

**A Veterans Oral History**  
**Heritage Education Commission**  
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Moorhead, MN

**Daniel Olgaard**  
**Narrator**

**Linda Jenson**  
**Interviewer**

2007

**DO: Daniel Olgaard.**

LJ: Mr. Olgaard, where were you born?

**DO: Born on a farm southeast of Cooperstown, North Dakota.**

LJ: And who were your parents?

**DO: My parents were Sven and Hilma Olgaard, or Hilma Erickson Olgaard.**

LJ: And what did they do for a living?

**DO: Well my dad was a mechanic and an all-around gentleman. He was a sheriff of Briggs County at one time. My mother was a homemaker and seamstress.**

LJ: How many children in your family?

**DO: There were five boys.**

LJ: Five boys, were you the oldest, youngest?

**DO: I was oldest.**

LJ: Where did you go to school?

**DO: Cooperstown grade school and high school.**

LJ: You graduated from there?

**DO: Graduated from there.**

LJ: What did you do after high school?

**DO: Well I worked on a farm for a while and then I finally got a job in town until the civil service draft came along and then I registered for the draft.**

LJ: You registered, huh?

**DO: Yes, I became number 438 and then I waited for the call.**

LJ: How long did it take after you registered until they called you?

**DO: About a year ... I was rejected three times because when I was five years old I got hit in the eye with a baseball and I'm blind in my right eye. So I was rejected as a 4F for a while.**

LJ: But then they did?

**DO: Yes, then they finally on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November of '42, they sent me down to Fort Snelling and I came home and they called me back on Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1942, I joined a military.**

LJ: What branch did you go into?

**DO: I was Army Air Force.**

LJ: And where did you go for training?

**DO: Fort Snelling ... I was stationed at Fort Snelling for 21 months and we took our basic training down there in the Minnesota valley river bottoms in January and February of '43.**

LJ: Where did you go after Fort Snelling?

**DO: I was there for 21 months, then I went to Camp Lee, Virginia, to go to quartermaster school there.**

LJ: What kind of school?

**DO: Quartermaster.**

LJ: How long was that school?

**DO: I was only there about a month and then they sent us to Camp Reynolds, Pennsylvania, for overseas orientation. After that why I got a furlough for a week and then we came home and we went to Camp Myles Standish in Boston and waited for overseas shipment.**

LJ: And what did you hear?

**DO: Well we were always wondering where we were going because we got issued both tropical and winter clothing. But we went downtown and the bartenders told us we were going to go to Greenland. The military told us that we wait 'til three days out at sea and then tell us where you're going. We already knew where we were going. We went north 21 days to Greenland. We stopped at St. John's, Newfoundland, and we were up on the west coast of Greenland and back around it. So it took us 21 days.**

LJ: Twenty-one days at sea.

**DO: Yes.**

LJ: Any seasickness?

**DO: No, I was lucky. I walked guard once in a while and stuff like that so I got some fresh air and that guard duty was watching the destroyers and the Canadian corvettes circle us looking for submarines because we went over what they called the "Torpedo Junction." And that was interesting.**

LJ: What was it like those 21 days on the ship? Were you crowded?

**DO: No, I was lucky because we were on a hurricane deck so that we had three bunks stacked up top and I happened to be on the top bunk so I didn't have to worry too much. The one on the bottom one, once in a while caught it.**

LJ: What was Greenland like?

**DO: Well Greenland was a lot like here in the summertime. They called it Greenland because in the summer it gets a lot of moss and grass and stuff. There aren't any trees or anything, but when the Norwegian explorer came there and he saw that country that way, it was nice and green. And the weather was real nice. In the wintertime, if you can live in North Dakota, you'd have no problem up there.**

LJ: How long were you in Greenland?

**DO: I was up there a year-and-a-half from October '44 until March of '46.**

LJ: What were your duties in Greenland?

**DO: We were in the quartermaster corps and we took care of the flights coming in and out and servicing the different units up there. We had bases out into Greenland, what we called outposts. But it was up to us to get the food and stuff to them. I happened to be on the main base, I was lucky.**

LJ: Any special stories from that time in Greenland?

