

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: ok, my name is Gil Olson.

Question: And you're originally from Yakima.

Answer: Yakima, Washington, that's where I was born and raised until I went to, well, I went to the University of Washington, and then the service, of course, and I've been back in Olympia ever since that time.

Question: So were you farmers over there?

Answer: Yes, matter of fact, one of my grandsons has the farm that I was born and raised on.

Question: What type of farm?

Answer: Fruit farm. We had peaches and apples, cherries, pears, guess that was it.

Question: So were your parents, your grandparents, were they original settlers?

Answer: Well, my parents came out from Illinois. My father was born in Sweden, and my mother's parents were born in Sweden, and they were married in Illinois, and they had two children there, and then they came out to the state of Washington, bought the farm, and were farmers all their life.

Question: So you worked on the farm when you were young?

Answer: I did that. They didn't have child labor laws then, and I can remember picking up an apple, wiping it off on your pants and eating it without worrying about whether you're going to die or not. Today I'm dead by all these people because you can't possibly eat all those pesticides and still be alive.

Question: So did, when, see now in 1939, were you still in Yakima or were you over in college?

Answer: Yeah, I graduated from high school in '38. I went to junior college for the first year, and then I went to University of Washington after that. And that's when the war came along.

Question: Do you remember the day that you found out about Pearl Harbor?

Answer: Well, yeah. I can remember. I was sitting on the back of a boat out here in the harbor, Lewis's boat, when I came down with another friend of mine and his girlfriend, and we were on the back of the boat and I can remember Hazel coming out and saying, Come listen to the radio. Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, and of course, we went back to the University that night, you know, things were sort of different, because it was, all the trucks were running down to the harbor with all the soldiers and I got back to the fraternity house and of course that affected a lot of the people in my fraternity house, and the mood which was so very, very happy when I left was very somber when I left, but a lot of the fellas were in the National Guard, and if you remember the National Guard. You probably don't remember, but the National Guard was called up to active duty the next day. So, our house was depleted by quite a bit.

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was when you heard about it?

Answer: Did I know where it was? Yeah. I knew where it was.

Question: King of surprised, or did you sort of expect...

Answer: Well, I think you'd listened ever since the Germans had invaded Poland, and my opinion is President Roosevelt...I know I'm sort of alone in this, but President Roosevelt, I think, really wanted us in that war. In fact, I...this is heresy to say it, I think, but I still think that President Roosevelt knew about Pearl Harbor before it took place, and it took place because he wanted America in the war, and so like President Bush, now, it's hard to push American people into war.

Question: That's the opinion of other people. You read about that...the opinion of other people, quite a few people, whether he knew or not.

Answer: Well, I can't prove it. That's just a gut opinion.

Question: So then, you were in the fraternity; you were in your first year at U of W?

Answer: Well, see that was '41, the war, so that would have been my second year at University of Washington.

Question: So how did you end up in the military then?

Answer: Well, you've heard of the draft, and I didn't want to be drafted, so I volunteered and I went out to, oh, I can't think, Washington had the Navy enlistment deal there, and I went out there, and one of the people doing the enlisting was a fellow from my hometown, and so we got sort of friendly, and I says, Well, I was gonna enlist, and he says, Well, you qualify for the V5 program, which was the aviation program. I says, Well, I can't pass the physical. And he says, Why. I says, Well, my blood pressure's too high, cause every time I'd take my blood pressure for the military it'd jump way up and go back to my own doctor and it was very fine, so. Anyway, talking to him I did pass it very easily, so I went into the Navy in flight training. Started out in California, then back to Pasco, then back to Corpus Christi, then graduated in flight school as a Naval, well, you graduated as either a Marine or, and I didn't like water, and an island stays in the same place, where a carrier doesn't always stay in the same place, so I chose the Marines over the Navy, and at that time the Navy had a great deal of casualties, and so they were looking for replacements so, that's how I became a Marine.

Question: Did you have to make carrier landings in...

Answer: Well, we had to qualify as carrier landings. I actually took my carrier landings practice in Florida down by Miami, and, but I took my carrier landings in the Great Lakes, which is sort of odd place, but they have a small carrier there, so I... you had to qualify. You had to make 8 carrier landings, and 8 carrier takeoffs, and so I qualified there. And incidentally, the takeoffs are, you'd think the landings would be sort of hairy, but takeoffs are much worse because you come to the end of the ship, you don't have any choice. You have about 6 wires that catch you on the way coming in, so that was my last attempt to fly from a carrier.

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Question: No catapulting.

