

Dr. Ralph Olsen

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Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by Bianca Milligan Zachary Wright

Edited by Leah Cohen

Cohen: Hi. Today is December 5, 2018. My name is Leah Cohen and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I'm very pleased to interview Colonel Ralph Olsen, M.D., at his home in West Bend, Wisconsin. So, we'll start with a little bit about your background, before you joined the ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. When and where were you born?

Olsen: I... I was born in Milwaukee--- May 14, 1929--- at Mount Sinai Hospital, our principal Jewish hospital - and my Grandfather was chief of surgery at that time.

Cohen: Wow! What was it like growing up in Milwaukee?

Olsen: Uh-- my... my mother, a doctor's daughter, married a Norwegian sailor while he was United States citizen being born here one month after my grandparents got here from Norway. But uh, the marriage did not last [referring to his parent's marriage]. So, I... I grew up fundamentally without a father, and I had wonderful uncles, and I grew up in a nice neighborhood, nice grade school, nice high school in what is now, the Central City of Milwaukee.

Cohen: Okay and... what did your mother do for a living?

Olsen: Well, my mother, graduated from Milwaukee-Downer College [a former woman's college, now Lawrence University] in Milwaukee and... after the divorce, she went back and got her teaching degree from--- University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, which was then called Milwaukee Normal School and she taught... well until the age of seventy.

Cohen: Wow!

Olsen: Taught kindergarten.

Cohen: Wow, a real career teacher.

Olsen: Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah... and you mentioned in the questionnaire that both your uncle Bob Fitzsimmons as well as your father, Norman Olsen, had served in World War One and later, World War Two?

Olsen: That's... that's right. I'm proud of my father. I never saw much [of him] during my lifetime, but--- during World War One, he served on a--- sailing ship, the Kurt, which was taken as a prize up in Seattle when we entered the war and he sailed this purely sailing ship to the Philippines where another German prize was taken-- and Dad had... had training in square rig ships from a naval academy in Chicago, which doesn't exist anymore. So, he was [putted up? 3:12] on a prized crew on the other wooden German ship sailing back to San Francisco which took him three months. By the way, the--- Kurt where... where my father first served in World War One, was a steel hull, three mast-ed ship and--- she--- was renamed after she was taken as a prize the--- the Moshulu and after World War One, she served as grain ship from England to Australia back and forth and, interestingly, she is still afloat in Philadelphia as a restaurant, and beautifully maintained.

Cohen: Wow, so very--- long lasting ship.

Olsen: Yeah and Uncle Bob, as I said earlier to you, served with the 339th Infantry which was the regiment we sent to Russia in World War I. He was a Captain. He commanded C Company... was rather badly wounded over there... and... But stayed in the theater. Some of their biggest fights were, well after the Armistice and in November of 1918. When they got back to New York, nobody even paid any attention to them. Well, when World War--- II started, right after Pearl Harbor, my Uncle Bob and my dad... Uncle Bob went to [U.S] Army recruiting and my dad went back to sea and Uncle Bob said "I want my rifle company back," and they said, "Mr. Fitzsimmons, you're in your forties. We can't give you a rifle company. We'll make you a lieutenant colonel." He said, "I just want to be a captain and have my rifle company back." And he wrote his congressman and he wrote his senator, but to no avail, they made him a lieutenant colonel in the Quartermaster Corps, and he served the war out building the Burma Road [A road built during WWII linking Burma with Southwest China].

Cohen: Oh, my!

Olsen: He died one month after the armistice. At a party, at the Officer's club.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness!

Olsen: And is buried at the Punchbowl [Crater] in... in Hawaii, in Oahu, Hawaii. The... our military cemetery.

Cohen: 'Cause that's where he was at the time that he passed away?

Olsen: No, he was in... he passed away in a--- Karachi, which is now Pakistan, but then was part of India.

Cohen: Oh. Did your uncle and your father talk to you a lot about their war experiences?

Olsen: I saw my uncle more than my father.

Cohen: Yes.

