

Dr. Clarence G. Oliver, Jr.

Successful journalist, Army officer, & educator—
including 30 years as an administrator
for Broken Arrow Public Schools.

Chapter 01 - 1:10

Introduction

Announcer: Clarence G. Oliver, Jr., Ed.D., Emeritus Professor and former Dean of the College of Education at Oral Roberts University and retired Superintendent of Broken Arrow Public Schools, has enjoyed success in three distinct career fields— Journalism, Military, and Education. He has been a teacher, journalist, Army officer, school administrator, newspaper editor and publisher, author, community leader, university professor and dean of a university college of education.

In 1955, Dr. Oliver moved to Broken Arrow from Ada, sight unseen, to teach at Broken Arrow Public Schools and rose to the rank of superintendent. He served in that role from 1974-1992,

Prior to his long-time career in educational administration, Oliver had an extensive journalism career. He became a Broken Arrow historian and authored several books.

Clarence Oliver is an inductee in the Oklahoma Educators' Hall of Fame and has been honored as a "Distinguished Alumnus" by both the University of Tulsa and East Central University, and both inducted him into their Educators' Hall of Fame.

Listen to Clarence Oliver talk about his very accomplished life on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 11:23

Blind Grandfather

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today's date is February 17, 2016. Clarence, would you state your full name please?

Clarence Oliver: Clarence G. Oliver, Jr.

JE: Can I ask you what the G is for?

CO: Grady.

JE: Clarence Grady Oliver, Jr. Your date of birth and your present age?

CO: July 24, 1929. I am 86 years old.

JE: And we are recording this today in the facilities of VoicesofOklahoma.com. Where were you born?

CO: I was born in Ada in south central Oklahoma, Pontotac County, nice regional community.

JE: Your mother's name?

CO: My mother was an adopted baby so she has a legal name that was rarely used. Her correct name is Jewel Americus Dyer. She added Roberts because the family took her in but did not legally adopt her.

JE: I'm taken with the name "Americus"...

CO: Americus...

JE: Yeah. My grandfather in North Dakota...this is just an aside...he settled land in 1894 in Americus township. I have always been taken by that name, Americus. There was a man named Americus, wasn't there, in the history.

CO: Right.

JE: Anyway, your mother...what kind of person was she? Describe her personality.

CO: She was very outgoing. She only had the opportunity to go to school to the 8th grade. That's all that was offered where she had the opportunity to go to school. She went to work as a maid or a servant in the home of a rather wealthy family in Ada and observed how successful they were and some of the things that contributed to her success. As I was a child, she tried to share some of that information with me and encouraged me to do some things that would emulate those people who had been successful.

JE: So that obviously worked.

CO: I don't know about that but I attempted. I got kidded a lot about wearing a suit most of the time. Even now, I still do in a professional activity. When I was 6 years old, she had begun to tell me the importance of dressing properly. I don't know where she got a suit at that time in her financial situation because our family was really not well off at all, but she put me in a suit at age 6 and encouraged me all through life to always have a suit available. It may be the only piece of good clothing that we had but she said you will have a suit. So it was something that she taught me that I have really bought into.

JE: To this age of 86.

CO: That's right (laughs).

JE: Because you came in with a suit and tie on today, as a matter of fact. Your father's name?

CO: Obviously since I'm a junior, my father was Clarence Grady Oliver, Sr.

JE: Where did he grow up?

CO: He grew up in rural Pontotac county in a community called Pecan Grove. It was a community that was established to some degree by his father who had moved in the

territorial days in the late 1800s from Tennessee from a town called Walnut Grove. He named this little community Pecan Grove that he helped develop.

JE: What did he do for a living?

CO: Well he also came through some difficult times. He grew up as a farm family. There were 12 children in the family. The school he went to was only up to the 6th grade and that's all the education that he had...formal education. He loved to read and he was kind of self educated after that. During much of the time that I was a child during the depression years, he had to work at odd jobs, whatever he could. Originally after he left the farm, he went to work for a service station that his older brother owned, and in those days, a service station was a rather complete place with mechanics and tires and batteries and selling all of those kinds of activities. There were about eight or nine people employed at that station and he served as the clerk. He did whatever financial recordkeeping that they had. In his later years, he was employed by the Oklahoma Portland Cement Company. He was a boiler engineer and worked in that occupation until he was able to retire.

JE: Were you encouraged that education was real important?

CO: I really was not. Neither of them had progressed beyond elementary school years. I think I was more encouraged in that line by a gentleman who was a Sunday school teacher and later a then junior high school teacher. He was also a scout master. He took me under his wing. He recognized that I came from a family that was not very well privileged and he encouraged me to make some changes and to prepare to move on with an education.

JE: Did you have brothers or sisters?

CO: I have a sister who is 10 years younger.

JE: So you were out of the home by the time she was 6 or 7 probably?

CO: Yes. She was 7 or 8 when I was off and on my own.

JE: Tell us about the first house you lived in, what you may remember about it.

CO: It's the house I was born in and grew up in. It's an interesting house. It was over in the original part of Ada at the north side of the tracks. In those days, it was—and probably still is—referred to as the wrong side of the tracks. It was an older part of town. It was a four-room house. At the time I was born and in my early days, it did not have any amenities. It only had gas lights, no electricity, no water, no sewer, outdoor privy, a well outside. It was built to some degree...most of it was built by my grandfather, who is not my legal grandfather but he was a gentleman who he and his wife had adopted my mother when she was 6 weeks old. The interesting thing is that this gentleman, this grandfather of mine, was blind. He was a very intelligent person. He operated a small... in those days called a neighborhood grocery store. In those days, grocery stores were just little mom and pop operations. Even though he was blind, he was able to operate a

store. He wrote poetry. He could sing. He could play the harmonica. At the time, I did not understand the language but what I thought was a juke harp and he was talking about playing the juke harp (laughs)...but a very intelligent person and a good carpenter. He would be able to saw a board; if one would measure it and give him the spot to start, he would saw that material. He built the house, did the gas plumbing under the house. My mother as a child would show him where to cut the pipe. He would cut the pipe and thread it and assemble it and put in all of the gas in the house, even though he was a blind person. I was born in that house and lived in that house until I married at age 21.

JE: Wow. You must have drawn a lot from your grandfather.

CO: I did. He's another of my heroes. I became his, for lack of a better term, seeing eye dog when I was about 6 years old. He loved to walk and I, each evening, would lead him. He would hold onto my arm and we would walk around the block around the neighborhood. As a result of that, I developed a pretty good skill of observing what was going on all around because a person leading a blind man needs to be able to tell him there's a tree on the left, there's a crack in the sidewalk, there's a bump here, there's a curb here, and if you were going into a neighbor's house, you would have to tell him how many steps there are up onto the porch and that there's a screen door and it opens from the left to the right. So at a very early age, I began to develop those skills. How do you tell what's going on to a person who can't see? He also liked to be read to and as soon as I learned to read, even as a first grader, I would read to him at night. As that skill developed, I read the Bible to him; I read magazines to him; I read newspapers to him every evening. Probably that helped develop the skill of being able to read orally. I have used that through the years.

JE: Look at all the knowledge you gained as a youngster.

CO: And I did.

JE: Nobody told you you had to do this, did they? I mean, as a 6-year-old boy, you had a responsibility you felt.

CO: That was part of the family responsibility.

JE: Right. Did he live with you?

CO: He lived in a room in the back of this little store that he had nextdoor.

JE: We haven't said his name. What was his name?

CO: His name was M.D.L. Roberts, but that M.D.L. stands for Marquis de Lafayette Roberts. They called him Marcus. In those days, it was very common to name people after heroes and, obviously, Marquis de Lafayette was a great hero in our nation and my grandfather was born in the mid-1800s so Lafayette was still very popular.

JE: About your house and the simplicity of it. Since you didn't have electricity, what did you do to keep products cold? Did you have an icebox as they called it, I suppose?

CO: (laughs) We had an icebox and the iceman cometh! Every day, the deliveryman would come by—originally in a wagon and later in a pickup truck—with ice in the back, covered blocks of ice. We'd place a sign in the screen door or the window of how much ice we would need that time and usually for our family, we would get 12-1/2 pounds, which was the smallest quantity. The iceman would put hooks in it, put it in a bag and carry it into the house and place it in the icebox, in the top of the icebox, and the cool air would go down into the inside of the box and the water melting from the ice would go to the bottom in a pan and it was a typical icebox.

JE: Cold winters...was the house built for that?