Answer: No, well they had catapult, but they only use those for the search planes... the seaplanes that they take off and then land out on searches, but all the other planes were launched. You gunned your airplane and started down the deck and hoped you had air speed at the end of the deck.

Question: So how fast are you going when you get to the end of the deck? Do you know?

Answer: Pardon me?

Question: How fast did you have to be going?

Answer: Well, the airplane that the aircraft carriers, which is not today, but we would try to maintain 30 miles an hour off the deck, and your plane had to have about 60 miles an hour, so you took off somewhere between 85 and 90 knots.

Question: You see pictures of old carriers that, when the planes leave the deck they drop.

Answer: You do. That's probably the hardest thing you learned when you went off the end of the carrier. If you didn't have air speed, you pointed the nose down to the water. You're about 90 feet above. Much higher now, but then about 90 feet above the water, and so you gotta learn to point that nose down and pick up speed and then come up. You almost hit the water sometimes, but the people that tired to pull the nose up were the people that went in the drink.

Question: Not a lot of fun, huh?

Answer: Lotta fun. Lot of enjoyable experiences. I'm glad I served in the service. I saw a lot of things I never would have seen otherwise, but I'm glad I'm through.

Question: Now you were deployed in the Pacific finally. Is that where you ended up going?

Answer: Yeah. I was in the Marshals and I was in the Gilberts, which is down in the Marianas.

Question: So how did they transport you out to the Pacific theater?

Answer: Well, we went to, I don't really remember, but I think we went to, I think we flew over to Hawaii, and in Hawaii we got aboard a carrier, and then were transferred out to the Marshals and then took off from there.

Question: So you didn't make another carrier takeoff then?

Answer: No. Never, once I got my deal, why... it might be interesting, I don't know, how I. I hate the water, you know, I hold my breath in the shower, because I swim, I breathe in underwater and breathe out on top. When I got to Chicago to check out on a carrier, I pretty much stayed out. I'd always sneak around to the

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

back till I'd gotten through. I stayed in pre-flight school for 8 extra weeks because I hadn't learned to swim yet. And Jack Tourney, who used to be the coach at University of Washington, was also the coach down there and he says, Gil, I think I'm going to keep you here to tell people, teach people how NOT to swim. So when I to the carrier, we took on the carrier was ok?, and my first wife and I had just gotten married and we got to go on leave when we got through, so the Admiral who was the head of the base then had this rule that you had to swim 200 yard with your clothes on, among some other things. Getting in and out of the life raft and that, that wasn't bad, but this 200 yards with our clothes on, I had never swam 200 yards without my clothes, and I think that that's the last time I've been swimming. And I don't plan to go swimming again.

Question: Just afraid of the water, huh?

Answer: Yeah. I think if I take a shower I hold my breath.

Question: So in the Marshal Islands the Gilberts, were you replacement pilots?

Answer: We were replacement squadron, yeah, the whole squadron didn't go, we were just replacements. About 7 or 8 of us went over in the Marshals, then we were transferred down to the Gilberts, Uliithe which was one of the staging areas, going to be a staging area for the invasion of Japan. So they were just gathering us, so that's where I flew the F4U 'cause I was operations, group operations down there, instead of assigned to a squadron. And so I flew the F4U there for my flight time, and that's where I first became acquainted with that airplane.

Question: Now the, was the SBD, is that what you flew primarily?

Answer: SBD's and SB2C's, they were dive-bombers. I was basically a dive-bomber pilot. That's what I was graduated as a dive-bombing pilot. And that's...

Question: It was just you, there was no radioman, or gunner on the plane?

Answer: Yeah. SBD and SB2C both we had a radioman, well, it wasn't much of a radio man, it was sort of, you know, 'cause most of the radio we did ourselves. He was the rear gunner, and observer, so he had a 50-caliber machine gun to protect us both from the rear.

Question: So when you got to the Marshals and the invasion had, you came in after the invasion, then?

Answer: We were mostly mop-up, we were what I would call the second wave. These islands of Mili and Eniwetok And we would fly search planes and search them to see if there's any activities, and then we'd go and bomb if saw any activity. Use napalm bombs and so we had strikes on those and, the Marshals were really the place where I did that. We were sort of mop-up. You'd get shot at once in awhile with ground fire, but not a great deal.

Question: You stayed a long time to root the Japanese out then?

