, happened to be in the emergency room at the time, and he looked at the kid, and he told her ... [that] he did have a ruptured appendix, peritonitis and he'd be in the hospital for a couple of weeks. ... He still lives around here. He married that girl. [laughter] ... You know what? The

college has a little insurance form that made them give me thirty-five dollars. His family broke up down there and they never paid it, either. However, I tell you, this kid married into a rich, Jewish family, by the way. They owned National Hardware, or a lumber and hardware business, Cash Lumber. ... He gave me all of those things to put in that hallway on the floor there, ... [the] parquet floor, just down here. ... [They are] probably worth more than the operation would cost. ...

Medicare was changing these books on the first of May of 1970, and I didn't really know the old rules very well, and this is why I decided [that on] the first of May, I would retire, because of Medicare. So, to be an Army or a Navy doctor, the only good thing about it is that you don't have to work very hard ... at night and on weekends. You get reasonably good pay and a reasonably good retirement. So, I really wouldn't want to put up with all that bologna and so forth as an Army physician. [I] couldn't wait to get out. ... I had a great time in Italy, and I had a lovely apartment, and I got pretty fat over there ...

KP: Did you live on base or off base when you were stationed in Italy?

RO: When I first got there and my wife and children hadn't come, my daughter was born just after I got there, a week, then, I lived on base and ate on base. When I got to Rome, the Army had taken over a rather nice hotel, and we were staying there, but, for some reason or another, they let me get an apartment ... out of the hotel, and we had a nice apartment. ...

KP: Your wife came with you.

RO: She came just before I went to Rome and my two children. That guy, who was the captain of the Coast Guard, he's fifty years old. He was born two days before D-Day. I never realized it until we had a big celebration at fifty years from D-Day, this year. I knew ... [that] the war was going on, mind you. ... He was born on June the 4th, and D-Day was June the 6th, and I just didn't realize it all these years. So, he turned fifty. So, he was about three years old when he came over, two or three, and she was one. So, they were there my last year in Rome.

KP: You traveled through Europe on your way to Norway. You mentioned the short supply of gasoline. Does anything else about that trip stick out in your mind?

RO: I learned that the Italian Riviera and Italy in general was much prettier than France, the part of France [that] I saw. Italy is a lovely country and the Riviera in Italy is also outstanding, a place like Santa Marguerite, toward Genoa, Napoli, San Remo. Then, [I remember] just driving from Italy and past the gambling place, Monaco. My wife's roommate in prep school lives in Monaco, and we visited her once, when I was playing golf in France, but, the drive up to Lyons, to Paris, really was not very pretty, and, during the war, Paris was not too spectacular. We stayed there for a couple of days. I had a hard job getting out of Paris. [I had] to keep going north, to Bremerhaven, with my sick daughter. I left one place, and followed directions, and went around the circle, ended up at the same place three or four times. [laughter] ... After leaving Paris, I think we went through Belgium, and then, Holland, and then, Germany. Well, in Belgium, every other store in this town, I think the name of the town ... was Mons, M-O-N-S, ... was a beer

tavern. I never saw so many beer taverns as in Belgium. Holland, we went through there so fast, I didn't see too much. We spent one night there, and then, the next thing I remember was, we got into Germany, and, from Germany to Hamburg, I never saw a building standing, not one. Anyway, some of the basements or foundations were covered, so that there were people living in those foundations. So, that war was not like this one, where you couldn't kill civilians, and so forth, and so on. They just killed everybody, such a vicious war.

KP: Were you surprised by the destruction you saw in Germany?

RO: Yeah, I was quite amazed. I knew it was bad, but, I didn't realize it was that bad. I think it's quite nice now, I hear. I haven't been there since. ... [In] Hamburg, there were a few buildings, and there was some business going on, but, nowhere else, ... where I got out of Holland and got to Hamburg.

KP: How much devastation did you see in France and Italy?

RO: Very little.

KP: Germany was quite a surprise.