Olsen: And--- he [Olsen's uncle] --- yeah, he talked somewhat, but after his death and in-- my... when I was in my fifties and sixties, I read up on the 339th Regiment, and everything they went up through there in Russia.

Cohen: You mentioned that you--- that a lot of people in high school were also very enthusiastic about serving.

Olsen: Without a doubt. Every single graduate went into the [U.S.] Army, Navy, or Marines, and of course, we all looked forward to that opportunity, but I graduated in '47 and the War had been over for a year and a half. Then I went to college [laugh] and I still wanted to be an Army officer, so I was in basic ROTC and then infantry ROTC. Well, they wouldn't commission me because of vision. So, I went to medical school and finally, got commissioned into the Army after graduating from medical school. [laugh].

Cohen: [laugh]. So, which high school had you gone to?

Olsen: I went to West Division High School in Milwaukee.

Cohen: In Milwaukee? Was it because World War II was going on that you and your peers all wanted to go and fight for [interrupted]?

Olsen: Oh, yes. That was the feeling.

Cohen: Interesting. Did people discuss politics and the war a lot at the time?

Olsen: Well, you know, this is interesting.... Milwaukee was a very sympathetic German community. There was the German - American Bund and some prominent Milwaukeeans were members of it. But once the War started, once we were in the War, they all did a complete turn around and supported the effort. One of our most prominent families, the Nunnemachers, their son, Jake, had died the last days of fighting in Northern Italy. Many, many tragedies. We must remember during the Second World War, we averaged 150 dead per day. I mean, on average, 150 telegrams went out every day of someone who was killed.

Cohen: That is staggering.

Olsen: It is.

Cohen: I probably don't have the right term, but you were saying before, you wanted to join the Army right away, but they didn't accept you initially because of your vision?

Olsen: That's right. [laugh]. And my third year of college in infantry ROTC, they said, "Your vision is so bad, we'll never take you in the infantry in the active Army." So, well, I was a zoology major and I was qualified for medical school, so I went to medical school. Upon graduation, the same day I graduated, I was commissioned in the Army.

Cohen: Right away. And what kind of training did do when you were part of ROTC and how was it organized?

Olsen: Many, many institutions in the United States... Many colleges or universities are called "Land grant universities," and the government gave them the land and financed the building with the stipulation that they would train officers for the Army. Naval ROTC came a lot later. This was originally Army ROTC, Reserved Officers Training Corp. It's all gone now. Up until about 1965 at the University of Wisconsin, there was compulsory... for all male freshman ROTC, for two years.

Cohen: Would that mean you would have to train? Let's say, do basic training in the summer time. How did that work?

Olsen: No. No, there was no summer time training during the first two years. ROTC consisted of two classes a week in tactics. Then on Saturday morning, there would be drill in the wonderful, old armory at UW [University of Wisconsin] Madison.

Cohen: What did the drill consist of?

Olsen: Exactly that. [laugh]. Marching, falling out in uniform, and... going through the manual of arms. Those were wonderful days, the two towers of the old red gym, well, called then, the armory were full of gun racks and there were probably 2000 Enfield rifles stacked up in there for the cadets. But then, after two years of basic, you could go onto a branch ROTC. The University of Wisconsin had infantry, transportation corps, engineers, finance, and medical school. And so, you just went on.

Cohen: Did you learn how to use any of the rifles?

Olsen: Oh, yeah. Following my junior year, we went to camp for six weeks at Fort McCoy [Wisconsin] and just trained incessantly, fired every single weapon in the inventory. It was interesting. [laugh]. I want to emphasize that thirty-four years

in the active Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve, I've never been in combat.

Cohen: But I'm sure you've dealt with a lot of soldiers who were in combat.

Olsen: Oh, yes.

Cohen: Okay. So, how was the medical school program?

Olsen: Medical school ROTC?

Cohen: Yeah.

Olsen: This was pretty easy... It was only one hour a week of military medical instruction. The professor of military science and medical school was also a resident in cardiology. It was pretty loose. Oh! We did go to camp though between the freshman year of medical school and the sophomore year of medical school. Everybody had to go to a basic training camp, all the medical school cadets, except the veterans. I said, "Look, I've went through basic training at Fort McCoy with infantry ROTC." They said, "Okay, Olsen. You can go Walter Reed Army Hospital [center, near Washington D.C.]," which was a wonderful summer.

