

Interview with James Louis Johnson, Sr.
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Interviewed by David Overy

Overy: Mr. Johnson, when and where were you born?

Johnson: I was born in Brainerd, Minnesota, August 22, 1917, lived here all my life.

Overy: Why did you join the National Guard?

Johnson: Well, some other friends of mine joined, we all got together and went down there together and joined, December 12, 1938.

Overy: Were times pretty tough? The latter part of the Depression?

Johnson: Well, no, I was a machinist at the railroad at the time. It was just something, you know how people are, people get a little restless so we all got together and joined the National Guard. And that's what we did.

Overy: Did you have fun?

Johnson: Oh, yes.

Overy: Did you train at Camp Ripley?

Johnson: Yes, my first camp at Ripley was in 1939 that was when Ernie B. Miller was 194th Tank Battalion Commander, Commander of the 34th Division Tank Company; there was only one tank company. I started out as a driver for Ernie Miller, tank driver. Went through 1939-40.

Then in 1941 we were mobilized. We left Brainerd in February of 1941 and went to Fort Lewis in Washington to form the 194th Tank Battalion. A Company was from Brainerd, Minnesota; B Company was from St. Louis, Missouri; and C Company was from Salinas, California. They formed the headquarters from the people we had. Ernie Miller became the 194th Battalion Commander at that time.

Overy: Was your training in those early years pretty effective?

Johnson: It was effective, yes, but those were the days when we used to run around with sticks and brooms and say “Bang” and shoot. At that time we only had one tank and then we got two tanks, that’s all we had for tanks. The tanks company called for about 17 tanks and we had two.

Overy: Must have been hard to train.

Johnson: Yes, we’d have maneuvers down in Ripley at that time but we had to substitute trucks for--we’d put a bunch of people in the back of a truck and we would ambush columns coming down the road. We’d come out from behind the brush and a whole load of people would be in the back of a truck, and that was the tank we used. We never had enough rifles to go around either, at that time, later on we did get more, we were pretty slim at that time.

Overy: You must have gotten to know Colonel Miller then? What kind of a man was he?

Johnson: Every man in that outfit, the whole 194th Battalion would have gone through hell and high water for that man. He was fair, a real good commander, and very nice guy. I’ve never heard anything bad about him. Everybody thought he was the finest commander. We know his whole family pretty well. He gave me a direct commission in 1941 before the war. We were short of officers and I was a sergeant at the time, Staff Sergeant. He knew the ROTC was getting

ready to wind up with their season and getting ready to ship in a bunch of officers. He would rather have the officers from his own battalion.

Overy: So he promoted you?

Johnson: Yes. We attended a few schools right before we went to Washington, and that gave him grounds to give us a commission. There must have been twelve out of the whole battalion that got commissions that way.

Overy: What particular qualities do you think he had?

Johnson: For one thing, he was a good commander and he was fair, and he stuck by his men. He was the finest commander I've ever seen, and I've gone through a lot of commanders, in WWII and Korea both. (Inaudible)

Overy: Did it surprise you that he made it through as a prisoner?

Johnson: No, it didn't. Another thing that happened; I was in Alaska for 27 months, married before I went, I went for pilot training and I got it. I came back and flew in California for six months as a pilot, learning, I only had a short time to go and I would have gotten my wings. But I wanted to go back to armor, at that time I didn't like the Air Corps, it was a different group and I had armor in my blood. Three times I had to go in front of the Colonel and ask to be eliminated from pilot training, the third time he finally said alright. There were three of us that went up there at the same time wanting to get out. I requested a letter in my file stating, "Due to my own request, I'm eliminated from pilot training." I did get the letter. I went back to armor, and I went back to Fort Knox, Kentucky; and I took over a company, company commander. I went from

Alaska to pilot training, after 27 months I applied for pilot training, a few of us from the outfit applied, so we came back.

Overy: Okay, let's go back then, you were activated February 1941 and went to Fort Lewis. Now that's where you went to OCS or what was that like?

Johnson: It was like a regular school for about two weeks, at Fort Lewis.

Overy: Were you recommended for this by Colonel Miller?

Johnson: We were told to go in. (laughs)

Overy: Now what was it like?

Johnson: It was a good school, real constructive. A lot of basic stuff, command and that sort of thing. There was about two out of the bunch that didn't make it, the rest of us did.

Overy: How come you went to Aleutians? How did that come about?

Johnson: Well, when we left, the B Company left the 194th at Fort Lewis, we got up there and they redesignated us the 602nd Tank Company directly under General Simon Bolivar Buckner. He was quite a character, a nice fellow and a real funny guy, I liked him. He was sent to the South Pacific later. We lived in the same barracks with him and the 602nd Tank Company was his baby, nobody touched the 602nd that was General Buckner's baby. He dispatched us anywhere he wanted to, nobody else touched us. We were the only tank company in Alaska. Later on when the Japanese started coming up the Aleutians we were shipped up. Before that I had a detachment of about thirty men that I took up and down the Aleutian Islands because the Chinese before that had ordered about 150 real light tanks. They had kilometers on them and they were different from our tanks, they were small. I took a detachment of about thirty men from our

company up and down the Aleutians, all of these places, instructing the infantry as to how to use armored tactics. Maintenance and everything else. This was all along the Aleutians, Fort Heyden we went to, (?), Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, Umnak, quite a few different places, with the infantry. These were the people that were going to get the tanks and we were instructing them on how to use them. That lasted about three months.