RO: Yeah. [There was] very little in Italy. Around Salerno, there was some damage. In the town of Leghorn, there was some damage. Otherwise, generally, Italy was [not damaged]. I saw no damage around Naples, in particular. I loved that place, (Serento?), Capri. In some ways, you'd hardly know that there was a war, particularly compared to Germany. ... There, you'd see a house damaged or stuff like that, not too bad. Speaking of another thing, around here, Lyme Disease is a terrible problem and it's caused by ticks and mites. You know, in the ... First World War, more people died of illness and disease, typhoid, and typhus, and so forth, than died from gunshots, or ... bombing, and things of that nature. ... Therefore, in this war, there weren't as many people dying of disease and so forth, but, I can tell you that every single building in Italy had a sign with, "Spray Treatment, ... DDT." ... I know [that] in this country, recently, DDT has been taken off the market, because some damage was done to these birds that are around here. ...

RL: The bald eagle?

RO: No.

KP: The osprey.

RO: Osprey. There are plenty of ospreys around here, now, of course. I think that some judicious use of DDT out in these places where deer are around, ... they could spray them ... and things of that nature, ... could eliminate this Lyme Disease, which is injuring so many people. When you come right down to it, there's another one that's getting bad, too, starting at Block Island, (berylliosis?), also carried by a tick. Why kill all [of] these people for the sake of a couple of ospreys? ... You know, it's a matter of judgment here. Speaking of socialized medicine, too, you know, since you're a senior in college, hey, we were talking about socialized

medicine when I was in college, just as vigorously as they are now. I've got a ... *Connecticut Medical Journal* which has an article, from fifty years ago, they always had one, and the last couple that I had, they had socialized medicine [articles], ... a couple of pages. ... So, I don't know how far this is going to go. A lot of people are in favor of it. Of course, I didn't have any opinions then and... some of the other students had strong opinions then. I don't know why. I only knew about it ... because it was in the newspaper and, probably, in some of the newscasts on the radio. Some of the kids were listening to that. Also, there were commuters there, too, so, they probably heard this discussed at home, ... when these kids went home for vacations and stuff. As far as I know, that's how it started. It was never discussed in class. This was just in outside discussions, occasionally in class, ... but, not very often. Mostly, my memory is of outside of class. So, it's an old subject. ... You know, where I go in Florida, a lot of Canadians go, and they don't really care for it there, because taxes are terrible. ... They really don't like to wait six months [to] a year for a (corrective?) operation and things of that sort. I don't think [that] they do many organ transplants. ... I'm not that crazy about organ transplants myself. A person who has a transplanted organ remains a chronic patient. They can't live as usual. They have to take some medicine by mouth. They have to have an injection of some sort once a week, or once a month, for the rest of their life. Otherwise, they're going to reject it. ... Organ transplanting is something new. ... I've never been excited about it. [I] still am not. I wouldn't be crazy about getting one myself. [If] I couldn't live as I live now, more or less, I'd think I [had] probably lived long enough. I don't know. Do you get *Time Magazine*?

KP: No.

RO: ... There was an essay in *Time* ... about dying and it said [that] some people become resilient. They regret some of the things they [have] done and said. The last sentence was from some ... guy from Tibet who wrote it, but, "If you have a problem with a friend, pretend he's dying, so that you can get to like him." [laughter] He said, "The same applies to yourself," which is quite true, I guess, if you don't like yourself. ... I don't know how important this role of civilians in the Second World War is to you and how much you've read about it as a historian, but, *Time* had one [article] that's about two pages long and I saved it when I knew [that] you were coming. [It was about] all the people, ... women and all, who went [in]to factories and built tanks, and ... jeeps, and trucks, and bombs. ... I think that it's really quite fascinating, I think, because we really hadn't prepared, although the Army had prepared. I told you that my brother was already down in Camp Blanding and was shipped off to the Pacific shortly after Pearl Harbor, but, they had been having maneuvers down in Louisiana and all that sort of stuff before Pearl Harbor. So, in some ways, we were getting ready.