Cohen: Oh, okay. In Washington D.C, the military hospital. What type of training did you do there at Walter Reed?

Olsen: At Walter Reed? I simply did purely medical training in dermatology and medicine.

Cohen: And when you were in these various ROTC, did you have to wear a uniform?

Olsen: Oh, yes. Yes.

Cohen: And did you live in a special dorm or was it just a dorm with other--?

Olsen: No. You didn't live in a special dorm. The uniforms for the ROTC were all tailor-made by a company in Philadelphia, Jacob Reed and Company. And they were beautiful uniforms.

Cohen: [Laugh, somewhat unintelligible] ...tailor-made.

Olsen: Yeah. [laugh].

Cohen: That's kind of funny. [laugh]. So, you're in college, I believe, in medical school and I think this would coincide with the Korean War.

Olsen: That's exactly when it coincided. So, I didn't go to Korea.

Cohen: Because you were still a student?

Olsen: Yeah.

Cohen: Were you wanting to go to Korea? Were you concerned about being sent to Korea?

Olsen: I was so engaged in medical school; I didn't have time to think about getting out of medical school and going to Korea. Anyways they wouldn't commission me in the infantry, so I couldn't have gone anyway.

Cohen: Okay, since you were not commissioned in the infantry, where did they put you so to speak?

Olsen: Well, as they said, if you graduated from medical school, they would commission you if you had a seeing eye dog. So, that's what happened.

Cohen: [laugh]. Okay, so... I think I was wondering about what you did between 1954 to 1956... I missed [interrupted].

Olsen: Well, the Army would not take me for an internship when I graduated from medical school. They said they'd take me into the regular Army in January... in December 1955, so I did a civilian internship in Maine and did some residency in Madison [Wisconsin] the summer of '55, the last terrible polio epidemic. It was terrible. Then, I went to school for six months and then I went into the Army at the end of October, in the active Army at the end of October 1955. January '56, I took my six month - what was called the "Army Company Grade Officers Course" - in which, the young doctors in that course were taught about every single branch of the Army. We were taught about the third types of Army hospitals, evacuation, wound treatment... We all received a fair amount of surgical treatment with goats. It was a nice course. And then in June of 1956, when I finished that course, I was sent to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver for a two-year residency in pediatrics. The Army's got lots of kids and I spent most of my life taking care of them. In Denver, I met Lieutenant Eugenie Fischer and we got married. I had seen her at Fort Sam Houston [Texas] marching and I thought, "Oh, what a beautiful girl." And in Denver, she walked down to my ward in a white uniform and that was it. And we've been married sixty years next summer.

Cohen: So, one second: When had you been in Fort Sam Houston and when did you go from there to Fitzsimmons?

Olsen: I went to Fort Sam Houston to Fitzsimmons in June of '56.

Cohen: So, you did the six-month training. Okay, got it.

Olsen: Yup. The Six-Month Company Officers Course.

Cohen: Course. And so, you had already seen her and landed both together at the Fitzsimmons. Wow. So, what sparked your interest in pediatrics?

Olsen: Now. This is an interesting question. First of all, my mother was a kindergarten teacher. Secondly, during my internship, I always thought I'd be a good orthopedic surgeon, but during my internship, the orthopedic surgeons were not inspiring. And the pediatricians, all three of them in Bangor, Maine, were wonderful teachers. And I really got a hang for pediatrics and it's good I got into it.

Cohen: I know this isn't part of the interview, but I really loved my pediatric doctor and I think he only stopped practicing in his late eighties. He was this wonderful man. [laugh].

Olsen: [laugh] Well, good for him! I retired from pediatrics when I was seventy-two. Good for him.

Cohen: So, were you and Eugenie, did you ever work as part of the same medical team or same ward?

Olsen: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we did.

