



## Lt. Col. Clarence Olsen

October 15, 1919 - July 18, 2011

Clarence Andrew Olsen, a resident of Homestead Manor, died Monday, July 18, 2011, at Memorial Hospital at Easton after an extended period of failing health. He was 92.

He was a retired lieutenant colonel, with distinguished foreign service in the U.S. Air Force and continued to be widely and familiarly known as “Colonel” throughout his civilian life. He was also a devout Christian, a fact which guided him throughout his life. “Being a Christian,” he once said, “is not a deficit. It’s an asset.”

He was born in Trappe in October, 1919. His mother, Mary Brown Olsen, was the daughter of a Queen Anne's County farm family. His father was Rev. H. J. Olsen, the son of Norwegian immigrants and a pastor in the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Easton, Trappe and Oxford in the 1920s. Clarence was raised in strict accord with the precepts and doctrines of the church in which his father pastored. "We could not be in sports, we could not go to the circus, we could not be in school plays like 'worldly people'" he recalled not with rancor but more with the realization that those deprivations of his youth may have inspired the reformation to come. Clarence got an early nudge in that direction when, at age 12, he and the Olsen family moved to south central New York State. There, at Central High School in Binghamton and under the loving and inspired tutelage of a teacher named Loretta Murphy, he found that he had

been blessed with the ability to learn, indeed to absorb, the French language.

In three years with Miss Murphy, he learned to fluently speak, to read with ease, and to become totally familiar with the French language. It would chart his course through life.

"It was," the Colonel claimed without hesitation, "God's will." He had planned on a career as an educator but World War II introduced him to a life in the military.

After attempting to enlist in the Navy — that service failed to pick up his papers — he ended up in the Army Air Corps, the forerunner of the Air Force. And those years in Loretta Murphy's French classes began to deliver on their promise, winning him assignments with the French underground, as the liaison between the leaders of the French Resistance and the Allied Forces, and eventually, as interpreter at the post-Potsdam conferences and as a translator for Gen. Lucius Clay. He was the only member of his unit to receive the two World War II decorations, the "Croix de Guerre" and "Dcoration Militaire". Olsen returned to civilian life in 1946. But civilian life for him lacked the order, the precision and, indeed, the respect for authority of life in the military. "I felt like a foreigner in civilian life," the Colonel recalled.

He had obtained his master's degree and was in his doctoral studies when the Korean conflict erupted. Without completing his thesis, he re-enlisted.

"That first morning, when I heard the bugle blow reveille, I knew I was where I belonged," he said. "I had come back home." And it was into that rough-and-tumble, often indelicate world of the military that he brought his Christian bearing and his Christian message, reaching people who, by his own assessment, "never would have been reached in any other way."

There followed assignments in counter-intelligence. Liaison between the French security forces and the U.S. Embassy in Paris, France. In Frankfurt, Germany, chief French interpreter for international maneuvers. In Heidelberg and Oberammergau, Germany, director of an anti-Communist propaganda

project. And at the Pentagon, U.S. Army contact officer for the Foreign Military Attache at each of the 50-plus embassies in Washington, D.C. Additionally, he was 'on call' as French interpreter for the Department of Defense and Escort Officer for French-speaking royalty and high government officials.

Then, in the early '60s, tours of duty in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, again, no doubt because of his foreign language abilities and his unique Christian/military bearing, assignments as liaison officer between the U.S. armed forces and the chiefs of state of those countries. Throughout his military service, Col. Olsen was a recognized Christian, a man of God in uniform.

Through elementary and high schools, he had taught himself to play the piano and even though he had become what he calls "a song and dance man," entertaining the troops as script writer, director and performer for musical variety shows, he did not smoke, drink nor, even when provoked, use improper language. Neither did he tolerate blasphemy by any of his performers on stage. Col. Olsen closed out his military career at West Point as chairman of the French Department, retiring in 1970 .

At the retirement ceremony, the Commandant of Cadets presented him with a Citation from General Westmoreland, U.S.Army Chief of Staff, and an additional one from the President for his outstanding work with and influence on the West Point Cadets.

Returning to civilian life again, he escaped what he considered its disorder and lack of grace by winning any appointment to a French teaching position at Asbury College in Wilmore, Ky. and, in the 1980s, a Bible study directorship and an assignment as director of entertainment (recalling those 'song-and-dance days') for the annual fund-raising retreats of both "Leadership Ministries" and "Friends of Ashland Seminary."

Worthy of note - John 'the Jock' Ewing was an outstanding athlete but initially

a mediocre study at Asbury College. Under Col. Olsen's authoritarian training and counseling, Jack "the Jock" went on to become Dr. John Ewing, president of Wesleyan University. He publicly credited Col. Olsen as the one who gave him "a focus on life.")

The Colonel returned to "home base" so to speak, to Delmarva's Mid-Shore and to residence at the Wesleyan Heritage Community and Homestead Manor at age 73.

For many years, he graced the worship at First Wesleyan Church in Easton with piano renderings of hymns of praise which every so often contained graceful snippets - a chord here, a chord there - reminiscent of other performances of days gone by.

For the last five years, he attended the First Baptist Church of Easton.

Col. Olsen's survivors include a brother, Roger Olsen of New York State, and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by a sister, Mary O. Conklin, and three brothers, H. Paul Olsen, J. Frances Olsen and Alvin J. Olsen.

Service Note: 8/17 Wed. A graveside service at 10 a.m. at Fairview Church of the Brethren and a memorial service will be held at the First Baptist Church of Easton at 11:30 a.m. Those wishing to attend the burial are asked to gather no later than 9:30 a.m. to form a procession at the Baptist Church on Idlewild

In accord with the wishes of the deceased, memorial contributions may be made to First Baptist Church, 115 Idlewild Ave., Easton, MD 21601.

# Tribute Wall



“ He was best friends of the Helsby family. Particularly Robert D. Helsby--my father. My middle name Clarence was after my "Uncle Clarence" as I called him.

Robert Helsby - July 17, 2025 at 09:04 AM



“ He was my French language professor at Asbury College. I admired him a lot.

Michael J Raymond - February 11, 2024 at 12:08 PM



“ Lt. Col. Clarence Olsen

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ Lt. Col. Clarence Olsen

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ Lt. Col. Clarence Olsen

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ YOU WILL BE IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER  
THANK YOU AGAIN FOR PLAYING THE PIANO AT OUR  
WEDDING  
WE LOVE YOU SO##imported-begin##JOHN AND MAGGIE  
BEAZELL##imported-end##

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July 25, 2011 at 12:30 PM



“ We honor a great christian and a faithful friend. Bro. Clarence was  
an inspiration wherever he went. We will meet again  
someday!##imported-begin##Ellery and Wendy Adams##imported-  
end##

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July 23, 2011 at 08:14 PM



“ Colonel Olsen ... dear Ole ... you will be missed. How sweet a man  
you were and so giving of yourself to all the cadets and to  
whomever you met. You will forever remain in my heart.##imported-  
begin##Sigrid[Puffer] Wares##imported-end##

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July 22, 2011 at 01:44 PM