Answer: Well, you know Mili was a small island around there. We'd look at that island, we bombed the airstrip and there were all kinds of bomb holes in there, and we'd fire around that and they'd fire around and we'd find someplace that they'd look

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

like they were growing stuff, and so we'd go in and napalm and burn up the ground, and burn up the people that happened to be there, you know, so, that's really not too much fun, but it's what you were told to do. You would guess, and we took prisoners off that island. People would surrender. We'd send ships down there and they'd come out and they were so emaciated, you know, it was really terrible. Look at those people. We figure that there was probably maybe, oh, 300 – 400 people on that island, and when they surrendered there was over 5,000 Japanese on that island, and where they came from and how they existed all that time with all the bombing we did was really amazing to me.

Question: Yeah, but they did a lot of...

Answer: Pardon me?

Question: They lived in a lot of caves and things, didn't they?

Answer: I don't know what they lived in. They were underground, 'cause we never found anything. And intelligence wasn't, of course, they didn't have the technology that we have today that they can see through forests and stuff, so it's most visual, but it amazed me that so many people could exist on that island.

Question: So did the, were you provided ground support? They'd call you in for...

Answer: No, the island had been secured. These were islands; basically, the only island I was on was Kwajalein where troops had gone in before us. These were sort of by-passed islands that they had airstrips on and the Japs needs, I mean you had airstrips on and stuff, but they had been bypassed, they'd been bombed, but there was no concentrated effort to...they were just isolated, they were just to keep them neutral was the whole idea, so they couldn't build up the Japanese forces.

Question: A lot of tiny little islands around there then.

Answer: Lots of little tiny islands out there.

Question: And Kwajalein? You were on Kwajalein Island?

Answer: We were on there. I took submarine training on that. Search and set out submarines, 'cause one of our jobs was to search for submarines. I never found any. I never found anything to bomb, except these islands.

Question: So Kwajalein?, what was it like on these airstrips you were operating out of. Were they paved or were they...?

Answer: No most of them were crush coral and they would have this uh, I don't know, sort of metal stripping, metal that you folded together. I forget what they called it now. I forget lots of things. That was laid on top of the coral. And so you would. The island really would take up the whole landing strip. You come out of the, you hit the runway at one end, and you tip off when you came to the end of the runway.

Question: Did, now you were married before you left. Is that...

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Yeah. I was married. I got married the day I graduated from flight school.

Question: So where did you meet your wife at?

Answer: I met my wife at University of Washington, and she was a blind date, and then we went together, and she came down to see me graduate, and we decided to get married. And we got married. That was her main rule?, is that I come back after the war and either I was going to law school and we were married and we had a child and at that time law school was 7 years. I had 4 more years to go and Al Lewis, who was now my father-in-law was a very, very good friend, wanted me to come down in business with him. My brother wanted me to be a lawyer down in Yakima with him, but that meant 4 more years of school, so I chose the easy way, and came down and worked for Al Lewis.

Question: So did you get lots of letters while you were overseas?

Answer: Yeah. Letters were the most important thing. In fact, the.. in the pictures were some...I tried to find some of those letters. I couldn't find those, and but I can remember that Jerry was the only child I had and was my old.... he was born before I went overseas, and I had a picture of him with a little lock of hair. But Marie was very good. She sent me a real newsy letter at least once a week, and so she... Mail wasn't that often over there, but she always had pictures in it, and she always had news of Jerry and what had gone on at home, so she was my source of really, of information.

Question: Yeah, it's pretty important, mail call, wasn't it?

Answer: It was very important. You felt sorry for the people really that didn't get any mail, because you were getting. If you didn't get mail, you sort of stayed away from them, 'cause, you know, it's so sad when they call out mail and you're one of two or three guys that don't get any mail. Even worse was getting a letter from your wife telling that she was going out with some somebody else and she wasn't gonna be your wife anymore. And that was really difficult, and that happened quite often.

Question: Do you have any friends that that happened to in your group?

Answer: Pardon me?

Question: Any friends in your group have that happen?

Answer: uh, one of my very best friends, it didn't happen to him, but it happened to his gunner, and really shook him up. Well, they sent him home; the Red Cross took him home. It didn't end up salvaging the marriage.

Question: Did you wear your letters out? Keep them all bundled up and reread them?

Answer: Did I what?

Question: Did you wear out your letters? Did you treasure the letters that you got?

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Well, I still have some of them someplace. That's what I tried to find, but I couldn't find them. The only thing I did find was a picture of Jerry, my oldest son, who's now 58, with a little lock of hair at that time, I have. But I used to carry that in my wallet overseas. I still have that.

Question: So your wife was pretty worried about it when you were gone, I take it?