Cohen: Okay, yeah. I guess I'll speak to your wife as well, but I noticed at some point, she decided to retrain as a speech therapist for children. So, I kind of wondered, if you were also influenced each other in your interests?

Olsen: Well, when she was taking speech therapy, we were still dating. Then she - this is an interesting story - she went back to New York, got out of the Army, stayed in the Army Reserve, got back to New York and at the end of my residency, I really realized I needed a little more soldiering. If I was going to get ahead in the Army, so I needed a little soldiering. So, I volunteered for the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell [Kentucky - Tennessee]. So, I went through jump school [United States Army Airborne School]. It was kind of a glorious life. The medicine was pretty easy to practice. I met some wonderful friends. There's a picture of myself and General Westmoreland up on the mantle, pinning my Paratrooper Wings [Parachutist Badge] on me.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness, that's wonderful.

Olsen: Two stories I remember from my 101st Airborne days... When I went to jump school, General Westmoreland came to my jump school and said, "Ralph," you know. "Ralph, there's a regular engineer air captain with you in jump school.

Would you let him be class commander? 'Cause this is going to mean a lot to his future and being a medical officer, it won't mean a lot to yours." I said, "Sure, Sir. That's fine", but the regular engineer captain quit jump school at the end of two weeks." Then all of a sudden, I got a call to the general's office, and he said, "Ralph, will you take command?" I said, "Yeah." [laugh]. Now the other funny story is that during the winter of '58 - I'm sorry - during the winter of '58 and '59, the entire 101st Airborne jumped at Camp Breckinridge, Indiana. In the middle of the winter! One battle group after another. You know... One thousand, I mean... 1800 jumpers coming in a span of about four or five days. There had to be a medical team up there, constantly on the ground and I commanded that. I had two helicopters, a platoon of medical corpsmen, and the medical helicopter pilots and some other assets and I was riding around Camp Breckinridge in the winter and I came to an old National Guard encampment and there was a pay phone hanging on the tree. I happened to have a bunch of quarters in my pocket and I called Eugenie in New York. I hadn't talked to her in about ten, eight, nine months and I said, "Look, we're having a New Year's Eve party at Fort Campbell. Will you come down? I'll send you a plane ticket." And she did. And then we got engaged and got married. So, that sums up my Airborne days. [laugh].

Cohen: What a wonderful experience. So, you also mentioned that when you were with the 101st, there was a parade - a governor's parade in Fort Bragg- that you found inspiring. So, I was wondering what the parade was like [interrupted]

Olsen: I just think to see an entire infantry division, or in this case, an airborne division, on parade is something that every soldier remembers when you pass and review and take the salute and give the salute to the governor or whoever is there. I never had combat experience. So, I'm sure there are inspirations I've never shared and that's just something I remember.

Cohen: Wow. I have maybe a little bit of an ignorant question... So, how does a medical team function with the Air Force? Is it so that if necessary, [for] the medical people would also be able to parachute down?

Olsen: Oh, yes. Yes. The 101st Airborne Division included the 326th Medical Company and that included a couple of clearing platoons with a doctor in charge of each. I was a little above that. I was the surgeon for the entire support group engineers, quartermasters - other things. But everybody jumped. In those days, the Army was not organized into battalions. It was organized into battalions, but the battalions were organized into battle groups. And every battle group had a doctor assigned to it. So, the 101st Airborne probably had about... about... twelve doctors. One very interesting friend of mine in the 101st, Bernie [Bernhard] Mitemeyer became the Surgeon General of the Army, a three-star

general. And Bernie and I were good friends and later, and we'll come to this, he got me back in the regular Army. [laugh].

Cohen: Oh, well, that's kind of neat. You mentioned that the medical work with the 101st were not too heavy. What were typical treatments or issues that were coming up?

Olsen: Sprained ankles and broken legs. [laughs].

Cohen: That's it - sprained ankles! [laughs].

Olsen: So, let's go from 101st Airborne to one of the greatest active duty tours I've ever had.

Cohen: Let's go.