KP: During the war, did you have a hard time finding an apartment in New York?

RO: Okay, when I was an intern, I lived in the hospital. My wife lived with her parents and they had moved to Danbury. We moved from Flushing to Danbury. ... I used to hitchhike up there once or twice. ... [Did] you ever hear of Brooklyn Heights? [Have] you been there?

KP: I do not think so.

RO: It's beautiful. It's right near the Brooklyn Bridge. It overlooks Governor's Island. Well, I got an apartment up on the fourth floor, sort of an attic that somebody had redone and made into a big living room, ... and a small kitchen, and a little bathroom, and a bedroom, up four flights, ... forty-five bucks a month, and I thought it was great. ... We still burned a lot of coal, so, if you had a white shirt on, something on the table or something, you would pick it up, and it would have soot on it. Now, I had a classmate who went back to a medical school as an anesthesiologist and was living there at some jazzy place on Brooklyn Heights. All [of] the Brooklyn Dodgers used to live on the Heights. All [of] the Wall Street guys did, [too], because the Brooklyn Bridge took you right into Wall Street. ... I went back to see him once, when I came back from Rutgers at some sort of a reunion, about seven or eight years ago, and I went over to this area where he lived, on Willow Street, and there's a guy walking his dog, and I told him what I was there for. ... It so happened that he was the owner of that building and, at that time, he was getting 1200 dollars a month for that apartment. ... The only difference was that he put an air-conditioner in the window, [the] only difference when I was there. ... So, I didn't have any trouble.

The fraternity we had, I joined, a guy from Rutgers, who went there a year before me, told me I ought to join this fraternity and I could sleep there and eat there. He had two buildings in the little alley just down from us. It was a tough part of town. That was living pretty low, but, it was also very inexpensive. Since I went as a civilian, [as] I told you, I had my own money, so, basically, we had about thirty members and it was great. ... When I first went there, ... in July, we didn't have nice, cool pants to wear, like you have, woolen pants. I had to walk from the subway, way over there, carrying a suitcase, and I got down there, and we had three of these, and we had a row of houses, ... and it had three stories, ground floor, and another one, and then, another one, ... with a room and the kitchen on the first floor, ... a room and a bathroom on the second floor, and two rooms on the third floor, very small rooms, not as big as this, and we had three of those rooms. Some of us lived there and we had members who came in and ate with us in one of those [rooms]. ... When I got down there and found it, there wasn't a soul around. ... That's when I thought, "What the hell did I do this for?" Nobody felt so lost, and unhappy, and hot. Anyway, finally, I heard a voice up at the top, and here's this guy just getting out of the shower, and he came from Maine, and he was a year ahead of me. He spent the summer there, working and not going back to Maine. ... Actually, they only had this short time, because this is when they started that all year round stuff. ... To show [you] how tight money was, he had just taken a shower and he had just rinsed out three condoms and was hanging them out to dry, to use again. [laughter] That's how tight money was. So, I'll never forget my first day, when I arrived at medical school. He came especially [for] ear, nose, and throat. He was training at Columbia, post graduate training, and [he] was an ear, nose, and throat specialist in Red Bank, New Jersey. ... [Do] you know anything about Red Bank, New Jersey? ... He was in the same class, one year ahead of me, at school. ...

The place where you saw all those guys lined up here, ... in Brooklyn, in Army formations, well, [do] you know that Brooklyn Battery Tower? They had planned ... to build that, and they had ripped down a bunch of houses behind the hospital in the medical school. The school was on Henry Street, not too far from Borough Hall. I don't know if you know Brooklyn. They had ripped out a lot of buildings, and there were these empty lots where they were going to start

digging into that tunnel, and they stopped all that, and we had all of that space down there for this Army training and drilling with the medical school. ... I've never been through that tunnel myself, but, this older son of mine was on Governor's Island before he came here, and he almost went through that tunnel once, ... the Queens-Midtown Tunnel. [Have] you been through that?