Answer: Well, Yeah. I think all wives were worried about there husbands. Most of them anyway were worried about their husbands. I think my wife was very glad to see me get back. I was pretty glad to see her when I got back.

Question: Did you, now was she there when you...where did you leave from again?

Answer: Well, I left from San Diego, and I came back to San Diego.

Question: So she was here then.

Answer: She was here, yeah, 'cause we came back part way by carrier and part way by airplane. We were lucky when we were in Ulithe because at that time, you could get discharged, well, sent home on leave, we'll put it that way, but you had to sort of find your own transportation, and we at that time, newly made captains, which wasn't very high ranking. There were a lot of lieutenant colonels and that, and all was up there was tramp ships, you know, and so a captain, so was way down on the list. But we happened to be sitting in the officer's club this one day, as Paul (inaudible) mentioned, and myself, we were both coming home, and this fellow walked in, whom we had gone to flight school with back in Corpus Christi, and he was out flying the plane going between the islands because they were looking for, what they were really looking for was beer from the islands. And so we told them what we were doing and how we were going to have to wait, and he said, Well, I'm here and you come down to the airfield and tell them, the guard, that you want to see me and the airplane. And he said, Don't bring any luggage. You gotta leave without luggage. He said, We'll check our manifest, and if it isn't overweight, you can fly back to Hawaii with us. And so we went aboard the airplane, and that's how we got, so we passed up all these people, got home before they did, so we were very, very fortunate in that respect.

Question: Did the, uh, officer's club over there. What was that like? Was it there, was the facilities built up over there?

Answer: Not really. You slept in what, everything was really in (inaudible), That's a tent on the sides and top, but it did have a wood floor. We'd make our beds that we slept on out of old inner tubes. They were very priceless over there, because you take an inner tube and cut it into strips and line your bed.

Question: Like springs, huh?

Answer: Yeah. Like we take a shower, we would catch rain in 50-gallon barrels and pump it up and take a shower. When it rained, everybody would whip outside, and girls were non-existent over there, so you'd whip outside with a bar of soap and take a shower in clean water.

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Question: So you saw Japanese POW's over there?

Answer: Pardon me?

Question: You actually saw Japanese POW's when you were there?

Answer: Oh, yeah, we saw quite a few Japanese over there. Captives. The odd thing about the Japanese, you know, they were, when you take them down to prison, when we'd go down and see them sometime, just out of curiosity. You know, they had showers and everything for them, but the Japanese don't believe in showers, so they take a little like a wash basin and put, turn the shower on and put the wash basin, fill up with water, and they would squat down beside the wash basin and take a shower. When they run out of water, they fill up the washbasin again. They wouldn't think about getting underneath the shower.

Question: So were they pretty beaten, or were they, 'cause a lot of there were a couple of island where hardly anybody'd surrender.

Answer: Well, they just, their philosophy didn't believe in surrender, you know, they just amazed me. They're very resilient people. They have a different lifestyle that you and I do. They think differently than you and I do. I'm not saying they're wrong. I think the thing that I resented the most really was Pearl Harbor, you know, that they were over there bombing us, and I go over there to Pearl Harbor and I go down the walkway, and you see all the signs in Japanese and American and you go into the restaurants and the menus are in Japanese, and English, and I think I sort of resent that. I personally have, should have, do have. I have a lot of good Japanese friends, but I still think that we were fighting those people, you know, and I don't quite see the, our guys were over there, you know, and prisoners of war, and I don't think that they would do the same thing for us if they'd won.

Question: At that time, did you have a hatred for them?

Answer: Oh, I don't think it's hatred. It's just been sort of a personal, I didn't really hate the Japanese, you know, I, we bomb with napalm and I see these people down there, you know, and the napalm is pretty hot stuff, and ...

Question: So was that hard to do?

Answer: It, well, you're just taught to do that, you know. They're the enemy, and you go bomb them and, you know, you picture there what you did, but you don't like to go down to the field and start praising? people down there that are working and you don't like to kill people. At least, I don't enjoy killing people.

Question: You're on a, being a dive-bomber, you like a B-17, you'd have a better chance of actually seeing what you were bombing.

Answer: Well, you do because you dive from 8 – 12,000 feet and you think you're down vertically, but you're really down about 70 degrees, but you go down to the lowest you think you can, which is about 2,000 feet, and release your bomb and you're looking right at them, and then you come back out of your dive, hopefully, but napalm was, you weren't dive bombing. You do what they call skip bombing. You come in and then go down about a 45 degree angle and let your napalm go. Which

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

was not as bad during the daytime, but nighttime you don't really realize how much it lights up the sky. SO I think the first time I dropped a napalm bomb I probably dropped mine about 3 miles from the target because the guy's napalm went out ahead of me. And it scared me, the big flash! But you get used to it.