Olsen: And that was with the 34th General Hospital, La Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, France. I was assigned as chief of pediatrics there. There was one other pediatrician. The 34th General Hospital occupied a monastery on the Loire River, which had been occupied, of course, by a Catholic brotherhood. The U.S. Army built in addition to it, but it was wonderful duty. The chief of medicine and the chief of the hospital, chief of surgery, were all older, getting ready to retire, people. The rest of the staff was all young guys out of their residency, orthopedic surgeons, general surgeons, internes, radiologists, urologists, pediatricians - and, we're all young and right out of our residency, and we ran the hospital. We just had a wonderful time.

Cohen: So, were most of the children whom you treated, were they the children of the U.S. service people?

Olsen: Oh, yeah. And we had - wherever the Army goes, whether you're at a stateside garrison or an overseas post - not so much now, but then - the whole family was there and there were lots of kids. So, for example, at Orléans, France, right near my hospital, there was a grade school and a high school. My Genie taught in the high school when she left the Army Reserve and there was a lot of family activity going on. Incidentally, the monastery was on the banks of the Loire River and on the shores of the Loire was a deserted refectory. That means a dining room for the Catholic brothers. So, we young doctors took that place over, hired a French chef, had a wonderful lunch every day [laugh].

Cohen: [laugh]. Where you and Eugenie live when you were in France?

Olsen: Where did we live? We rented a hunting lodge on the Loire River from a Parisian. It had no central heat. Big fireplace. This fireplace [at his home] is designed after

that fireplace. That's where our Wendy was born and... you know, it was probably one of the more singular times of my life, those three years over there in France. I was pediatric consultant to all France and had to visit all the other hospitals in France. We had a doctor draft then and so, I come to a hospital as consultant and I run into a professor of pediatrics from Cornell Medical School. And that's the way it was. I learned more than I ever taught. A doctor draft... we no longer have it, but we had it in those days, and any child from Yokosuka, Japan to Iceland to England to France to Germany, who needed to see a doctor, would see a pediatrician.

Cohen: So, a lot of access to medicine...

Olsen: It was wonderful.

Cohen: Did you sought out to get to so La-Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin, France or had you [interrupted]?

Olsen: Oh, no. I was originally - when I finished with the 101st Airborne Division, General Westmoreland bid me farewell and I said, "Well, I got to go on with medicine." He said, "I understand." And we were assigned to Germany. And I said to Careers Branch in Washington, "Look, I'm Jewish. My wife is Jewish. We're not that happy about going to Germany." He said, "Sir, everyone wants to go to Germany. We'll send you to France, but who wants to go to France?" I said, "I want to go to France." That's how we got to France.

Cohen: [laugh]. That's funny because you would think it would have been a destination, as well.

Olsen: It was great duty [laugh].

Cohen: Were the hospitals run in English or did you also speak French?

Olsen: That's interesting. We had many French civilians working for us. We had, my nurses in pediatrics were all French. We had, supporting the hospital, we had about... one hundred Polish troops under a Polish commander who was also a doctor. These Polish troops had somehow escaped the Russian Occupation of Poland and made their way to France. And they were so welcomed in France. And I guess they all settled down there, finally.

Cohen: So interesting. I see here is a lovely picture of the three of you.

Olsen: Yeah, that's our Wendy.

Cohen: Yeah, little Wendy. Were any of your other children born there as well?

Olsen: Jory, Jordana was conceived there. But she was born after we got back to the States. I went to Fort Dix [New Jersey]. And... Lest we take up too much time, I was at Fort Dix for about a year. Then I decided to try private practice. I went back to Milwaukee with Genie, Jory was born at Fort Dix, the two boys were born in Milwaukee. Both of them, by the way, are retired from the regular Army. But I stayed in the National Guard all that time in Milwaukee and finally, I got a yearning to get back in the Army and my pal from the 101st Airborne, Bernie Mitemeyer, was the Surgeon General. I called him up and got sent back to West Point [New York] for three years, taking care of cadets and kids.

Cohen: Wow. So, just to sum up. So, you were at Fort Dix in New Jersey for a year. That was part of the Reserves?