KP: I think so.

RO: It takes you to the Long Island Expressway.

KP: Yes, I have definitely been there.

RO: ... This friend of mine, who was an anesthesiologist, was an only child. He had a car [and] ... had enough gas to go for a ride once in awhile. His father was from Norway, and ... he was an architect, and he designed the air vents for the Lincoln Tunnel. ... Going through the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, occasionally, you'd see a car, but, now, you know, they're lined up for a mile or two trying to get in, two or three lanes. It's quite a change.

KP: You had relatives in Norway during World War II. How did your family react when they found out that the Germans had conquered Norway?

RO: That was never mentioned. They didn't like it. ... They were like the rest of us. They didn't like the Germans, but, I never heard anybody say that they were afraid some of their friends or relatives would be killed. I don't think [that] there was any resistance to ... the occupation of Norway and there probably weren't any shots fired at all. ... I didn't think there was any war going on over there in Norway. So, that really wasn't a problem. They just didn't like it.

RL: Did they ever talk about it?

RO: Well, they talked ... about it, but, only as far as these people invading and taking over their country, only from that standpoint. ... Speaking of that, another thing I learned recently was that, you know, after they invaded Pearl Harbor, then, all of the Japanese people in California were interned, because we collected the Japanese before they invaded the West Coast. ... With all of the blackouts and so forth, they were a little afraid of being invaded by Germany, but, they didn't think it was too likely, because that ocean was rougher and harder to get across, ... but, with that foothold in Pearl Harbor, we thought that that was going to happen. ... Their communication, then, was not like it is now, where they discuss things over, and over, and over again. ... That sort of thing did not go on on the radio. They simply stated that, "To prevent these people from betraying us in any way, [they will be interned]." They were still Japanese immigrants. I don't know if you realize this, but, a lot of immigrants, even now, their heart is still where they came from. You take the Puerto Rican people, they go there lots and lots of times. (They get welfare down there?) and I asked them, you know, why they come here in the winter. ... [We have] a miserable winter. They're sick all the time. The reason they come here is, they don't have any Medicaid down there or Medicare. (Well, we have it all over the place?), but, when we gave those Japanese people, those few who were still alive, all the billion-and-a-half dollars, this really

upset me quite a lot, that my tax money had been used for that. I thought that was pretty bad, you know. One of the senators, ... who lost an arm over there in Europe ...

KP: Daniel Inouye.

RO: ... He instigated that and I think he persuaded his people to do that. The outfit that I went to, that was called the Four-Four Deuce, or the 442nd Infantry Division [Regiment], and the Japanese-[Americans] were in that, and they are the ones who I joined when I first got to Italy. ... The ones who still remained had this replacement depot in Leghorn, where I first went, so, I got to know the fellow who was in command of that regiment and the executive officer. ... I'm still quite friendly with [them]. ... The commander has died, but, the executive officer is in his eighties now, and we still correspond. He lives in Texas. [We] became quite friendly. Both were Japanese. My jeep driver was a Japanese man, you know. German prisoners of war were, too, and they were all truck drivers, in addition to the black people.

KP: Did you treat German POWs?

RO: No. They must have had their own doctor, but, I'm not certain. Their camp was across the street, and, once in a while, we'd have a jeep driver who was German, and, once, ... we had a delivery from one of these guys. A bartender was German, in the officers' club. ... You know, I never did find out who took care of those people who got sick and I'll bet you [that] they had their own doctor there. ... I slept with a German POW one night. You know, Italy has a mountain [range] that goes right down through it and ... we were on the Mediterranean, on the shore. ... Well, once in a while, you'd get about that much snow, but, generally, it's green and reasonably warm. It's like Florida, almost, but, up the mountains, you see, in the winter, there's snow, and good ski resorts, and things like that. ... Once, we went up there, the major who was in the 442nd and he had an Italian girlfriend that he was with, and the doctor from Arkansas and his wife, and me and a German private. When we got up to this ski resort, circling up that mountain, late in the evening, ... they had ... three rooms, one for one couple, and one for the other, and then, another room with a double bed, and that's all they had. So, the German POW and I slept together one night and [we went] back home the next day. [We] might have stayed two nights, I'm not sure. ... We didn't stay very long, but, [we] had a little fun up there.