**DO: Most of the time like that. If a plane cracked up, why it seemed like the first thing the boys went for, it wasn't worrying what was on it, it was get the plexi-glass so we could use that to make souvenirs and stuff. And the British were up there, too, with us and they flew their mosquitoes in and out and they did come in in foul weather and our boys couldn't. So that was a memory we had up there. And the icebergs, when we landed in Greenland the first night up there, we heard a boom and we thought we were being attacked. The guy said, "No, that's only just the iceberg breaking off."**

LJ: Really?

**DO: Yeah, what do they call that – what the hell do you call those things – not the iceberg but the . . .**

LJ: Glaciers?

**DO: Glaciers, we had live glaciers and dead glaciers. And the live glaciers we saw about a mile away and when that broke off a hunk, you could hear it.**

LJ: Awesome.

**DO: Yes.**

LJ: I bet that was scary the first time.

**DO: It was scary, right.**

LJ: Any special buddy stories?

**DO:** Well not really. I was the only one from North Dakota up there. I did have some friends from different parts of the United States. When I got ready to leave, the boy that was supposed to take my place, he didn't have any glasses so I gave him mine and he flew home with me. No, we had a lot of fun up there. I had a [unclear] up there. I got to be a friend with Hank Soar, which is a New York Giants football player and big league umpire. And we had a lot of people coming and going. Also we got to meet quite a few dignitaries because we were the main base between the United States and England.

LJ: What was the food like?

**DO:** Good, we were the quartermasters so we had choice. Once in a while when a ship would come we would have midnight requisitions so that we'd have steaks.

LJ: Oh, not too bad.

**DO:** No.

LJ: What happened after your time in Greenland, where did you go?

**DO:** After that I got sent home for discharge. So on March 20, 1946, I was in Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and got discharged.

LJ: Why so early?

**DO:** They were getting rid of all of us. Yes, most of the boys. I was a little late ... most of them went home in '45, but I happened to go back on R&R one time so I stayed an extra couple of months.

LJ: And how long were you in Fort McCoy, Wisconsin?

**DO:** Just long enough to process us and get us out of there.

LJ: I see and then home?

**DO:** Home we went.

LJ: Back to Cooperstown?

**DO:** I stopped in Minneapolis for a little while to see one guy. When we landed from Greenland to go to Camp McCoy, we stopped in Boston and we took a train to Chicago and then up to Camp McCoy. And the funny part of it was,

**we had the Army Air Force on our side and the other part of the crew was Navy Waves. So we had entertainment all the way back to Camp McCoy.**

LJ: Any special stories you want to share?

**DO: When I was in Fort Snelling, we had 3,500 Nisei, Japanese Americans, down there and we had a lot of Nisei boys with us in Fort Snelling. And I got to know quite a few of them and I corresponded with them until a couple of them have passed away now. Those were the kind of guys, the people talk about the Japanese but they were loyal soldiers and we organized the unit and got the boys together and gave them the clothing and set them up as a unit. Then they went down for training. They are the most decorated unit in the United States Army. They were over in Italy and captured, I think it was, Anzio Beachhead. So I have one side to tell and a lot of people are mad because we were fighting.**

**One of the boys we were with in Fort Snelling, name of George Masunaga (sp?), his parents were split up, one was in Idaho and one was in Nebraska. After discharge, he went home and the government had taken away his truck garden and his orchard. But they went back to work and went right back to work and he retired at 55. Yes and none of them were ever on relief.**

LJ: They had a certain amount of days that they were serving? Is that what you're saying?

**DO: You mean the Japanese?**

LJ: Yes.

**DO: No, they served like the rest of us. They volunteered like we did or were drafted like we were. Except they were drafted but their parents were put in concentration camps. Yes and I think you will read about that now they're trying to help some out on some of that. But it was tough for them, too. But they were loyal citizens.**

LJ: Did you attend any reunions?

**DO: No, we haven't. I was never attached to any basic unit. They never did have anything up in Greenland. When we were attached to Fort Snelling, we were what they called detached service. So we didn't serve as any quartermaster company that was all it was. Yes.**

LJ: How did you feel about leaving the military when you did?

**DO:** Well, at that time I was wondering if I should stay or not but all they, there wasn't anything like it is today. All it was infantry or something like that and the pay wasn't any good, so we just got out of it. We're just glad to get home.

LJ: Served your time?

**DO:** Served our time, yes, I had three-and-a-half years in the Army, even as a 4F.

LJ: Now a 4F is?

**DO:** That's you're unfit for military duty. We had some physical difficulty or something.

LJ: And when you left, you had the final rank of staff sergeant?