Olsen: No, I was on active duty then. Then back to Wisconsin and the National Guard.

Cohen: National Guard from '63 to '75.

Olsen: Yeah. '75 to '84, I was in the U.S. Army Reserve, still doing training, two weeks a year and then in '84, I went back on active duty.

Cohen: Wow. So, when you were part of the Wisconsin National Guard, what did that require? Was this the time you also had your private practice?

Olsen: Yeah. I had a private practice and I was the surgeon for the 32nd Division Artillery. Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin.

Cohen: Okay, so that was your [interrupted].

Olsen: All Army doctors are called surgeons, by the way

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Olsen: All Army doctors are referred to as surgeons.

Cohen: Okay. So, what was your role? Was it also as a pediatrician?

Olsen: I trained a lot of corpsman [enlisted members of a military medical unit]. And to tell you the truth, except when we were at summer camp, firing our weapons.... I sat in mostly on artillery training and... This brings up a point. During the Vietnam War, which occurred during those years that I was in the National Guard... The policy of the Army and the government was not to send any Reserve or National Guard units to Vietnam. This was a great mistake. We had a wonderful artillery unit. We probably could have made not a big difference, but could have made differences. None of the National Guard was ever sent to Vietnam. Should have been.

Cohen: What was the objective, then, of having this well-trained [interrupted]?

Olsen: You know... It cost the government a lot of money, state and federal, to sustain the National Guard units. We still have all of them. We still have plenty of guardsman in Wisconsin. But they get deployed. They get deployed regularly to Afghanistan. By the way, I must mention my connection with France was... What's the word...Reincarnated by my son, Paul, who during Desert Storm, was with an engineer company taking out mines in front of the 1st Infantry Division. On his right, was the British 1st Armored Division. On his left, was the French Foreign Legion battalion. Paul was the only kid who could speak French. So, he was sent over to the French Foreign Legion on a daily basis for liaison. He made a point to go over for lunch every day because they had a set table with wine and everything. So, while his company was eating C-rations, he was sitting down at a table with a tablecloth and a bottle of wine. [laugh]. As a result of this association, he was invited to and attended for six months, the French Engineer School in Nages, France.

Cohen: Your daughter Wendy had said three years in France had a lifelong influence on you.

Olsen: Oh, Wendy will reinforce that.

Cohen: How did you feel it had an impact?

Olsen: Well, this house for example. Genie took sketches of the hunting lodge we rented on the Loire. This house was built along those sketches. Both Genie and Wendy are superb French cooks and I benefit. Wendy speaks good French; Genie speaks good French.

Cohen: And your son, you mentioned, [speaks French] as well.

Olsen: And we're all members of Alliance Française in Milwaukee.

Cohen: Cool. So, during the time you're in the Wisconsin National Guard, it was also the time of the 1968 riots [i.e., 1967 riots] in Milwaukee. Do you want to talk about that?

Olsen: Oh, very little. The riots were very well controlled by the mayor of Milwaukee, Mayor Maier, our governor and the Wisconsin National Guard, we simply, immediately upon - the riots were based on the riots in Watts, Watts, Los Angeles which had occurred at the same time. We immediately put troops at every single alley and street surrounding the core of Milwaukee, which included my home, where my mother was still living. And all the gas stations were closed and only one life was lost. My good friend, LTC Bobby Hoff (??, 39:30) had the job of taking the 32nd Division Artillery trucks and going to dairies and distributing milk to the children in the core.

Cohen: In the core. What was your role during the riots?

Olsen: I had no casualties.

Cohen: Were you treating people who were injured or?

Olsen: No. Nothing like that happened

Cohen: Okay, so you were sort of on stand-by?

Olsen: Those riots in Milwaukee were quelled by Mayor Maier in the very instant that

Cohen: Wow. That's good... Okay, so you said you part...Oh yeah, So, I think you said you were a part of the Army Reserve from 1975 to '84?

Olsen: Yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: What did that require?

Olsen: Oh, it was required... Fundamentally, it required two weeks of service at an Army hospital somewhere.