CO: The house was a single wall house, no insulation. Originally newspapers were pasted to the inside to help with some insulation. The only heat was an open face stove in the living room—not a large one but it was an open-faced heater which was pretty common in those days. Later in my 10 years old age or something in that range, my father was able to get some additional plumbing and to bring in water from the city water system and put in a sewer system and he built a bathroom, enclosed a back porch to make a small bathroom. The hot water heater was inside that bathroom. It was rather primitive in design but did function. We had a bathtub and stool and we had an indoor bathhouse for a time.

JE: You thought you were getting modern.

CO: We were modern. My dad built a cabinet in the kitchen for my mother. We were uptown (laughs). During the depression time, it was a four-room house...difficult times. My family rented out two rooms of those four rooms for another family. Our family lived in two rooms and the other family lived in the other two rooms.

JE: What about a kitchen? Did you all come communally to the kitchen?

CO: Each one had a small kitchen arrangement in the room.

JE: How large was that family?

CO: They had one son—a couple and one child.

JE: Quarters got a little close at times?

CO: It was a little close. It was not uncommon to have part of your house rented out. It was still rented by the time I was in high school. We were living in three rooms and had rented one to a lady and her daughter. We did share a kitchen and bathroom facilities then.

JE: As primitive as that was, when you look back, it's just got to make you feel so proud that they did what they needed to do to get by.

CO: They survived...

JE: And they did survive.

CO: Right.

JE: How old was your mother when she died?

CO: My mother was 83 when she died. My father had cancer and died at 66, just a year or two after he was able to retire.

Chapter 03 - 9:10

Oral Roberts Family

John Erling: You didn't remember the Dust Bowl because you were too young?

Clarence Oliver: I do remember the Dust Bowl.

JE: Oh you do? You were born in '29 and the dust and the depression were up to about '35?

CO: Right.

JE: So you do remember...I was just thinking about that, how a single wall, the dust blowing through the house.

CO: It did, and you would put wet towels around as best you could. Obviously in that part of the state, it was not as severe as it was in the western part of Oklahoma, but you could still see the dust and you could see the clouds. We did experience that.

JE: You could taste it, I suppose?

CO: That's right.

JE: When you were outside, the nitty-gritty of the dust?

CO: It's just there; it was in the air.

JE: Do you remember people from Ada moving/leaving because of the Dust Bowl/Depression times?

CO: We had some relatives who did move to California and eventually came back. As far as remembering individual families, those are the ones I remember leaving and coming back.

JE: So then the first school you attended was there in Ada?

CO: It was.

JE: A country school.

CO: It was an interesting school—Irving Elementary School, the same school my mother attended when she was in school, the same school that Oral Roberts attended, the same school that Bob Kerr attended. So there was a lot of history in that school. By that time, it had become a grade 1-6 school. I went 6 years there. The original building was the same one that Roberts and Kerr and my mother had attended. Later they built a new building and tore down the original structure.

JE: Do you remember the Roberts family then in Ada?

CO: I do. Oral's father was minister of a Pentecostal church that he had established two blocks from where I was born. I mentioned that I was a seeing eye dog for my grandfather. Among the things that my grandfather liked to do was each Sunday, he wanted to go to

a different church in the neighborhood. In those days, you had a church on every corner so we had a Baptist church on one corner and a Methodist church across the street on the next corner, Church of Christ a block away, the Nazarene church two blocks away, Church of Christ two blocks away, a Pentecostal church two blocks away. So we made the rounds, and he wanted to go to different ones. He liked to hear the different preachers. I sometimes would take him down to hear Reverend Roberts preach. That was my first experience with the Pentecostal religion. He was a good preacher.

JE: Was he a powerful preacher?

CO: He was a powerful preacher. Oral's parents lived across the street from the family of the girl that became my wife, my fiancée.

JE: And her name was?

CO: Her name was Vinita, just like the town—Vinita June Shirley. Vinita's father and Oral's father would meet frequently in the front yard and have vivid discussions about religion because my father-in-law was a devout Southern Baptist and, obviously, Oral's father was a devout Pentecostal. They disagreed on some religion (laughs).

JE: Did you as children hear that or know they were talking?

CO: Yes, it was friendly. They were neighbors just out visiting. Yes, we knew they were talking about things.

JE: Oral would have been how much older than you?

CO: Oral was 10 years older than I.

JE: So then you don't have any memory of him in Ada?

CO: Yes I do...not a lot but...he began his tent ministry, as I recall, in Ada. It was not a large circus tent to begin with. The first time I remember his having a tent there was about two blocks from his parents' home place on a vacant lot at the corner of Fourth Street and Broadway in Ada—a smaller tent. He did a revival there. I also remember that when he was pastor of a church in Enid, he was the keynote speaker at the Pentecostal summer camp meeting. They had a campground east of Ada. I was in high school at the time and several of us drove out to attend the camp meeting to hear this evangelist, hometown boy coming back from Enid, and he preached at that. So we heard Oral even in the days I was a teenager.

JE: And he was, as we say, a firey or powerful preacher back then?

CO: He was.

JE: He might have been in his 20s maybe?

CO: He would have been...yes, he would have been in his late 20s at that time. And he was a powerful preacher then. So we had a connection with him before the university was constructed. He originally purchased a farm outside Broken Arrow that was called Robinhood Farm before he bought the land where the university is located.

JE: Did he operate it as a farm?

CO: He did...not a large one but he had some farming operations. That farm had a very interesting history because it goes back to a gentleman by the name of Sampson Chisholm, who was an adopted son of the Chisholm who established the Chisholm Trail in western Oklahoma and Sampson established the Chisholm Trail in eastern Oklahoma that came through Broken Arrow across the Arkansas River and went on up into Kansas. After he retired from the 10 or 15 years that cattle trails were in place, he came back to Broken Arrow and established a cattle ranch on that area southwest of Broken Arrow. It's the same place that Oral bought the ranch at one time. Sampson Chisholm and his wife and a child were buried on that property. Their graves are still there. It has changed hands several times since then. When I was doing some history about Broken Arrow, I visited with Richard Roberts and his sister to see if they remembered the graves and where they were specifically, and they did not know the history of the Chisholm family but they did know that there had been graves on the farm. So those have been identified and the present owner knows where they are. After the new owner, I learned the history of that location. He named the housing development that he put on that ranch as Chisholm Ranch Estates.

JE: It is known as that to this day?

CO: It is now. It's a new development there called Chisholm Ranch Estates. That's the same land that Oral purchased before he purchased the land where the university is located.

JE: He had an interest in land, didn't he? Elsewhere on Voices of Oklahoma, I have an interview with Oral Roberts. He died about five months after that, but he talked about standing out here at 81st and Yale and looking and that farm. So that story he told and land...he would say, "They can't take that away from you", and that was his guarantee. That's the logic that apparently drove him to that farm.

CO: That's right. He wanted to invest in land. He always felt they can't take the land away from him. They could legally I guess, but... (laughs).

JE: And then round-robin way, way ahead, you end up becoming professor at ORU?

CO: I did. Oral had envisioned a graduate school in the college of education that was fully accredited. After I retired from the superintendency and went back into journalism for a while, he—and then later his son, Richard, and the provost, Carl Hamilton—for a couple of years wanted me to come and joint them to work on the development of a graduate school of education that was accredited. An accreditation at college of education is based on public school degree programs that are developed. The only graduate programs they had in the school of education were those that were preparing people to go into the Christian school ministry type activity and those could not be accredited under the stated national accreditation process. So they wanted me to come out there. I

did not particularly want to do that but I later felt well perhaps that's what I need to do and should do, and it was. It proved to be very successful and we were able to build that graduate program to get the doctoral program established that Oral wanted. That's all nationally accredited. It's one of the stronger programs in the state now.

JE: He must have been proud to know here's an Ada boy in my school? So you had a connection there.

CO: We did. When I was superintendent of schools in Broken Arrow and we had then a new gymnasium, Oral was very much invested in his basketball program at ORU. He thought athletics would bring national attention to the school, which it did. He always liked at the beginning of the basketball season for their blue and white scrimmage within their own team to take them to a neutral gymnasium. He asked if he could do that at our gymnasium. He had just started the university, obviously, a little bit before that. It was interesting to sit with him in the bleachers and listen to him share his vision for what he wanted the university to be, the buildings that he wanted to construct there. He had a vision.

JE: When you heard this, were you skeptical? Did you think oh that's a pipedream? How did you view that?

CO: I did not. He's pretty convincing, as you know from having talked with him. I thought well he can make that work. He had already started the university. He had the land. He had some buildings up and I thought he was going to be successful. He invited me out to the dedication when Billy Graham was the speaker at the original dedication of the university. For whatever reason, I had prime seats. He invited my wife and we had two boys and was sat, I don't know, on the second row, I think, right off the stage there. It was pretty exciting to be there for that occasion.

JE: And you weren't a member of the faculty yet?

CO: No I was in the school system at that time.

JE: It was your Ada connection...