Question: So why did you go down, why the different, the angle of attack when you napalmed.

Answer: Well, napalms would kind of spread, you know . Your napalm bomb, you want to spread it over a big area. When you're using a 2,000 pound bomb or a 1,000 pound, you're trying to hit a specific target rather than the napalm. You're trying to cover a big area with the napalm, and when that bomb bursts and explodes, you know, it covers a big area.

Question: So at 2,000 feet. What do you see at 2,000 feet when you're looking down?

Answer: Well, it's sort of hard to say, because you're looking at the target site, which is a series of rings, and you try to pick out your target and try to get in the middle of that, so it sort of comes at you. That's probably more bombers got lost with the fact that the guys get fixed on that target and they get too low, and when they pull up, the don't pull up.

Question: So you could see, at 2,000 feet, you can make out a truck and a palm tree.

Answer: Oh, yeah. You can see that.

Question: Could you make out people?

Answer: Probably a group of people. You wouldn't distinguish them, but you could see them.

Question: They're still pretty fuzzy?

Answer: As far as people were concerned, we didn't see them except in the napalm, because others you were bombing the building, a specific building, so you wouldn't really see any people. In fact, you just see the building, and then your intelligence planes would show you when you got back whether you hit the building or whether the building was still standing there.

Question: Was that a hard, was it sort of morally, was it something your conscience dealt with?

Answer: Well, I think napalm was worse, because you were, that's hot, and it burns, you know. When you're going to bomb a building, that's impersonal, so you want to come back and have intelligence show that you hit the building. If you come back and it shows that the building is still standing there, that means you didn't do a very good job. Bombing was, dive-bombing itself was sort of impersonal. You're just looking at a target. Napalm, you see the people. You see the what, the crops, you see, it's a fire, and you know, fire's not a very pleasant way to die.

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Question: So then you personally, because most people you speak to that were pilots they were high up altitude and it was very imper.... they were aware of what they were doing, but it was so high up that. Did that...?

Answer: Well, I think you were obeying orders. If they said Go do something, you go did it, you know. You didn't have the protests like you did. If I higher authority told you to do something, you did it because they told you. You didn't feel guilty about it. You didn't feel happy about it. It was just something you had to do.

Question: We heard that from quite a few veterans about, that it was duty. But in their internal struggles, most people's struggles were afterward.

Answer: Well, yeah. I wasn't really that connected with that much activity. My, the fellow that I went out with the last time, there were 6 of us went out, and 4 of us were... I should say, there were 8 of us went out and 4 were sort of neophytes. Four of the people that were our leaders, so to speak, had been out there; this was their second trip out there. Second tour of duty. Now they'd been out there in Guadalcanal, those places, you know. If they had 6 pilots in the squadron, they were lucky to come back with 5 of those pilots, you know. Their casualties were really high. And ours weren't that high. So I'd have to divide a war into two parts, and I guess I was in the second part.

Question: Most dangerous part, still, though.

Answer: Well, it, anything dangerous, but anything that's fun is dangerous. I really enjoyed my war experience. I saw places I would never have seen in my lifetime, and we didn't have, we thought it was really bad, but we didn't have it that bad.

Question: First time you'd been out of the United States, probably.

Answer: I think it was. I think it probably was. Because I was raised in the depression years, and nobody felt the depression wasn't..

Question: What was that like, during the depression?

Answer: Well, I guess I can remember when you, when your folks baked and cooked and canned and everything, you know, and you go down to the store and buy something, you know, hamburger was 2 pounds for 15 cents, loaf of bread was 10 cents, you could buy a lot of candy for a penny. Store bought stuff was a delicacy to us. Homemade bread and homemade jams and you kill a pig and you eat that pig all the time. We didn't have refrigeration, they didn't have lights. It was quite a bit different, but I was raised in a very happy farm. I was very lucky in that respect.

Question: Did you have water, I mean...

Answer: Well, yeah, you had systems in those days, you know, so your water was, everybody had their own system. So you fill up the system and in the wintertime you're very careful with the water, because they had to get it out of the spring.

Question: Was the community you were in at that time, Yakima, was it large?

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Oh, no, no. It wasn't. Yakima probably had about 12,000 people at that time. University of Washington had about 12,000 and WSU had about 3,000 people, and that's not quite true anymore. My high school class, for instance, there was.... I didn't realize how good my life was in, but I think we had I think 17 people in our graduating class, and there was only 3 boys and 14 girls, I didn't realize how lucky I was at that time.