----- END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE -----

RL: You hitchhiked from New York to New London. Was that relatively common back then, to hitchhike all over the place?

RO: Yeah. Well, [I] got up there to that traffic circle in East Brunswick where there was a Howard Johnson's, the first Howard Johnson's hotel. The old Howard Johnson, the originator of all these Howard Johnson things, was a friend of Jim Reilly, who was the swimming coach, and, therefore, one of his first motels was right up there in that traffic circle at Route 1. It was a four-lane highway, but, after the traffic circle, it would stop and become a two-lane highway, going down south. ... He used to go to Fort Lauderdale with us. ... His first motel was in Boca Raton, Florida, and it's still there, right on Route 1, ... across from the Boca Raton Club. ... We'd get

out there and you would soon get a ride to somewhere in New Jersey. Occasionally, somebody would let me off at the beginning of the Polaski Skyway. Have you ever been on the Polaski Skyway?

RL: No.

RO: It's not near the New Jersey Turnpike, but, you can see it from the New Jersey Turnpike, but, that was the only way to get over there. ... They would divide here, and some would go over the skyway, and I always wondered why they would ever dare to stop there to pick somebody up, but, a truck driver or somebody would pick me up. They were very nice, since I was a college student. I enjoyed hitchhiking. I talked to a variety of nice people, truck drivers and other people of different social and economic levels. ... Like I said, they'd let me off at the other end of the Holland Tunnel, or somebody would, and I'd get on the subway. ... To show you how few cars there were then and how light traffic was, ... this was before the war, as you go down Route 1, this way, the next town across the Connecticut River was Saybrook, then, we had a place called Clinton, and Westbrook, and then, Madison, and then, New Haven. ... Well, somebody coming this way ... would drop me off, say, in Clinton, and it would be dark, and there would be no cars there. ... After a while, you'd hear a car coming, four or five miles away, ... and you'd wait and wait, and it finally came, and they might stop, and they usually went, "Zoom," and kept going, after dark. ... Once, a car went by me, "Zoom," and, pretty soon, this car came back, because there was a guy who taught at the Coast Guard Academy and was renting a house from my father, he, and his wife, and his daughter, and he recognized me, and came back, and got me, and took me home. [laughter] ...

Hitchhiking wasn't against the law, then, and, you know, nobody ever heard of holding somebody up hitchhiking. Now, I wouldn't pick up a hitchhiker, because it's a different world now, but, I did a lot of hitchhiking, went to Danbury. Occasionally, I'd take the train. The train cost, I think, three dollars from here to New York. Now, Amtrak goes right through here, just like it does New Brunswick. It goes from Boston to Washington. ... We never bought a ticket from here to New Brunswick, but, we'd buy a ticket on a train. ... The trains would either go to Grand Central or to Penn Station, and we'd catch a train here that we knew went to Penn Station, but, we'd buy a ticket to New York, and then, stay on the train. When the conductor came around, we'd buy a ticket to New Brunswick. The reason [why] we didn't buy one that went all the way is because there was a dollar toll charge for the (Hellgate?) Bridge on the Pennsylvania Railroad. So, we'd save a dollar by not buying a ticket right straight through, [laughter] big deal. A dollar lasts a long time. So, occasionally, we did take the train, ... but, mostly, we might hitchhike home and take the train back. Occasionally, I'd know somebody who was going that way, and he'd give me a ride to New York, or something like that, and then, I'd take the train from New York. ... So, hitchhiking was good. There were enough cars, and the people were nice, and there were no problems, like there are today, with hitchhikers.