CO: I'm sure it was.

JE: Well that was a momentous time to be there with Billy Graham coming out; that's for sure.

Chapter 04 - 7:12

The Depression

John Erling: Back to the depression days...did people come to your house asking for food?

Clarence Oliver: They did. Somehow the people who are in need and are traveling through the community are often referred to as hobos but they were just people who did not have a home at the moment. I don't know how they marked houses, but somehow people knew that your house was good for a meal and they would come to the back door,

knock on the door. We didn't have much but my mother always would manage to share whatever we had. If they came to the door, they got a little bit of whatever we had and it was regular. I'm sure they knew at that address or that house, you could get a meal. And yes, they came very regularly.

JE: I don't know if you got to know their names at all but I remember at a farm in North Dakota south of Grand Forks, for one reason or another, I don't know if he was a hobo or not, he came regularly. His name was Kolbien and for that reason, I can remember that 70-some years later (laughs). That man's name was Kolbien. He had a great personality. What did you do for entertainment back in those days?

CO: Laid outside and I would ride the bicycle. I worked early. When I was 7 years old, I began a job hocking newspapers. That's a term people don't use now, but a newspaper boy. I would stake out a corner downtown and have the papers to sell to passersby.

JE: And you hocked the headline?

CO: We did. I learned that as being necessary. When I was first starting, I did not but I soon found out that if you could read the paper and you could tell people what was in the paper, you could sell more papers. At 7, I was a newspaper boy. I staked out a corner spot that was adjacent to the best men's clothing store in town, the S&Q Clothiers, at the corner of Main and Broadway. That was my corner that I was going to work. The process was that you had to buy the papers in advance and then you would go sell them. Papers cost 2-1/2 cents and you sold them for 3, so you made 7 cent per paper. I would have a nickel. I would go buy two papers, go up and hock those two papers and go back and buy two more and go back and hock them. If I had a great day, I might have earned 10 cents, 5 cents of which would have been profit. I would save 5 cents to go back the next day and buy the paper. But as I stood on that corner, I also learned that the only people who were buying the papers were the men who were wearing suits. That re-enforced what my mother had been telling me - if you're going to be successful, you have to dress nicely (laughs). But I would hock papers on the corner. So that took a little bit of time every day. We did play outside.

JE: And you wanted to do it...

CO: I did...

JE: Nobody told you that you had to...

CO: No it was a way of earning a little bit of money. People can't understand why people from the depression era will stop and pick up a penny off the sidewalk. But if a penny was the profit from selling two newspapers, you understood that.

JE: During that time, labor unions were formed as a result of the depression. What was your father's view of unions?

CO: The labor unions were coming into many of the businesses because the people who did have jobs were not paid as well as they felt they should be and the labor unions

were trying to raise salaries and get benefits. My father did not want to participate in the union, and the business where he was newly employed at the cement plant was becoming a business where the unions were active. I remember one evening that two men came to the house to visit with him about why he was not joining the union. They were pretty aggressive in trying to force him to do that. I remember how upset he was that they were trying to force him into the union. He later did join the union in his later years but initially he did not. He did not want to be a part of that. He felt it was inappropriate. In his mind, it was inappropriate to do that.

JE: He begrudgingly joined.

CO: He did very begrudgingly.

JE: You have written many books and so you wrote a book, “One From The Least and Disappearing Generation—A Memoir of a Depression Era Kid”. You have dealt at length here about it. How did this book come about? Was this one of your first books?

CO: It was one of the first books. The name of the book is a little intriguing to some people, “The Least and Disappearing Generation”. The Depression Era children—this group is the smallest generation in recent history of our nation. The group is often called “the silent generation” in some of the studies of generational groups in America. Our generation was born in the late ‘20s into the late ‘30s, about 20 million population - smaller than our parents’ generation - and about 50 million smaller than our children, the Baby Boomers generation. So we are the least in number of the generations. Obviously, we are getting old and we’re dying so we’re disappearing (laughs). But I just felt that my children, in particular, and later grandchildren needed to know what life was like during the time before the depression, during the depression, and then in the early years as the depression was ending. So I wrote the story.

JE: I just opened it up here. The game you played was tin can shinny. What was that?

CO: (laughs) It’s a little bit like hockey except it’s played out in the street. You use a beta up tin can as the puck. It’s pretty much played like a hockey game. The shinny was really just a limb from a tree that had a crook on the end of it and you would use that to hit the can.

JE: Kids can find anything...

CO: You can create things but you had a game and you had a goal at the end of the street. There wasn’t much traffic on the street because not many people had cars. After my parents lost basically everything they had at the depth of the depression. Our family did not have a car until I was in high school.

JE: That was in the ‘40s?

CO: That was in the ‘40s.

JE: You said they lost everything. How bad did it get?

CO: I remember at one time my father had one shirt. He was working at that time at a service station. My mother would wash the shirt every night and dry it and he would wear it the

next day. They had very little clothing, very little food. Some families had businesses. Some families in the other part of town were not extremely wealthy but they were wealthy enough that the depression did not affect them in the same way as those who did not have steady jobs and who were not in business. So food was not readily available.

JE: Would you go to bed without dinner, starving?

CO: We weren't starving. We would have something. I remember my dad at one time tried to raise chickens that we could eat and half of them died. You can't do such things in town as well as you can out in the country. He bought a cow, or got a cow and worked it off, I guess. But we had a cow and he tried to keep it in our backyard but there wasn't enough grass to support it. So having milk from a cow didn't work out too well. He did have a garden and would try to raise some vegetables and things in the garden. For a number of years until he had steady employment, it was pretty slim.

Chapter 05 - 2:15

High School

John Erling: We're talking about the '30s, the late '30s. You leave elementary school and then you go on to junior high school.

Clarence Oliver: Junior high school...

JE: Then on to high school?

CO: The junior high and the high school were on the same campus on the south part of Ada and that was the better part of town.

JE: How did you take to school? Did you enjoy it?

CO: I did most of the time. I learned rather quickly after I got to the junior high school level that I was from the wrong side of town. I also learned that I did not think I could be successful in that community on a long-term basis, that I would probably leave there at some point.

JE: Most young people were probably doing that - leaving.

CO: Those that did not come from families that owned businesses and that sort of thing, they were.

JE: In high school, were you involved socially in clubs or anything? Was there anything that pointed out that you had a skill at a certain area?

CO: Most of my involvement in activities was Sunday school and Boy Scouts.

JE: Church - what faith was it?

CO: I'm Southern Baptist.

JE: You grew up in that church...

- CO:** That was my mother's denomination and my father was Methodist in his family. I remember when he decided to become a Baptist just to keep peace in the family, I think, so that the whole family would be together. I remember when he was baptized in the church; I was a boy but I remember that activity. So our family became one that was affiliated with the Baptist church, although his older brother was a Methodist minister and at one time was pastor of the neighborhood Methodist church. I frequently would go over and hear my uncle preach and attend sometimes, even their vacation Bible School activities at the Methodist church because it was convenient.
- JE:** You were around the church and several preachers. Did you ever think you were to be a preacher?
- CO:** I did at one time and some people in the family thought that I was going to be called to the ministry but I was not. In my high school days, I wanted to be a journalist and a photographer, and I was both.
- JE:** Okay, so you did find out in high school that you wanted to be a journalist because that led to writing these books?
- CO:** Eventually, I guess it did because I later trained in journalism and worked in journalism.

Chapter 06 - 5:00

December 7, 1941

John Erling: Let me ask you about December 7, 1941. I think you would have been about 12 years old.

Clarence Oliver: Yes.

JE: The bombing of Pearl Harbor - what do you remember about that day?

CO: It was an interesting time. Radio transmission in those days was not very good. Our family had a battery-powered radio but you always listened to one program a day or very little listening time because you needed to preserve the power of the battery. On the day of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, our radio would not work well. Many of the people in the neighborhood did not have radios. I remember neighbors all gathering on the front porch of a neighbor who lived on the south part of the block behind us across the alley to listen to the radio transmission because they had a radio that was powered by electricity. We sat there and listened to the reports that came in, a lot of misunderstanding. Either I assumed responsibility or was given the responsibility to run back and forth/up and down the street to the neighbors who weren't there to give them a report on what was going on or what had been reported. I remember one incident that the reporter on the radio made the comment that Long Island was being invaded. That frightened everyone

because they thought well they are invading the continent. They later came on and said no I meant Guam island. So we had gone to tell people Long Island was being invaded. Then later I went back and said no, the reporter made a mistake; it was Guam island. It was an interesting time keeping up with those radio transmissions that were sometimes garbled and a lot of misinformation came about.

JE: As a boy 12 years old, did it make you nervous? You must have sensed the nervousness and maybe fear of the adults.