**DO:** Yes.

LJ: That's an accomplishment.

**DO:** When I left Greenland, I was the only sergeant in the organization because they were discharging them. And our captain was, I don't know, he just didn't seem to follow up. So I was the only the staff sergeant, when I left they didn't have any. Headquarters company took over. So that was one memory we had up there.

We had our colonel up there, he had a waxed mustache. We called him Colonel Waxie [sp?]. And there was one time up there, we lived on Spam and fruit cocktail because the ships couldn't come in because they come up the fjord.

When we left Boston, we came up around there. We hit Julianehåb to go up to Greenland and on that fjord – the icebreakers. The Eastwind and the Westwind Coast Guard were breaking the ice for us, so that was something to watch how they'd go up on the ice and break the ice and fall. That's why it took us the 21 days to get back to our base.

LJ: Unbelievable, what were those machines like that broke the ice like that?

**DO:** They were big ships. You don't see much of them around the country at all. But they were about a medium-sized ship and they were steel hulls and they had double screws so when they'd push up on the ice and then they'd let it sink. They'd back off and push up on the ice and let it sink. When we were

**doing that, why the Eskimos would come running out to greet us and we'd sit and throw tin cans at them or food and stuff, so we had a lot of fun. Yes, the Eskimos are quite the people, very efficient. Yeas, it's run by the Danes, so we did get to visit some of those places.**

LJ: What did you do after you left the military?

**DO: I came back to North Dakota and went back to work for Penney's. During the war, my mother got a check for \$5 a month for spending money. Of course, she put it in the bank for me. When I came back I went back to work for there. During the process why, I went to my brother's wedding one time, I met a girl and ... we found each other.**

LJ: The girl in the other room there?

**DO: That's the girl in the other room, yes. It worked out.**

LJ: How many years have you been married?

**DO: Fifty-one.**

**Mrs. Olgaard: Not quite, 50.**

**DO: Not quite, 50, it will be 51.**

LJ: Well congratulations. What a milestone.

**DO: It is quite a milestone, yes.**

LJ: And you have two children?

**DO: We have a boy and a girl. Both live in town.**

LJ: Any grandchildren?

**DO: One little boy, yes.**

LJ: How long did you work at J. C. Penney?

**DO: Seven years ... I worked there before awhile and then I came back. And when I came back why, we had a manager that, I don't know, he didn't. See I use to speak Norwegian and when I talked to the customers why he thought**



**I was talking about them. So he and I got in a disagreement and I went to work for the competitor.**

LJ: Who was that?

**DO: Model Clothing Company in Cooperstown. It's a gentleman that had a good clothing store.**

LJ: Then I see you were also a customer service manager at Dakota Electric?

**DO: Yes, after a while of courting Ardis, well then we got married and I moved on to Fargo here because she was working for mother, Ma Bell, and I went to work for Dakota Electric on my birthday and stayed there until ... what was it February of '82. I was customer service manager that was taking care of, well you know, what's that like.**

LJ: Yes, dealing with the people, taking care of problems. So you retired in 1982?

**DO: Yes.**

LJ: What have you been doing since your retirement?

**DO: I tell you there's plenty to do because we volunteer at the Sons of Norway and volunteer at church. I was with the Acro Team for 11 years, if you've ever heard of them.**

LJ: Yes, what did you do for them?

**DO: I was a president for a while and a fundraiser and our daughter was part of it. That's how I got involved in it.**

LJ: Great team.

**DO: Yes, so that was a lot of experience. We would go to the ball games and whatever the kids were in, band concerts. So we kept busy. Like I tell the guys, I should get a job so I get some time off.**

LJ: Get some vacation in there.

**DO: We've traveled a lot. I think we've covered most of the states, haven't we, Ardis? And quite a few provinces, we've been to Norway and we've been to Hawaii and we've covered Europe. Instead of buying a big, beautiful home, we spent the money traveling.**

LJ: Good for you. That's terrific. What do you think about the war that we're fighting now in Afghanistan?

**DO: I don't understand what we're trying to do because we're looking for somebody we can't find and all we're doing is irritating the people over there and I think it's time that we pull in our horns and wait and see.**

LJ: Did you ever think we'd see a day like that, September 11<sup>th</sup>?

**DO: No.**

LJ: Did you ever think you would ever see that?