Question: so did the, the depression, probably being a farmer was in one part good because you were producing food during the depression I suppose. Where city people that weren't, they might have had a harder time almost.

Answer: Well, yeah. It depended upon where you lived, of course, farmer, we had a small farm and we had a large family, so we all worked on the farm. You didn't have the child labor laws you have today, you know, but...I think the farmers were more of a community than people living in the cities. If you had a job in the city, you were in pretty good shape. If you had a farm, you made do.

Question: So that was a big benefit, the war really provided for a lot of people, I mean, the education benefits. It changed this country drastically, didn't it?

Answer: Yeah. It did that for me. I went back after World War II, I forget what program they called it, but I went back to college after World War II, and it didn't cost me anything at that time really, you know. The GI Bill of Rights, and you got your veteran's benefits at that time. I still think veteran's benefits should be for those people that are injured, not for those of us that came through uninjured.

Question: Did, what was the worst part of the whole war for you? What was the worst day you had?

Answer: Oh, I can, I think the worst thing about the war is really you're away from home. And you don't have the conveniences of home, but it wasn't that bad. I think just the loneliness, not lonely, 'cause you had friends around, but you miss your family. Family is very important, always been very important to me.

Question: And what was the best day, do you remember the best day?

Answer: When the war ended. When the Japanese surrendered, you know. You can talk to a lot of people, and they'll talk about the atomic, atom bomb, and stuff, you know. I happen to think that was a great thing. They killed a lot of Japanese, sure, but as I said, I was on Ulithe, and that was where one of the build-up places for invasion of Japan, and the Japanese are very tenacious. To land on Japan, to land on the shores of Japan after seeing other places, we would have lost. A lot of people are alive today that wouldn't be alive today because their fathers lived through the war that wouldn't have lived through the war. So, the atomic bomb to me was a great thing. I think it saved a lot more lives, and particularly American lives than would have been otherwise.

Question: When you were on Ulithe and the build-up was going on, were you there long enough to watch it ?

Answer: It was just starting when they dropped the atomic bomb. That was a time of jubilation as far as we were concerned.

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Did you know that you were gearing up to invade?

Answer: Well, yes and no. It was not, you know, something that you was a press release or whatever. It's sort of word of mouth that these ships were starting to come, and people were starting to come. You know that there's a reason for it. They don't really tell you the reason, but scuttlebutt is a great thing. And officially nothing was said. Scuttlebutt said Yes, so who knows.

Question: So do you remember thinking about when you were thinking about invading Japan?

Answer: uh, no. I think, nobody that I know of was looking forward to the invasion. They'd been through Okinawa, Guadalcanal, those places, but the Japanese are tough. They're tough to fight against, you know, and you're defending their homeland. You know an awful lot of the people they were out of luck and you weren't going to make it.

Question: If you had gone, you would end up on the main island of Japan, being where you were at Ulithe. You would have gone if...

Answer: Well, someplace we would have been in Japan. I don't know where, 'cause we were not carrier. We hadn't flown carrier enough that we wouldn't have been based on a carrier. We would've, once they establish a beachhead, if you want to call it that, they would try to secure an air base. And then we would have been transferred to the air base, so we would have been, you know, had a base there, but we would have been bombing targets in Japan, where I don't know.

Question: Have you been to Japan?

Answer: No, I never have been to Japan.

Question: Ever had the desire to go?

Answer: No, not really. Not really. I'd like to go down to the South Pacific again. I thought, Well, I could go to New Zealand. I'd like to go to Australia, 'cause I never got to those. That was supposed to be our relief, but it didn't turn out that way. I got to go to Guam, which was really very interesting.

Question: Did, you still don't want to go back to Kwajalein, though, huh?

Answer: Oh, I'd like to go back and see some. I still, some people did go back to the islands, and. The romance, I guess you would call it, was gone now. It wasn't, they aren't quite the same as you remember them. You know, like Majoro for instance.. the natives were off on another atoll. We were on this one atoll, and now it's back to its native, and they say go back there and it's not like it was. It's dirty and poverty, and it. I've never talked to a person that's gone back to any place in the South Pacific that was glad they went back. The glamour that you think, you know, that you remember, and you always remember the glamour. You don't really remember the bad things. They go back and the glamour isn't there anymore, and so I don't regret not going back.

Question: But you go to Hawaii quite often, though, huh?