CO: I think all of us were very concerned about what might happen. We knew so little about what was really taking place. It was several days before people really began to get full information about it.

JE: I suppose the first president you heard then was Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

CO: That's correct.

JE: And you heard him speak after the bombing or...

CO: On the radio, yes. Later the fireside chats and those things. People would gather around the radio every evening and you would listen to that. It's difficult for families now to realize what life was like before television and before good radios, before FM and those kinds of things.

JE: Then there were entertainment programs. Do you remember any of the names of those shows?

CO: Young people always listened to The Lone Ranger and Amos and Andy or anything that was entertaining to us.

JE: You graduated high school in what year?

CO: 1947. While we were in high school, most of us were anticipating that we would be called into the military before we got very far along. Some were volunteering while they were still in high school. The war was winding down but it was not over in those high school years.

JE: Your parents must have been proud of you for graduating high school.

CO: I think they were, although neither made the decision to be at my graduation ceremony.

JE: Why do you think that was?

CO: I think in reflection on it, they probably did not feel they had proper clothing to go to a ceremony like that.

JE: Hmm. Did that bother you?

CO: Not a lot. They had not been able to come to football games or track meets or band concerts.

JE: Because they didn't feel they were dressed...

CO: I presume they just did not feel they could dress properly.

JE: It didn't deter you from anything, I mean you didn't say well my parents didn't do this and didn't show up and so I'm not going to succeed (laughs).

CO: (laughs) No, I just continued on. A lot of that is I think through encouragement of this gentleman I referred to who had been a scoutmaster and a teacher. We maintained a great friendship. He became a real hero for me. His name was Oscar Cantwell. He later became a scout executive, later moved to New Mexico, was a teacher in New Mexico in Hobbs, New Mexico and Clovis, New Mexico and later became a county clerk or county treasurer in New Mexico. He had been a high school teacher when we were in high school and had encouraged me to begin dating Vinita, who later became my fiancée and wife. He was the one who said you two need to get matched up.

JE: Really?!

CO: And he was correct. So we maintained a friendship with him until his death. On one occasion, we went by to see him when we were on a vacation trip and we spent a nice evening with him. He had a great influence on me.

JE: Boy Scouts too was influencing? You belonged to the Boy Scouts.

CO: I did. I did not progress too far. During all of those years, I continued to work part-time delivering newspapers morning and evening and later driving a Mistletoe delivery truck which was affiliated with the Oklahoma City Times and Daily Oklahoman company—Oklahoma Publishing Company—had a delivery service so I in my high school years usually worked part-time.

Chapter 07 - 4:37

Photography

John Erling: After high school, you enlisted in the Army.

Clarence Oliver: Not quite. After high school, if I knew a job was really difficult for young people...because at that time, all the veterans were returning from the war and any available job went to a returning veteran typically. There was a master photographer who had a nice studio in downtown Ada. He worked out a plan where I could work for him for six days a week as an apprentice. I learned everything about the business and photography and darkroom activities and cameras and film and retouching and all those things. It was a different type of operation than photography is now. I took that job for an astounding \$7 a week, 6 days a week for \$7, plus learning the business. After I had been there about a year or year and a half, I got a little bit of a promotion financially (laughs). It wasn't always for \$7. But I worked with him even the two years that I began college in Ada. But while I was still in high school as a senior, I enlisted in the Oklahoma National Guard. So that was my first entry into the Army. In response to your question of when I joined the Army, I did join in the National Guard at that particular time. Ada had two

National Guard units. That's when the National Guard was being re-established because the 45th infantry division was being returned from Europe and they were re-establishing it as a National Guard unit. I began as a private in the company.

JE: The photography work then into...

CO: Photography was a profession that I was really interested in. I had studied on my own. I had always had a camera to some degree. They were always little or used, not really wonderful instruments but they were cameras. So I was always taking photographs. I saved a lot of those photographs and later had another book that was basically a photographic history of young people growing up. But I worked as a photographer while I was in college and later when I transferred to Oklahoma A&M, I worked for the university in photography department and learned camera work for filming athletic events, did football game filming for A&M and basketball game filming. The photography department at the university contracted out for filming high school games in the area and I would do 16 mm filming of the high school games in that area. So photography led me into being able to work with a different profession than journalism but associated with it. Later, just prior to getting married, I established a freelance photography business for a few months before the Korean War began, before we were activated to go to Korea. But I had a little freelance company of my own doing wedding photography and groups and portraits. I had learned the business with the studio—everything from mixing chemicals to developing film, selection of cameras, doing commercial work. We had all sizes of cameras up to an 8 x 10 sheet film. That's a large camera and you are very careful when you take a picture there because it's very expensive to use film of that nature. All of the retouching was hand retouching with pencil and magnifications. Now you do all that on Photo Shop on the computer. But it was all hand done in those days.

JE: Yeah. But then your unit was called to Korea.

CO: Well the Korean War began. Two weeks later, our unit was activated and we were advised that we'd be reporting to the old Camp Polk which is now a large training center in Louisiana. They reopened that with a unit filled with draftees to bring it to above authorized strength and see how quickly we could train a unit and ship overseas to go into combat. We reported to active duty in September of that year.

JE: So would that have been in 1950?

CO: 1950, right.

JE: Just before the Korean War began.

CO: Two weeks after it began, we were activated.

JE: As you grew up leading up to that, was there always this talk of fear of communism?

CO: There wasn't so much fear initially. At least we weren't aware of it. We were aware that the Russians were a country of people who were embracing communism and we

read about the activities in World War II and we read about the history of how it had developed. But I don't know initially that we felt that it was going to be a threat to the world. But as we reached the time when the Korean War began, we did realize rather quickly that that was an effort to spread communism and then we did become fearful of it.

JE: Then you were ordered to combat service in the Korean War.

CO: That's correct.

JE: In '51.

Chapter 08 - 10:05

Korea

John Erling: For those that are listening, tell us what the Korean War was about.

Clarence Oliver: The Korean War had a lot of history leading up to it because Korea has been a divided country many, many times. But the new division of Korea between what we now know as North and South Korea followed activity at the end of World War II when that country was given basically to Japan for a while. Before World War II, it was the result of Theodore Roosevelt, for whatever reason, being chosen as the person to resolve some of the differences between Russia and Japan following the 1903 Japan-Russian War that Japan won. As a result, Theodore Roosevelt was dividing up some of the land and he gave Korea to Japan. They ruled that country really harshly. After World War II, Russia wanted to regain some of the land that they had lost in that war and they now had been a part of the coalition that had defeated Japan, so they divided the peninsula and gave the north half of the peninsula basically to Russian control and the south half, South Korea, with some support from the United States. The leaders of both countries wanted a single nation and each thought their plan would be better. The southern part of the peninsula wanted to make it a democracy and the northern part wanted to make it a communist country. The premier of Russia, Stalin, had discouraged making an attack to reunite the peninsula. But finally in the spring of 1950, he authorized the attack to go ahead and the North Koreans attacked South Korea and pretty much quickly captured almost all of the peninsula. The United States had very little preparation to help with the fighting against the North Koreans and were almost pushed off the peninsula. Finally from the Pusan Perimeter at the very tip of Korea, they said this is as far as we are going. We are going to stand and fight right here. Finally we were able to get some reinforcements and the United States was finally able to bring some people in and began re-attacking the North Koreans and eventually pushed them back to the Yalu River area, at which time China came into the battle because they thought they were about to

enter into China. General MacArthur probably would have done that had he not been forced not to do so by the president. But it was basically an effort to spread communism into that country and then to begin spreading it in all of southeast Asia.

JE: I was 10-11 at the time so was aware and there were young men in our church who had gone, but I remember always the talk of the 38th parallel. That was very much in the news, the coming and going across that line.

CO: The 38th parallel was just simply a line arbitrarily drawn on the map and said Russia you take control of everything north of there and we'll take control of the south - not a very wise decision.

JE: Yeah. Were you in combat?

CO: I was. I was in an infantry company. I was a master sergeant at that time in a rifle company. We went into combat in December 1951. Our company was part of a regimental combat team of the 45th division that was sent into Korea a month before the rest of the division went in. We were attached to the first cavalry division. Our regiment was replacing one of the cavalry regiments in the area west of Chorwon in North Korea, north of the 38th parallel a few miles, not a significant number but several miles. That, I have been told, was the harshest winter in the history of Korea. The night that we were making what is known as a midnight replacement of a unit. An infantry company will bring up their troops to a position behind the front line and then go in small numbers to the individuals who are in place in foxholes or bunkers, whatever their position, and replace one or two men at a time. You relieve that person; they leave and go back and your unit gradually moves in. We were doing that at midnight so that you would be concealed from the Chinese forces who were across the valley. We were told that it was 20 degrees below 0 that night. If you get below 0, it's cold - and it was cold! As we moved up into the position behind the line, we were told to dig in. Well at 20 below 0, you don't really dig in; you dig out your entrenching tool and you chip away a little bit. We finally just laid down on the ground and tried to sleep until it was time for us to make the replacement.