RL: When was the last time you did it?

RO: Hitchhike?

RL: Yes.

RO: Well, when I was an intern, [as] I told you, my wife and first child were living in Danbury. I would hitchhike back and forth to Danbury while I was an intern. Now, I'll tell you, you don't know much about Long Island, ... but, I'll show you a picture of the boat I used to race, and I'll show you a picture of my cabin cruiser. The cabin cruiser had six beds in it. This was built in Bayonne, New Jersey, by the same company who builds these submarines, called the (Elco?), and this book here [mentions] a lot of guys who lived on (Elco?) houseboats before the war. ... Paul Pearson, he gave it to me. ... Anyway, my wife and I would occasionally go over to Long Island in this boat here for a couple or three days. We might go on a Sunday, and I had Wednesdays off at the time, and we'd go here to Three Mile Harbor, which is near East Hampton and Amagansett, which was really lovely, over there in the Hamptons. ... Three Mile Harbor would take you almost to Amagansett. Well, we'd go there and tie the boat up, and I'd hitchhike to the town and rent a car, because it was three or four miles, and we didn't feel like walking three or four miles, but, that's the only hitchhiking I've done since I was a student. So, we'd have a car to go out, and scout around over there, and play golf, and stuff like that. ...

KP: Since you grew up so close to the water, had you ever thought of joining the Navy?

RO: ... Being a Navy town, they not only build submarines here, but, they keep them here, and they had some other Navy ships here, too. Well, when I was a kid, sailors, in other words, enlisted people, did not have a good reputation and we were told to stay away from those sailors. Of course, they would hang around the bars and things in town. ... Actually, we had prohibition, ... but, they'd come to town, get drunk, and so forth, and, therefore, it never occurred to me to become a sailor in the Navy. ... Of course, Annapolis or West Point didn't occur to me, either. As I told you, college didn't occur to me until Rutgers asked me if I wanted to come, because of, hey, where I lived. In our discussions, my parents, my mother in particular, she talked a lot about how nice that would be, if I was one of these doctors that she had me read about, or, somehow, when I was small, read to me about, and things like that. I'll tell you another funny thing. When I was in grammar school, I went to a school right up the street here, where people from this neighborhood went to school. Right now, they bus black people there, but, this school only went to the seventh grade, so, I had to go downtown to the eighth grade. ... The physical ed director there, his nickname for me was "Doc." I often wondered why and I suppose ... that there was something about me, my personality or something, that seemed to point in that direction. I don't know. Another thought, ... this was built in Bayonne. ... [When] the war started, they started to build ... PT boats there. ... After the war, they started to make pleasure boats that looked like PT boats only smaller, and shortly after they started doing that, they had better accounting systems, and they found out they were losing money, [laughter] and they shut it down, and, therefore, that was the antique I had. [It] never leaked a drop.

KP: How long did you have that?

RO: Oh, I had this for ten or fifteen years, I guess. Anyway, these are (Elcos?) and there's several of them anchored down there, too. They had a funny house on them and all that, but, these were pretty old boats. They were built in the '30s and '40s. Guys lived on these as house

boats and probably had room for four or five guys sleeping on it. ... That was your only question about the Navy, “Why didn’t I go [and] join the Navy?” I never wanted to be a naval officer. I don’t know why, except [that] they did not want me to associate with the sailors, and, therefore, that thought never occurred to me.

KP: The Navy did not appeal to you because you had grown up in an actual Navy town.

RO: ... Well, in general, we were not supposed to associate with them or behave like them. ... As far as I was concerned, all the officers there came from Annapolis, and, from what I heard about Annapolis, you had to be appointed by a politician and the same with West Point. Well, my parents didn’t know any politicians. ... It never occurred to me even to take the exam for the Coast Guard. I don’t know why. ... This older son of mine, he went [to] college [for] three years before he took the exam for [the] Coast Guard. He wanted to [go] ... to Rutgers, because I went there, and, also, he wanted to be a doctor. ... You know what? I don’t think he went to class the whole year he went to Rutgers. They wanted him to, ... not resign, but, what is it when they tell him to drop out, ... so that his grades would not appear in the future? because if he stayed there, then, his grades would remain on his record and he’d never be able to get a record high enough to stay there.