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: We go to Hawaii almost every year. Yeah. I don't go to Honolulu, though. I don't care for that.

Question: Have you ever been to the memorial there in Pearl Harbor?

Answer: I've been there once, yeah.

Question: A long time ago?

Answer: Well, I haven't been there for about 10 years. Now they're worried about it, you know, because the oil's coming up. I don't know what the oil is coming from, but it's there.

Question: Is the... you said about the Japanese writing and this and that. It's sort of an odd situation where you have Japanese friends and this happened. Are there still things that strike you as wrong? I don't know if I'm ...

Answer: Well, I don't know what to say about, the internment, you remember, was very. Now I was in favor of internment at the time. Of course, that's what Roosevelt did to build up support. And I also have very close Japanese friends that are good friends, and they were interned and they have a very different view. We never talk about that, cause we have different view, because I can still remember some of the death marches, and some of the... We treated the Japanese, in my opinion, a lot better than they treated us, and I can't feature that if they had won, that we would be getting compensation today, 'cause the big word today is compensation. I don't believe in that.

Question: Did you have any Japanese-Americans living in Yakima at that time?

Answer: oh, yes. Big Japanese community. In the lower valley, there was fruit farming, and Japanese were great fruit, what do you call it, vegetables and that kind of stuff, they grew. They didn't grow apples and stuff, but they grew a lot of their fruit down there, and a lot of those were uprooted and taken from their homes, which was not right.

Question: Did you go to school with any of them?

Answer: No, I, what they have in Yakima. You have the Lower Valley and Upper Valley, and I was in the Upper Valley. I don't think that, I didn't, you know, we were all Caucasian. We all white. I didn't know what a Jewish person was till I went to college. Never had any in our, I didn't think there were...and I still don't, you know, but those Jews, well, I said, What's wrong with being a Jew. I'm a Swede, so we didn't really have any racial... maybe we did, but you know, no Blacks lived in our community. Nobody that wasn't Caucasian lived in our community, so you were never exposed to them.

Question: The military experience must have been really educational as far as people went for you, because all of a sudden you were in this, probably you were exposed to people who had been raised in creeds that you never...

Answer: That's true. People and stuff that had nothing, and being in the service, their conditions were improved. Of course, segregation was still there when I was in the south, you know, you had different barracks for the black people, and the

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

black soldiers or Navy, they really were. They were the guys that waited on the tables. They did menial jobs, but they didn't live with us. They were kept very separate, and we used to be sort of stubborn. When we were down south, you know, we would never obey the signs on the buses and the trolley. We would sit in the back. Deliberately, because I didn't see then and I don't see now why you pick on somebody because they were a different color. You know, we were officers and so these people would get very mad at us, you know, but they couldn't say much, because they were sort of afraid to say anything about the military, so I sat in a lot of back of buses, because I just don't believe in that.

Question: It's a big culture shock when you were in the Deep South from up here isn't it?

Answer: It used to be. I don't know whether it is now, but it was two different countries. You know, I can remember the colored only, or no colored allowed, no this that, you know. I just, I don't agree with that.

Question: Did you speak Swedish in your household?

Answer: No, I regret that, too, because when I was a young kid, you know, I was an American and I was always called Swede, you know. Weren't very many Swedes in our community, you know. There was a lot of Dutchmen, a lot of Englishmen, a lot of Frenchmen, but Swede was just, now that would be discriminatory. I didn't see why people called me Swede, you know. Oly was ok, but Swede was not, but that...

Question: Did you Mom and Dad. You must have had relatives back in Sweden.

Answer: Well, we did. My Dad did. My Dad was born there, but Mother and Dad would speak Swedish, but we would never learn it, because that was, we wanted to speak English. I regret that today, because I wished I had, I wished I had, knew more about my Swedish heritage than I do know. I've never been there. My sisters were back there one time, and looked up the family.

Question: So you have cousins back there still.

Answer: I don't know. No, no cousins. I've now reached that time in my life when I tell my children, when I die, you know, you're gonna be the oldest generation 'cause I am now the oldest generation. I have no brothers, no sisters, no aunts, no uncles, and nobody that's older than I am in my family.

Question: You're the patriarch now, huh?

Answer: Well, I'm the patriarch of the family. I told my sons now, one son says, Well, Dad, I'm 58, how can I be your kid. I says, You know, when you're 75, if I'm still alive you're still gonna be my kid. It's what happens.

Question: Did, when you came back, did you sort of put away those years and go on with things and...