JE: Anybody freeze to death out there?

CO: Well you felt like you were. At that time, the proper winter clothing and proper winter boots and things had not been issued. We were still short on supplies. But we did have clothing that was reasonably warm. We had prepared for it. We had been there a while. We had been acclimated as the weather got colder. We had been in Japan in a deployment in what was then a defensive position in northern Hokkaido, the northern-most island in Japan. At that time, they were not sure if Russia was going to invade Japan and we were stationed there in defensive position before we moved on into Korea. We left there in November. So we were beginning to get accustomed to cold weather because Hokkaido was just off of Siberia and it was already getting cold and you got acclimatized to it after a while.

JE: You were in your early 20s?

CO: 20s yes, 22.

JE: That night you dug in, did you face combat right away?

CO: The next day we were there, that was just the beginning of the time when the large attacks were ending and the action was just patrolled action for a while. You would go out in small combat patrols and attack. That was when strategic locations were being challenged by both armies and you had the battles in places like Pork Chop Hill that you may have read about, seen movies about, and books about and land that would change hands almost every night. One group would take it in the daytime and another group would run you off at night. It was a small group action but that was going on at the time.

JE: Did you think is this going to last forever?

CO: Well you always are concerned if I ever get home and that kind of thing.

JE: You were writing letters to Vinita, I suppose?

CO: I was. We tried to write regularly. It took awhile. Now because we have such instant communications, it is difficult to realize that the only communication you had with family was by letter and it might be two or three weeks before you would get a response, so news traveled slowly. We made only one telephone call during the 13 months that I was overseas; I made one telephone call to Vinita while we were in Japan. It was very expensive and it is difficult to imagine these days what it was like but you had to make a reservation at the telephone office in Japan at the specific time that you wanted to make the call, and all that had to be coordinated back home. You would report to the telephone office and they would begin setting up the connection. We were in Chitose Hokkaido at the time. They made a telephone line connection to the coast, then made a shore-to-ship radio connection to transmit it, and then a ship-to-ship connection to Hawaii, and then a ship-to-ship connection to San Francisco, and then a line connection to Oklahoma City, and then a line connection to Ada. It took awhile to get all of that set up. Then your call started when they had the people all set up to answer the phone there. For my wife, it was in the middle of the night for her, but they answered the phone in the hallway and all the family gathered around to hear the conversation. I only had enough money for a three-minute call and it was \$12 a minute for a call, so \$36 for a three-minute call that was transmitted several times over with people listening in I'm sure all the way at every connection point. Keep in mind that \$36 would be about one-fourth of the monthly salary of a soldier for three minutes. That was the only telephone call I was able to make at that period of time.

JE: Thirteen months and you hadn't been home either.

CO: No.

JE: But the letters sustained your relationship obviously.

CO: Yes. Well, we were married...

JE: Oh you were married?

CO: Yeah, we married before I went overseas.

JE: You rose in the ranks too. You came in...

CO: I came in as a private and was a master sergeant in Korea. They asked me to take a direct appointment there and go to Japan for awhile and then return to Korea in another unit as a platoon leader at another company in another division. I chose not to do that and returned home. We were eligible for a rotation back because it was just the point system. After I returned home and went to work at a newspaper in western Oklahoma, I took a direct appointment as they were then beginning to reorganize the National Guard unit again as the war was ending. I took an appointment there and began my commissioned officer service.

JE: So you were a second lieutenant?

CO: I was second lieutenant in 1952.

JE: Was that the Thunderbird division?

CO: It was, same division.

JE: The Thunderbird division, of course, is very famous.

CO: It is and it is still a famous division. Someone said those who have been Thunderbirds are in the world's largest fraternity (laughs).

JE: Yes that would be true. You went on to become a captain and then a major, so obviously this military life...

CO: I loved it. I considered a full-time military career. At the time, I was a major, I had a severe heart attack that ended my advancement in the military. I was 35 and had a severe heart attack and it took a long time to recover from that.

JE: What year?

CO: That would have been 1964 or '65.

JE: And at a young age.

Chapter 09 - 3:52

Heart Attack

John Erling: Was it just out of the clear blue?

Clarence Oliver: I was in the doctor's office, had had a normal physical. In those days, they did not typically do electrocardiograms as part of a normal physical. Technology was not too sophisticated then and they did not know a lot about heart disease. The doctor, as I was getting ready to leave, asked if I had anything else that I needed to share with him. I said well I've had a little bit of pain in my left shoulder blade from time to time. He said

well, let's do a cardiogram. We did that and he said you're having a heart attack right now; he said it is going on right now. This is the interesting part. He said you go home and pack a bag, go check yourself in over at the hospital. We had a hospital in Broken Arrow on Main Street. He said go home, tell your wife, and pack a bag and go check into the hospital and I'll be over later today and we will start some activity. Today they would pop you in an ambulance and put all kinds of things on you, oxygen on you. They did not know a great deal about how to treat it except rest and diet and exercise and little medication. They placed me on some medication, some blood thinners. I was in the hospital about a week and then went on part-time work for 3-4 months. I worked part-time and was home recuperating. He referred me to one of the better known cardiologists in the state who is now deceased. He began treating me and after I had been treated for 3-4 years, I told him I needed to know in reality how long he thought I had to live. I said I have a wife and three children and I need to make some plans for them, and he said you might live to be 40 but I don't think so.

JE: And you were 36?

CO: Yeah, 36 at that time. He said you may live 4 more years. He said I don't think you will. I said well I'll do what I can. They first told me to quit work and go play golf and I said I don't play golf, I never have. I said I can't quit, I have a wife and family to support. He said well, I don't think you'll live long. So I just kept on keeping on.

JE: So have you had any problems with your heart since?

CO: Yes. I recuperated, obviously, and continued exercising and trying to eat right and those kinds of things. In 1998, after I had been at the university, had been dean, had already made a decision that I should leave that position, I was on a flight going to Florida as part of my responsibilities with the board of directors at Cancer Treatment Centers of America where I had been serving on the board for some time, and I had a heart attack while the plane was landing in DFW. I passed out on the plane and had my head against the seat. I had all the normal body function problems—drenching, perspiration, and completely out of it. The plane landed, people were deplaning, and the man next to me punched me and said I need out, said the plane is almost empty and I want to get out. I was the on the aisle seat and I somehow stumbled out into the aisle and got out to the area where people were gathering to board the plane. I collapsed out there with the normal vomiting and all of those things and went out again and they had the emergency crew at DFW airport come. My heart rate was 10 when they found me; later I learned that. But I'd had a heart attack on the plane. They put me in a hospital in Ft. Worth and implanted a pacemaker after some tests. Two or three days later, I was headed back. My wife and son came down to pick me up and we came back to Oklahoma. I'm getting ready for my third pacemaker now.

JE: It's kept you alive then, hasn't it?

CO: It has. I have been functioning with a partially functioning heart since 1964.

JE: Wow.

Chapter 10 - 7:50

Changed Careers

John Erling: You brought your family to Broken Arrow in 1955. Was that to join the Broken Arrow High School system?

Clarence Oliver: I did. I had not planned to be a teacher. I still had my visions of journalism. After I had worked as an editor in western Oklahoma, I had wanted to return to finish a degree. I was a senior in journalism at Oklahoma A&M at the time the Korean War began. I needed one more year there to get my journalism degree. When I came back from the Korean War, I had a wife and son and I had to go to work. I didn't have the ability to go back to school immediately. I took a job in western Oklahoma as news editor for the Watonga Republican, one of the historic newspapers in the state that territorial Governor Ferguson had established back in the late 1800s. It was a great newspaper and had a great owner/publisher who was a great mentor who had been an editor in Oklahoma City before he purchased that paper.

JE: Let me just stop you a minute. You went to work for a newspaper. First of all, you were trained to be a photographer.

CO: Well I had been studying journalism at Oklahoma A&M.

JE: Okay, so you had learned that you enjoyed writing...

CO: Oh yeah, I had wanted to be a journalist from high school days. In fact, while I was early teenage, a friend and I purchased a mimeograph machine and all the essential equipment and had a neighborhood newspaper for awhile, which was silly but we were even in those days writing.

JE: So then you went to Oklahoma A&M.

CO: Yes went to Oklahoma A&M and studied journalism. I was a senior in journalism there when the war started. So after the war, I came back and I went to work as a news editor

JE: How long were you there?