KP: Withdrawal?

RO: Withdrawal. They recommended that he withdraw, and he called me up, and he told me he quit. “Like hell you’re gonna quit.” So, I didn’t know the significance of it until he got home and told me ... what the difference between quitting and withdrawing is, and staying there, and so forth. So, anyway, he couldn’t go back there. So, [at] this Mitchell College up here, my children could have gone there [for] free, which he did, for two years, and then, one night, I saw, in the paper, [that] they were doing an exam for the Coast Guard. ... He took one of these exams. [It was] just like the SATs or something like it. ... So, he took it, and he got in, and that’s really what he ... was made for, he says. [He’s] a real natural, ‘cause he’s the commandant of cadets now, you know. ... I don’t know if he’s becoming an admiral or not, but, he might. ...

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

RO: That you guys forgot to ask?

KP: Yes.

RO: ... Let me say [that] I enjoyed being in a fraternity rather than living in a dorm. ... Do you belong to a fraternity down there?

RL: No.

RO: ... When it was smaller like that, you’d ... [have] the Sophomore Hop, and the Junior Prom, and seniors had this Military Ball for graduation. Everybody wore tuxedos and tails or something. We had Mark (Chartre?), (Gene Krupa?), and Glenn Miller, and [at] that new gym,

... I guess they at least open the doors to have a swim, the big sliding doors, and they put the grandstand in the gymnasium. Now, they've got that new swimming pool they put out there. It's huge. [I had] a brief look at that when I ... [was] down there. ...

KP: The Sonny Werblin Center.

RO: Yeah. ... [For] those big weekends, we'd, you know, ... have the girlfriend come and spend the weekend in the fraternity house, you know, and we'd go find some other place to sleep. There's very little drinking then. Of course, I think that we had Prohibition until I was about fourteen years old. Those big weekends were really nice. I don't know if you have those now or not. Do you have a Soph Hop or a Junior Prom?

RL: At Rutgers? They have something like that. They have Deinerfest, a festival behind the river dorms at Deiner Park. That is the biggest weekend we have. We do not really get excited over football anymore.

RO: No. I don't think that they ever will at Rutgers. Here's that guy in Cap and Skull who lost his arm, right there. I can show you a picture of me with Ralph Schmidt. You spoke to him.

KP: Yes.

RO: He's a nice fellow. ... [I have] more pictures here. One of these guys is a Captain Johnson, [who] became a major later. ... Johnson was here. He was a major when he came over to medical school.

KP: Do you remember "Mortar" Malone?

RO: Mortimor?

KP: "Mortar" Malone. He was one of the ROTC instructors.

RO: Malone?

KP: I think he was a captain.

RO: ... His name is not listed here.

RL: He probably left by 1942.

RO: ... Everybody had to take it for the first two years. Do you still have to do that?

RL: No.

RO: Since it's a land grant college, everybody had to take ROTC for two years, and then, they would take a few more. Now, this is the whole gang here, I think, of those who they took for

advanced. ... These are seniors, up here, and we are in the junior group, here, in the advanced military [science program]. We spent a whole summer in Plattsburg, New York. ... This guy won an Upson Scholarship. His name is Smith.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Olsen added the following postscript.

My oldest son (I had five) went to the Coast Guard Academy after leaving Rutgers and some post graduate work, he took the exam. He's now in the Coast Guard and is an admiral, has been for two years. They only take about four guys from a graduating class.

End of addendum.]

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Reviewed by Scott Ceresnak 6/10/98
Reviewed by Bojan Stefanovic 1/20/00
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/20/00
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 8/7/00
Reviewed by Robert Olsen 8/00