**DO: No, we never did. We couldn't believe it, when we did see it. Remember, Ardis? We just couldn't believe that anybody would be crazy enough to do it but after we saw how those buildings were built and then we could understand how the plane could cause all that trouble. Yes.**

LJ: Unbelievable.

**DO: No, I remember Pearl Harbor, too, and that was against the military but this one was against the citizens. No, it's no fun.**

LJ: And your military experience started long after Pearl Harbor?

**DO: Yes. That was on December 7<sup>th</sup>, '41 and then I was in November of '42. I had three brothers in the service. A pair of twins who were in Italy and Germany, and my other brother was in the Philippines and Japan.**

LJ: And what branches were they in?

**DO: They were in the twins went into the Air Force and ended up in the Army. My other brother was Coast Guard artillery out of Moorhead here. And they were on station in California for years, for a long time. He ended up in the Army over in the Philippines with General MacArthur and then they were going to invade Japan and he said, "Thank God they had the atomic bomb, otherwise we would have been in real tough shape." Yes.**

LJ: How did they all fare? Did they come home?

**DO: We all came home, right. We all came healthy.**

LJ: Good.

**DO:** We were lucky. None of us ... we didn't lose anybody in the family I know of. Ardis did we as far as the war goes?

LJ: So five brothers, four of you served.

**DO:** Yes, the other one had infantile paralysis so he couldn't get in. He wanted to, but he couldn't get in.

LJ: Amazing.

**DO:** Then I had a cousin that was going to Pearl Harbor that night but they didn't go in that night because they didn't want to try to get in by ship. Waited until morning and that's when they hit, so they were on the outside watching it come in.

LJ: What was it like coming back from your time in the military? World War II was the popular war wasn't it? Did you get that hero's welcome that everyone else got?

**DO:** No, they didn't even know I came home.

LJ: You came in quiet, huh?

**DO:** The first boys that came home did but the rest of us, no, they just, "Are you home, huh?" So that's the way it went. But now after 50 years they're going to build us a memorial, well, hell, we'll all be dead before it gets built.

LJ: Yes, it's too bad that it took this long for them to decide to do it.

**DO:** Most of the World War II boys feel the same way, who needs it now after all these years. But then if they want to build it, let them build it.

LJ: Do you remember the day you came home? Do you remember seeing mom and dad?

**DO:** Yes, I remember that because when I was at Fort Snelling we had a good deal. Every time I got a three-day pass, I could get a train into St. Paul on Friday evening. I'd be in Hannaford and then my dad from Cooperstown would come and get me and I'd be home before my pass started. Then I'd get on Sunday night and be back in time for reveille. So we had it made.

**We were in Fort Snelling while we were in the quartermaster corps, we met trains and all that stuff. One thing I remember there, we had two DPs. One was Steffovich. (sp?), his name was Steffovich.**

LJ: What is a DP?

**DO: Displaced person, they were Germans under surveillance is what they were. And he was a tailor, so he'd tailor our jackets so we had nice jackets but they were made-over jackets. And [unclear] the other DP, was a cook from Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. We had civilians eating with us at Fort Snelling and he'd make up the desserts and stuff. So we were treated royally.**

LJ: I'm sure.

**DO: No, I had no complaints. I said I was one of the lucky ones. I went through and like my brother told me, "Keep your eyes open, your ears open, and your mouth shut." He said, "You'd get along good. And don't volunteer." So we learned the hard way but we got by.**

**No, I had a lot of friends and, of course, at Fort Snelling, we were in the main office. We had a lot of civilians working there, so we had a lot of girls who were typists and secretaries and stuff. We had civilian men on the Kardex [sp?] system. So they would sit and eat with us, too. And we had, oh, I don't know, I think my wife has seen our menus that we had for Christmas parties and stuff. I should have brought one up and showed you.**

LJ: What was it like?

**DO: We lived with what's called garrison rations and that was regular food for everybody, otherwise it's field rations and then, of course, they're out there making food for you. But these boys, we had some good cooks.**

LJ: That's nice. Good people to know.

**DO: And we didn't pull KP either. We pulled guard duty once in a while.**

LJ: No KP, huh?

**DO: No KP, no, I had permanent KPs. We each put in a dollar a month. They were one day on and three days off. And when I was in Fort Snelling, one of the boys from Cooperstown would come through in the induction station. When I found out about it, I'd bring them up to our place, because we had a**

**big dayroom and a pool table and all that, so they'd come up and they could enjoy themselves. So I got to see the guys coming through the Army, too. No, I was lucky.**

LJ: Well that's great! Good to hear someone who had a good story.