CO: I was there two years and I kept talking to the publisher about returning to finish my degree. He was a graduate of the A&M college of journalism, had been an outstanding football player at A&M, but he had encouraged me to go to the University of Oklahoma because he said at that time I think the faculty in journalism is a little stronger. So I went down to Norman to see about enrolling and, for some reason—probably the rivalries

between Stillwater and Norman—they did not want to take all my credits from Oklahoma A&M.

JE: Wow.

CO: Things just were not working out. We couldn't find a job. We couldn't find a place that was appropriate for the family to live. I couldn't get the credits accepted. Finally I came out after taking a typing test trying to even get a job at the university; I came out to the car where my wife and two boys were waiting and I said we're not supposed to be here. I said something tells me that we are not to be at this university or not to even go on in journalism. All of sudden I had the impression that I needed to change careers. I told her, I said we are going to go back to Ada where I had started as a freshman. I am going to change professions and become a high school English teacher. Just like that, I felt that's what I had been called to do. Now many people who do not have the same faith or understand the concept of a person being called wouldn't understand that, but I felt I was being called to change careers. It was time for school to start. We drove back to Ada. They accepted every credit that I had.

JE: In which school?

CO: At East Central University. They accepted everything I had done at Stillwater. They gave some additional credit for some things that I had done in the military. They offered me a job part-time in the public relations department at the university which included some work in photography and helping with the television show that they were doing, a weekly television show. Then they offered me a job as the editor of the college newspaper - both of those paying jobs. We found a partially furnished house two blocks from the campus and a week later, we were in school and studying to be an educator.

JE: And you were very happy.

CO: Happy that everything was working well. Then later after we had been there studying for a year and a half, changing degrees (laughs), the university president wanted us to stay at the university and be an instructor in journalism and English but he wanted me to have completed some additional graduate work. He said go to OU and you can study some additional work in English and said we will have a contract for you in August but you have to complete these hours before then. So I again was changing from what I had been called to do. I was going to go back into journalism and be at the university. I went to Norman and I was working full time in the evening as a nighttime assistant manager for a large drugstore and going to school full time, carrying a little more than a normal load for graduate school, and I was commanding a National Guard unit in Allen and I was burning the candle at both ends and in the middle and had some serious health problems. In May, I was told by the university physicians, and later in some follow-up second and third opinions, was told that I had to have surgery immediately, that I had a serious illness—

hyperthyroidism with internal toxic goiter—and that I had to have immediate surgery. I said I can't do that, I have to finish these graduate hours by July or I'll lose the contract. They all told me you'll be dead by July, you can't live another five or six weeks with that, which changed the opinion. I didn't have any insurance and didn't know what I would do. The doctor said I can get you into the brand new Veterans Hospital that's just been finished in Oklahoma City because you're a veteran. He said I don't know what you'll do about your family but we can get you medically covered. I moved my family in with my in-laws and I entered the hospital. My surgery was pretty unique. They flew in a surgical team from Los Angeles to do the surgery, a rather complex one, and I was in the hospital three months. Again I was broke, in debt from graduate school and no income for three months. I knew I had to find another job. But at the time they were getting ready to release me, I was going to leave to make some arrangements for what I was going to do. I drove back to see the dean at East Central University where I was supposed to be coming back for the job. I said I'm qualified to be an English teacher. Do you have any listings in your record of any high school opening? I said I realize it's two weeks till school starts. He pulled out his file and he said I have two. He said one is in Calvin and one is in Broken Arrow. I said dean, I've never heard of Broken Arrow, and I had not at that time. I didn't even know where it was. But I said I've been to Calvin. Broken Arrow has to be better. I sent an application in to the superintendent. He called me the next day and hired me sight unseen over the telephone to come to a town that I'd never heard of three or four days before. We accepted the job and moved to Broken Arrow, drove into town and fell in love with it. We said this is where we are supposed to be.

JE: You were an English and journalism teacher.

CO: I started out as an English and journalism teacher. I resigned from that later, went back into journalism as managing editor of the Broken Arrow Ledger and three other of the McWilliams' newspapers. For six years, I worked back in journalism and then went back into education in Broken Arrow, taught marketing education and later assistant superintendent and then moved into administration.

JE: And then you were superintendent.

CO: Superintendent until 1992.

JE: So how many years were you superintendent?

CO: Eighteen as superintendent. I was 12 prior to that as the assistant superintendent. Moved to Broken Arrow in 1955 and it was a small community of 3000 people. That's probably counting a few pets (laughs). It's been exciting to be a part of a community growing from 3000 to 110,000 and to have been involved through that entire process.

Chapter 11 – 7:15**Race Relations**

John Erling: You saw a lot of changes in the world of education during that time.

Clarence Oliver: That's true.

JE: You came there in '55.

CO: Yes.

JE: I'm interested in race relations. Do you recall how the blacks were treated? You would see the signs I guess, blacks and whites?

CO: I did, and that was common throughout much of the land to have the separation. As a youth, I didn't really realize what was taking place. One of my newspaper routes when I was a young man was in what would be now called black town; it was called differently in those days. But it was a separate community area. The neighborhood in which I lived as a child was just two blocks from the area where the black community members lived and they would frequently show up on the playground of the school that was a block from my house and we played some. I never heard my parents mention in any way anything that was derogatory about another race, and they were basically nearby neighbors. I didn't realize, for some reason it never dawned on me, that they weren't integrated into school. They had a school not too far away and they went to that school. I just kind of thought well that's a neighborhood school just like ours is a neighborhood school. So it was in our time in the military that I began to really realize that there was some segregation activities that really were not appropriate. But when we moved to Broken Arrow and began teaching in high school, the superintendent at that time was a very progressive individual, a great superintendent, Glyn Hollabaugh. The national government had just issued some of the original decisions that schools should be desegregated and the Broken Arrow board of education in 1955 made the decision that they would integrate Broken Arrow schools. So the year I began teaching at the high school was the first year that black students were enrolled in Broken Arrow schools. That was 10-15 years ahead of almost every other school district in the state.

JE: You were quite a bit ahead of Tulsa Public Schools at that time.

CO: Yes, probably 15 years ahead. To my knowledge, there was not a major problem of any sort in our school system. I was teaching sophomore, junior and senior English classes and had black students in every one of those. They were good students. I did not detect any difficulty. Later in the military, I was commanding a National Guard unit that was based there and we recruited some black soldiers in our unit. There were times when I would need to take our unit in to be fed at a restaurant and I remember distinctly going into one restaurant and I had four or five black soldiers with me and they said we will not

serve you here. They said you make your blacks leave and I said no, if you can't serve all of us, you're not going to serve any of us. So we left. On the way to some training, we would stop our convoy to go in for a cup of coffee or for breakfast. I remember stopping in one nearby community. The restaurant refused to serve the black soldiers that I had in my unit so we all left as a unit. It took several years for desegregation to take place. I'm not sure that race relations are any better now and may be worse than they were in those days.

JE: In 1958 in Oklahoma City, we had the sit-in demonstrations. Clara Luper took 13 children and they sat up to the lunch counter at Katz and sat there and that's what started demonstrations, not only in Oklahoma but in other places. So Oklahoma City is known for that. I'm getting ready to interview three of those children who are now about 68 or 69 years old to talk about that experience. In their discussion to your point, it's worse. Back then, the lines were so definite—black, white, what have you. But now the line is so thin that you don't sometimes know that there is a problem and then yes there is. We don't have the signs posted.

CO: That's true.

JE: You think it's worse today?

CO: I do think it's worse today.

JE: So we haven't come very far in this race relation. Martin Luther King and what he did and the demonstrations they did and the marches and all. Why do you think it's worse today? What signs are there?

CO: There seems to be more hatred. Peaceful protests have become angrier than they did back in the '30s and '40s and early '50s. At least they didn't visibly show it to each other. I think they were more civil to each other than they are now.

JE: We should point out for those who will listen years from now to this conversation—here we are in 2016—we've had a rash of police encounters that's caused a major problem in our country.