Answer: Yeah, I never dealt in the past. I had a good time. I enjoyed it, and like I told you today, I had to go back up in the attic and look to find those things. I don't keep anything old. I never wore my metals because I didn't feel that we

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

deserved them. I think the guys that the first time were overseas, they deserved the metals. They earned them. We got an air medal every 5 medals every 5 trips we made and I didn't think that was right. Some guy was shot down, and wounded. He deserved a medal, I didn't deserve a medal.

Question: Were you proud of the time you spent in the service?

Answer: Was I what?

Question: Proud of the time you spent...?

Answer: Yeah, I'm very glad I was in the service. I'm very glad I was a Marine, you know. The old saying, Once a Marine, always a Marine, and somebody says I'm an ex-Marine, I say, There's no such thing as an ex-Marine. I'm very proud of the fact that I served, yes. I'm very proud of the fact that I was a Marine.

Question: Is the, when you see the flag at a football game or what do you think when you see that?

Answer: Well, I'm a flag buff I guess you'd want to call it. I know flag etiquette, and I put my hand over my heart and I do something else. The seam of your pants is where your left hand's supposed to be and your hand is supposed to be closed and over your heart and you're standing at attention. You stand at attention and you always face the flag, and you see people around now with their hands in their pockets and that irritates me, you know. I believe in respect for the flag. Now, there's a great deal of patriotism today, as you know. People flying the flag, but, you know, I have a flag and I fly it, but every time I fly it, I have a post that I fly it on, and I always have a light on. The flag is not supposed to be flown at night unless it's illuminated, but most people don't know it, and the flags drag on the ground and I say, Well, they're patriotic, but they ought to at least learn respect for the flag. If I had my druthers, you would do that, and if I give the flag salute, which I do quite often, I always explain to the audience first that they're supposed to stand erect, at attention, with their hand over their heart, and your left hand at your side. I think that's important. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. To me it's important.

Question: A lot of people don't know. A lot of people have no idea what price was paid for that flag.

Answer: Well, I can remember a friend of mine, it's an old friend, I'm not going to give his name, but he was telling me one day, I have a flag in my front yard. I says, Do you keep it up all night? He said, Yeah. I said, Do you have a light on it? He said, No, why? I said, The flag is never supposed to be up at night unless it's illuminated. Well, I didn't know that. Darned you anyway, now I gotta go home and light the flag up. Respect the flag, it's very important to me. Respect the country, it's very important to me. Respect the family, it's very important to me. I hope I never lose those values.

Question: Well, thank you very much, Gil. That wasn't too painful, was it?

Answer: No. I probably talked too much.

Question: No, no, you were great. You're the second person from Yakima we ...

Gil Olson

Tape 1 of 1

Answer: Is that right? Who else did you have?

Question: You know, I've gotta look and see...

Answer: You're just as bad as I am, aren't you?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: I can't remember anything.

Question: Actually, we also, but as far as fruit farmers, I think you're about the third or fourth fruit farmer. I had a woman and a man who

Answer: Well, farming was a big industry in Yakima.

Question: She was raised on a farm and her husband had a farm deferral and spent the war years farming. You know, actually, they probably weren't from Yakima. I think they might have been Swedish, actually.

Answer: Well, I don't. Farmers might have been deferred. I don't know. I wasn't farming at the time. I was going to college, and college students sure as hell weren't deferred.

Question: So V5 was the college ?

Answer: Yeah. You had to have 2 years of college, and you had to pass the physical, and you had to...it was. Getting a V5 was pretty tough. I was going to enlist in the Army Air force, because I liked flying. I had a pilot's license before, before the war, and I was going to be a pilot, but you know, I don't know why this was. I could not get my heart down, you know, it was way up 200 some. Now it's 130 something. I have no trouble, but I would go take that physical, you know, and I just know that that heart test was coming. I'd go home, take blood pressure and it was fine. My own doctor said, Fine. So finally this guy says, You know, you gotta do something pretty soon, 'cause you can't exempting you in the draft. So I went out to, what they call it, the field's still there, but it's not active anymore, at Lake Washington, but I went out there to enlist, and this guy that was in Enlistment was the captain, but he was from my home town, so he got talking to me, and he says, Well, Geez, you oughta go in the V5 program. I says, I can't pass the physical. He said, What's wrong. I says, My blood pressure. Well, of course, was always the last thing they gave. He says, Well, let's go take it right now and see how it is. And so I did. Well, geez, once I passed and it was just normal, so once I passed that the rest of it was a cinch. So that's how I came to be in the Navy instead of the Army.

Question: Well thank you Gil, I've really enjoyed this.