**DO: Yes, I had a lot of relatives in St. Paul-Minneapolis, too, so I could go on weekends and visit and I didn't have to worry about that. No, we had it pretty good. I had a good friend, too, that when we met troop trains, why, they'd come through and they needed gas. "How many?" "Well, we need 30 gallons." "Well, all we got is 50 gallons." "Well, we'll give you the 30 and we'll take the 20 back home." And then we'd put naphthalene in it and then we'd put it in our cars. So there was all kinds of tricks in there, too. No, the food was good and we had good officers. No, it was quite a deal.**

LJ: That's great.

**DO: We had a big field house and Lawrence Welk would come every year and play for us. And Sigmund Romberg would come and we had good entertainment. Yes.**

LJ: Wonderful and that's just what Lawrence Welk would say too, right? 'Wonderful.'

**DO: Yes, that's right. He saw to it. He was the only one that did. No, we were in the North Atlantic Air, Air Transports Command up in Greenland. We would service the planes as they went through. And so we got to meet quite a few people.**

LJ: Any final thoughts before we wind up the interview?

**DO: No. I can't remember anything that's special, except that I was lucky, like I said. We had Class A passes. We could come up and go to St. Paul and Minneapolis. The only trouble was we had to ride the doggone streetcars or taxis and that wasn't always available. And we had a lot of good boys – we had good food, good officers.**

LJ: Mr. Olgaard, how would you like to be remembered?

**DO: Oh, I don't know ... just that I served my duty that's all.**

LJ: Served your country?

**DO:** Yes.

LJ: Did your duty?

**DO:** I always said that I was just kind of lucky that I got a chance to do it being blind in one eye.

LJ: That's exceptional.

**DO:** A lot of people don't believe it, but that's the way it went.

LJ: That's exceptional.

**DO:** I always enjoyed myself because well you just make of it and do what you can to do.

Let's see, there was another thing in here – I remember one Japanese boy, called Fred Manje (sp?). He was a drill sergeant and we'd get the 90-day wonders down at Fort Snelling to come in there. And every time we went downtown, we'd have to salute them on the way. Well one night he was up there saluting too much so the next day he was the drill sergeant and all morning long it was 50 minutes on and 10 minutes off. Well I tell you there wasn't any saluting after that.

One thing that I remember was being with the Japanese boys down there and it's surprising what kind of people they really were. A lot of people think I'm nuts, but then that's the way it was.

LJ: You saw a totally different side to them than others saw.

**DO:** They were good, loyal – they did their duty. I know one, Yoshida (sp?) – Jimmy Yoshida from Hawaii, he came back a quadriplegic. That was interesting. I can't kick.

LJ: With four of her five sons in the service, your mother must have been thrilled with every one of you coming back.

**DO:** Yes, she had the flag with the four stars. I did come home from, what they call an R&R out of Greenland and then I ended up at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. We were going to go out and fight forest fires up in California but all of a sudden they decided, "No, you'd better go back from where you came from." So I ended up in Bangor, Maine, what we used to call "20 miles from

**20%”, because your 20% was overseas pay. The only thing you start out at \$21 a month. That wasn’t any fun.**

LJ: Any other special memories you want to share?

**DO: No, I think meeting the different people coming through the barracks they had three up there. We had houses that were square like this and the shower room and everything and latrine was in the middle, so we’d have to run out in the cold to take care of it.**

**We had Finlanders with us, too, and every time they’d open up the darn windows and tried to freeze us out. But we got along with them and they got along with us. We did have Germans up in Greenland. They were weathermen up at the ice cap. And when we did capture them, they were like we were. I knew enough Norwegian so a few words I could talk to them and they brought their dogs back with them. Yes, we got along good with them.**

**When we saw the maps they had, I think, every doggone stone marked so they knew what was going on up there. They were nobody to fool with it. They were great guys but we had to fight with them anyway. But I often wondered because we had in Greenland, the base was on the base of what we called the marine, where the fjords and stuff empty, where we had big 500,000 gallon tanks of gas up above us. If they’d drop one bomb in there we would have gone just like that, but they never did. Well, here are a few pictures if you want to take a look.**

LJ: Thank you very much, Mr. Olgaard.