Cohen: Which Army hospitals had you gone to frequently?

Olsen: Oh, I was at Fort Lewis, Washington, Fort Lee, Virginia. I went back... Let me see... I can't recall everything I did.

Cohen: Sure. Well, I guess I'm wondering, how did compare being a pediatrician in your civilian life versus a pediatrician in various military hospitals.

Olsen: I think the joy of military pediatrics is that I didn't have to charge anybody and didn't have to deal with HMOs [health maintenance organization] and PPOs [preferred provider organization] and all these health organizations. The Army offered a great freedom of practice.

Cohen: Was there a greater camaraderie?

Olsen: Always.

Cohen: Always?

Olsen: Always.

Cohen: Interesting. So, you mentioned your friends, whose name I've forgot, who got you back into the active duty, in the Army in 1984. How did that come about?

Olsen: As I said, I telephoned my friend, LTG General Bernie Mitemeyer and said, "I want to come back on active duty." He said, "I'll have a recruiting officer at your

office in three or four days. Ralph, welcome back." And gave me my choice of where I wanted to go.

Cohen: Did you and your wife move to West Point?

Olsen: She just loved the idea. We lived in a beautiful home overlooking the Hudson River. She was a good friend of General Scott's, our superintendent's, wife. Genie attended French classes. I think she taught a few. It was wonderful duty... and the cadets, we still see them.

Cohen: Oh my. Were you also involved in training cadets?

Olsen: No, I was... I was involved in their care. The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force academies all have pediatricians taking care of the young people.

Cohen: I see, right. That makes sense.

Olsen: I think you probably want to talk a little more to Eugenie now, who has much more interesting stories than I.

Cohen: Well, I do want to speak to Eugenie... but do you want to talk about a few other things like how you earned the four medals?

Olsen: No. I don't have any significant decorations. I have a Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster and a Paratroopers Badge. The other decorations are just for being somewhere overseas or something like that. They're inconsequential. I just will close by telling you that I have written my own obituary... and my last line in my obituary is, "My eternal love for Eugenie, my trust in the United States Army, and my faith in the Democratic Party."

Cohen: Wow...

Olsen: Shall we close?

Cohen: If you would like that, that's fine. I do have more questions, but if you feel this is a good ending, then I'm happy with that.

Olsen: Probably a good ending, Leah.

Cohen: Thank you.

Olsen: Thank you for taking me through the years [laugh].

Cohen: Thank you. It's been really fascinating. I really appreciate it. You know, thank you.

Olsen: Oh, by the way, this summary that Wendy typed up, I think you probably have a copy.

Cohen: I do, I do. Oh my, these are the pictures of you jumping [in response to being shown picture of Dr. Olsen parachuting.]

Olsen: I think that's me... Taken from the aircraft. I remember the first jump I made. I made it with General Westmoreland. When you're in an airplane, you have two lines of jumpers and they're called "sticks." and General Westmoreland was ahead of me and I was second in my stick. He unhooked his static chord and hooked it up behind me and said, "After you, Doctor." [laugh]

Cohen: [laugh]. Was it very frightening?

Olsen: I don't think, "This is not me, this is not me." I don't know. It was too long ago to remember. [In response to having been shown photos by his daughter, Wendy.]

Cohen: Was it frightening to jump or exhilarating?

Olsen: Do you ski, by the way?

Cohen: Not so much now, but I did a bit of downhill skiing in my early twenties.

Olsen: You remember if you got to the top of a downhill ski run, it was silent? And you slalom down, and the silence was so beautiful? That's what parachuting is. It's so quiet up there. It is so peaceful. [laugh].

Cohen: Is there any question that you'd like to me to ask that I forgot to ask?

Olsen: No, I don't think so.

Cohen: Okay, okay. I really thank you very much.

Olsen: I think what we have to do is see any of your associate has any good information on the 339th Infantry and if not, I can give it.

Cohen: On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, please accept a challenge coin as a token of our thanks.

Olsen: Oh, wonderful! A coin from the Pritzker.

Cohen: That's right. It's a token of our thanks.