CO: If you don't mind, let me go back to a time in Korea when our unit received the first black soldiers into our particular company. Integration in the military took place during the Korean War. Eisenhower had pushed for desegregation to be completed—desegregation of military that included blacks in totally different units. Sometimes they would not let black officers command an all-black unit. They would have a white officer commanding it. So it was still greatly segregated. I was administrative officer as we received seven or eight black soldiers that had come in and I had to review their records just to see that everything was complete. When one enlisted in those days, there were only two options to put on race—you put white or black. That was the checkmark that you designated to each. Then there was a section where you could write in something other than that if

you were. I remember going through the records of one young man from New Jersey. I called him in and I said you've indicated on your records here that you are an American Indian. I said do you realize the unit that you are in is from Oklahoma? Most of the men in the original basic unit are Oklahomans. I said that's Indian country. I said you obviously are not an American Indian. He was a black soldier. Our temporary office was in a large tent that had some supplies in it and our supply sergeant was a full-blood Cherokee and our assistant supply sergeant was a draftee from the Dakotas who was a full-blood Cheyenne. They were there listening to the conversation and I said now these two guys are American Indians. I said have you made a mistake on your records? He said well I guess I have, and we corrected it to mark it Negro on there. But he wanted so badly to be out of that black designation that he wrote in that he was an American Indian. In some areas, he might have been able to have accomplished that paper transition but he could not in that particular unit. I felt bad about having to call that to his attention but I said we need to make your record correct. That bothered me a lot that it was an embarrassment to him and it was a difficult conversation.

JE: But the fact that he didn't want to own up to being a black is the greater issue.

CO: That's the issue.

JE: It's embarrassing...

CO: It is.

JE: ...a society that this boy could not say I am black and be proud of it.

CO: That's right. It's sad.

Chapter 12 - 3:40

JFK and 9/11

John Erling: The day John Kennedy was assassinated - November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.

What do you remember about that day?

Clarence Oliver: I was assistant superintendent in Broken Arrow. The superintendent and I had been in Oklahoma City at the state department of education on some business. We were driving to Stillwater for a meeting with some people at the vocational technical education department in Stillwater. We had turned off the radio in the car and we were talking all the way. I did not know about the assassination until we walked into the career tech offices over there to see the gentleman we had an appointment with. Everyone was so somber and they were very visibly upset. We said what's going on? And they told us then that the president had been assassinated. So I didn't learn of it until later in the day, did not hear all of the radio broadcasts and things...

JE: We should say it happened at 12:30 on that Friday, so you learned about it...

CO: About 2:00 that afternoon. It impacted the nation as only losing the president under those circumstances could do. For a few weeks even, the nation was just in a state of despair really. It was a very, very sad time. Everyone watched all of the proceedings, all of the viewings. Everyone was glued to the television set for days just watching what was going on because the entire nation was upset.

JE: So you were superintendent?

CO: I was assistant superintendent at that time.

JE: So how was that handled in school?

CO: Well the students were upset in the same way that the teachers were. They dealt with it very carefully. They just understood that people were going to be getting very sad. If anyone wanted to talk about it, they talked about it in class. We brought in the counselors that we had and would try to help counsel students who were having unusual difficulty.

JE: Then let's reflect on another major happening known as 9/11, the September 11 attacks—September 11, 2001, when they attacked our twin towers in New York City, the World Trade Center, then on to the Pentagon. Another plane went down before it could make a strike. What do you remember about that day?

CO: Well I was obviously not in teaching at that time, not as superintendent. At that particular time, I was home and did not have the television on. My daughter called me and said are you watching television? I said no and she said the Twin Towers are coming down, some planes crashed into it and they don't know just exactly what's happened and turn on your television. I did and saw that taking place. During all the days following that, there was great fear about what was taking place in the nation, great fear about what the implications of this might be; a lot of misunderstanding. It is interesting that people watched that same scene over and over and over for days and days and days and could not get it out of our minds. Finally people were just to the point that I don't want to see it anymore. They wouldn't even turn on the television. It was such a devastating feeling.

JE: That's the feeling I had too. I also thought America will never get back to regular life again. And we did. However, it did change enormously, internationally...

CO: Never the same.

JE: ...never the same, that's right. Never the same for sure.

CO: I had a friend when I was at the university, one of our staff members who had resigned and had taken a job working in the towers. I wondered about her, if she was there. She was not; she was elsewhere that particular day. But that was one thing that went through my mind...I wonder where she is in that mess.

Chapter 13 – 7:35**Tony Duffle Bag**

John Erling: You've had, if I can count them up—how many careers have you had?

Clarence Oliver: (laughs) Well I've been obviously a journalist; I've been a photographer; I've been a military officer; I've been a teacher; and I've been school administrator, superintendent, a college professor and dean of college of education. I just can't hold a job (laughs).

JE: (laughs) Are you afraid to say which one you enjoyed the most?

CO: To be honest, I have enjoyed every one of them. I do enjoy writing. I think printer's ink is in my blood, even though, in my opinion, the Lord wanted me to be an educator and I have been. I have always wanted to be a journalist personally. And I've enjoyed being a journalist.

JE: And that's something you can continue with. We didn't mention the book: Tony Dufflebag...and Other Remembrances of the War in Korea. We have a bookstore associated with our website. Just a quick story...Tony Dufflebag.

CO: That's an interesting story because we're doing a follow-up book on that because for the past almost 60 years, I have been trying to find what happened to Tony. Tony was the name we gave to an orphaned Korean boy that two of my friends found on the streets of Seoul in February 1952. The temperature was somewhere in the range of probably 10 or 11 degrees. It had warmed up from the 20-below weather that we had been experiencing. Those two soldiers, friends of mine, I had recommended for a medal for heroism and as part of all that, we had given them three days leave to go back to the capital city of Seoul, which wasn't much of a reward because Seoul was pretty well devastated. It had changed hands three times in 18 months and it was a city that before the war had probably been 3 million population. It was probably down to 5 or 600,000 and buildings were devastated and not much they could do. In fact, there weren't any hotel rooms they could stay in. They were placed in the German embassy which didn't have a lot of damage and they had a room there. But they were out on the street the second night there and they found this little Korean boy who was about 6 or 7 years old. He was starving and freezing and had freeze burns all over him. He didn't have any shoes. The only clothing he was wearing was a tank top that was on the upper part of his body and one wrapped around the lower part of his body. He was in bad shape. He would probably have died that night or the next day. They said we can't leave this boy here. They didn't know what they were going to do with him. They knew they couldn't leave him on the street. None of us spoke very much Korean and the boy didn't speak any English. So they found someone who could interpret a little bit and found that the boy's family had been killed

by the Chinese and he was totally alone there. They took him in, got him cleaned up a little bit. The next day, they were to come back to our unit and they said we are going to try to sneak him back up to our unit. At that time, our unit had moved back off the front lines. We had been in the front 30-something days. We were moved back into a blocking position about 4-5 miles from the front. We were doing some retraining but we were at a reserve position to go back up if necessary. So it was kind of a safe location. They said we are going to sneak him back up there until we can figure out what to do. They tried to figure out how they were going to get him by the military checkpoints because no civilian could go up toward the combat area. They stuck him down inside of a canvas duffle bag that had all of their belongings in. When they got to the checkpoint, the military police checked bags but they were checking about every third bag. They had this little boy stuck down in a duffle bag and the military police skipped that bag as they were going through. So when they came back up to our unit, they opened up their duffle bag and out popped this little smiling boy. He was warm and safe and fed right at that particular moment. His name in Korean sounded to us a lot like Tony, so they started calling him Tony. I said well he needs a last name. He came to us in a duffle bag so let's name him Tony Dufflebag. We were able to keep him safe in our unit for a few weeks. We wrote home and told our families about him and I wrote my wife. At that time, we had a young son who was only about 6 months old at the time. She went to the town and bought a Levi jean jacket and that's the jacket he is wearing in that photograph. She bought a jean jacket and mailed it to us to give to him. We sewed patches and stripes and things on it. Another wife sent him a hop-along Cassidy cap pistol set and he strapped on his two cap pistols. Everyone in the unit just adopted him, fell in love with him. After awhile, the officials in our regimental headquarters heard that we had this Korean boy up with us and they said you can't do that.

JE: How old was he again?

CO: He was about 6 or 7, our guess. But anyway, he had been adopted unofficially by everybody in the unit. Even our company commander was part of the scheme of keeping him there until we figured out what to do. Eventually the regimental commander issued a direct order to our commander and said you will turn him over. Every time they would come up to get him, well he would just disappear and no one knew where he was. He would hide somewhere. He knew that they were going to take him. Well eventually they did get him and they placed him at an orphanage that had been established. The Air Force had established an orphanage at that time over by Incheon. He was placed there and we returned to the states. I had always wondered what happened to Tony. So for all the years since, I have tried in a variety of ways to find what happened to him but we have never been able to do that. I had a friend who was Korean who was in our doctoral

group at the University of Tulsa who was superintendent of schools at Incheon and later in Seoul. He said you will never find him. He said there are too many thousands of those orphaned boys. We tried to get newspapers there in Incheon and Seoul to run the picture and say “were you Tony at this time”. Still in doing that, copies of the book are in the Korean military history museum in Seoul. I had some friends who were on a mission trip and they visited with the archivist at that museum, which is a huge museum of all the wars that Korea has been in in 3000 years. The Korean War that we talk about is just a small part of that museum. But they at one time were going to put a small exhibit in about Tony and about that but I don’t know if they ever did that. We’ve not been able to find him. But still, we had a response even this week from a gentleman who runs an agency trying to identify people like that and he said it is almost hopeless.

JE: He would be how old today?

CO: He would be in his late 60s, maybe 70.

JE: You don’t know if he’s alive or not?

CO: No we do not. He had such a great personality, very vivacious. If he survived—and I am most confident that he was because they moved those orphans on down to some more safe areas in southern Korea—I knew that he would rise to some level of leadership in that country. In my mind, I envision that he is a governmental leader or a great corporate leader or something. I’d like to tell the rest of the story. I’ve about decided to just write the rest of the story as a fictitious story. In fact, I’ve got a draft started on that particular book.

JE: (laughs) You can’t keep yourself from writing, can you?!

CO: No. The title of the new book is Finding Tony Dufflebag (laughs).

JE: You would think that he would have some way of being the one to contact you.

CO: In my fictitious story, he does (laughs). Of course, he was only 6 or 7 years old. You remember some things at that age but you can’t remember a lot of the details. He would remember he was Tony, though.

JE: Right.

Chapter 14 - 9:43

Ethics and Morality

John Erling: For the city of Broken Arrow, you’ve become quite a historian for them.

Clarence Oliver: I have.

JE: You have written for them and produced a CD on their history.

CO: And we’re doing an update of the book that was written for the centennial year, for the first 100 years, to bring it up to modern times. It will be 113 years of the history of Broken Arrow.

- JE:** About education in Oklahoma today...it seems that there is such a shortage in the state budget. We today are facing a shortfall. As a matter of fact, they just discovered they had money in House Bill 1017. But it's always that drag to have enough money for education. Was that disappointing to you as a superintendent?
- CO:** It is terribly disappointing because it's the result of so many things that the leadership in the state has caused to go into law that has reduced the sources of income. They've granted so many exemptions that have shortened the income for the state. It's really frustrating to try to deal with that.
- JE:** It just seems that that would be one of the things that if you're going to put any money into, it's education. It just always surprises me that that doesn't seem to be the goal.
- CO:** It isn't in recent years in Oklahoma. We're at the bottom of the stack in the nation in the way we support public education. I don't see how the leadership in industries would want to move to a state that does not give stronger emphasis to education.
- JE:** Right. About your family, you had three children.
- CO:** I have three children.
- JE:** Their names?
- CO:** Our oldest is Paul, our middle son is Mark, and our daughter is Shirley. We have seven grandchildren; most are married. We have five great-grandchildren. So we now have four generations of Olivers living in Broken Arrow. The community is burdened with the clan.
- JE:** (laughs) They are very fortunate to have you, of course. And then Vinita—she died in what year?
- CO:** In 2009.
- JE:** How many years were you married?
- CO:** 60.
- JE:** That was a great loss to you. She was how old?
- CO:** She was 79.
- JE:** You have been able to move on.
- CO:** I am living alone and keeping very busy. I'm still writing. I'm on several boards of directors of foundations and one company and several mostly nonprofit organizations. I am deeply involved in the community. I do free work at the university. I volunteer and serve on doctoral dissertation committees and I do guest speaking every semester in the graduate courses there. I present history programs all over the area. I just keep very busy.
- JE:** I've got to remind folks—you're listening to a man who is 85 years old—to think of how active a person can be. You did have a health issue but now apparently obviously whatever it is is monitored and under control as you can be that busy. You tell me you had three board meetings tomorrow.
- CO:** I do have. I have three board meetings tomorrow and one the following week. I have two more the next week.

JE: Well you are very fortunate, and you've just finished a book—An Administrator's Guide: Leading With Integrity. Tell us a bit about that.

CO: The school administrators' association asked me about 12 or 13 years ago to write a book offering some guidance in ethical behavior for school administrators. The executive had heard me make a presentation at a business meeting in Oklahoma City of people who were in the insurance industry. I had been asked to make a comment about integrity or ethics in purchasing activities. I had put together a program for that group and the school administrator executive was, for some reason, attending the meeting and heard it and he said can you expand on that and do something for us in school administration? We don't have an ethics book. So I did. I put together a small booklet called Ethical Behavior. It was larger than they wanted so they got to cutting it down. It ended up being just a small pamphlet that dealt with a few areas of how people should behave ethically in purchasing and human resources management in a number of areas. That was a popular book they gave to all of their association members. It was out of print. It was self published. They just printed a certain number and they have been out. So two years ago, the new executive asked if I could do a new book for them or update that one and they assigned me to work with an ethics committee of the association to start on that process. So this has been a two-year project. They first said we don't want to lose what was in the first book. I said well, we'll try to keep some that that is still appropriate. So we worked with a group and some consultants in putting together issues on ethics and morality and the law. Obviously if you are getting into the area of ethics, you have to have a value system that you have developed and those are opinions. People don't have the same opinion about things, so I wrote the book as a personal reflection on ethics and morality and the law and my recommendations for things that I felt were moral or ethically correct in doing them. There has been a lot of writing nationally about failure of leaders to behave in an ethical manner. Something can be legal and not necessarily ethical. We see examples of that all the time. We see examples of people who have made bad decisions and have lost their careers as a result of it. So it is something that we think at least will cause administrators to think about these issues and hopefully to have a value system and internal compass that they can follow that will cause them to make good decisions as school leaders. It is just released. They are giving it to all the members of their association. It is available nationally instead of being a limited publication. It is available in hard back, soft cover, and electronic version. Interestingly, two universities/graduate schools of education have adopted it for ethics classes as a textbook.

JE: Which schools were those?

CO: University of Oklahoma has, ORU has, and NSU is considering it. It is just out. It has only been out a few days. People in the business community are buying it. I have already had

some invitations to make presentations and book signings totally unrelated to education so I don't know how that's going to work out.

JE: I was going to say—could our political leaders take some guidance from this?!

CO: (laughs) Well they were considering giving copies to legislators. I don't know if they will. I don't own the book. The school administrators own it now.

JE: You've given it back, haven't you?

CO: It's a give-back to the profession activity.

JE: Yeah, that's amazing. And you love to write. You wrote me a personal letter here as you handed me the book. I appreciate that very much. Students are listening. They could be in high school or early days of college. What kind of advice do you give to students?

CO: Not to be discouraged. As you asked that question, I instantly thought of a book that I've been reading recently. My early morning activities include riding a bicycle, an indoor bike. I have a reading rack on it. I read a lot of books through the year and I'm just finishing a book by John Maxwell with the title of Sometimes You Win...some people would think the next line would be "lose", but over the lose, he has imprinted "You Learn". I think people need to be aware that they should never be discouraged if they don't win everything. You learn from those mistakes that are made and take that learning and turn it into an experience that you can continue to improve. Always have confidence that you can do better than you've done. And obviously returning to my feeling of faith that I probably have spoken of too much today, but I have on the wall in my bedroom a cross-stitch sampler that my wife made several years ago as a birthday gift. It's a quotation from King Solomon that's in his writings and it has the message, "Trust in the Lord, lean not on your own understanding, and in all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct your steps". For those of faith, let Him direct their steps.

JE: Right. How would you like to be remembered?

CO: I think I would like to be remembered using the cliché that I had left the woodpile a little higher than I found it.

JE: Well there is no question about that. Thank you for doing this. I really appreciate it. I always heard about you but never did get to sit down face to face and visit with you. You have a career that many of us thought was just superintendent, which was a high calling, but you've had all of these other careers. So it was my honor to visit with you and include this part of Voices of Oklahoma.

CO: Thank you. Our visits were 6 o'clock telephone calls—we're not going to have school today, John. (laughs)

JE: (laughs) Right.

CO: That was back in the days when you really made a decision. You drove the roads and, well, our busses just can't make it today. Sit down at the weather forecast that it's going to snow; well, we're not going to go today.

JE: Yeah, you don't miss those calls in the morning, I'm sure.

CO: I do not.

JE: Nor do I miss getting up at 3:30 in the morning.

CO: I bet you don't. Well you were a great talk show host. I remember a lot of those shows. I made a comment that I loved to listen to you in the morning. But I remember so much the fun that was had about the Tulsa mountains and this truck driver that gave you such a fit (laughs).

JE: Yeah.

CO: You added such a delight to the start of the day for a lot of us.

JE: That's back when radio was fun. They can't do that any more today.

CO: No, I know it.

JE: I was there in the sweet spot of KRMG. I was just lucky, I really was. As Chester Cadieux said, "It's better to be lucky than good".

CO: That's right.

JE: I was really lucky (laughs).

CO: (laughs)

JE: You were good.

CO: No you were good. You were a great radio talk show host.

Chapter 15 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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