Overy: You had a tank company?

Johnson: I commanded a tank detachment of about thirty people out of our 602nd Tank Company. Then we came back to Anchorage, Fort Richards, and shortly after they shipped our whole company to Umnak, Alaska. There again the Japanese were working-- What made them change their mind at that time, they were going to come in the Aleutians, but they spotted a P-40, one of ours quite a ways out on the Aleutians, and they didn't know what to do because they had no idea how the P-40 got out there that far on the Aleutians. We had bases at that time at Umnak and a few other places, and they didn't know this. That's why they pulled into the closest island, and that's where they sat.

Overy: What did you think about the Aleutians?

Johnson: It was the worse place, we had more suicides up there than anyplace--the lack of something to do, they were bored. In the Aleutians there are no trees, not even a bush; every day is gloomy, maybe if you're lucky you'll see the sunshine fifteen minutes out of the week. Its damp, tundra.

Overy: What were the living conditions like?

Johnson: Pretty bad. In the winter time we had to dig in the tents. The wind blew so hard--we lost all our tents once so finally we dug everything down four feet. Sometimes we would wake up in the morning and we'd have to dig our way out of the tent, the snow was so high. It wasn't good, it was a bad situation. This is where these people made the mistake, when they made the invasion of Kiska and Attu, we were in on that mission by the way, we had our LSTs ready to go in, we had our tanks ready to go—what happened was, and this was the big boo-boo of command, they pulled in the 15th Infantry from California instead of using the 4th Infantry Division who had been in Alaska for a long time. They were well familiar with the conditions and weather in Alaska. (Inaudible). They pulled in the 15th Infantry and put them on the front lines, this was a big tragedy. They weren't aware of the exposure and everything else. That was the biggest casualty, not from enemy fire, but there was enemy fire. They laid in these trenches and their feet got wet--I've seen some cases in the hospital after they pulled them out. What happened was two companies from the 4th Infantry, they were advancing real fine, but the others were bogged down because they didn't know how to take care of themselves. As a consequence one of my best friends was killed, in the 4th Infantry. They got so far ahead of the others they were cut off. Why they sent in the 15th infantry, we knew later it was a big mistake. The 4th Infantry, two companies suffered heavy casualties.

Overy: You said you were in the attack?

Johnson: We went right up to Kiska, we never did take the tanks on shore but I did go ashore, but they were gone. It was a good thing they were gone because there are a lot of hills there, they had their rifles and big howitzers right on the top of these hills pointing down at the road. If we would have went in we'd have lost a lot, it's a good thing they were gone. You have to understand how they could sneak out of the Aleutians. The Japanese got out of there undercover

of the fog. It would get so foggy you couldn't see a thing. In those days they didn't have the radar and those things, on the morning we went in for the invasion we went in and found out they were gone.

Overy: You never really saw the enemy?

Johnson: We seen a few, they left a scouting troop behind, kind of harassing, but they were no threat at all. The invasion force went right in. Incidentally, the group patch had a knife on it, they were called General Corlett's Longknives, that was the invasion force at Kiska and Attu.
(inaudible).

Overy: As a commander how do you try to keep warm spirits up in conditions like that? How do you reaction to a situation like that, what do you do?

Johnson: Well, we couldn't even get Coke on the Aleutian Islands, I seen a bottle of Coke selling for fifty dollars. They couldn't spend their money either, maybe toothpaste, toothbrush, shaving lotion; some places we were at we didn't even have that. There were no coke or soft drinks or anything else. All the men did was sit around and play poker, gambled amongst themselves; that's about it. You tried to keep up the morale by keeping them busy, maneuvers to keep them occupied. There were a lot of suicides. They had a safe way of doing it too. They would fill their mouth full of water--I was OD one night, Officer of the Day, when I got a call that this guard had committed suicide. He filled his mouth full of water and put the rifle barrel in his mouth and pulled the trigger. The bullet hits the water and expands. That's what they did, and there were a lot of other ways that they did it. You had to watch them awful close, morale was low.

Overy: Did you have any problem in your command?

Johnson: No, we were lucky. We were right in with the Infantry. At Anchorage we were with the infantry, we were with the evac at Umnak, we associated with people.

Overy: What could tanks do, given the topography of the area?

Johnson: On the mainland it was a bit different, you could maneuver there pretty well. But on the Aleutians, what they used us for was they put us on outposts on the shoreline. In case of an invasion we had our tanks there to move up onto the shoreline. That's about what it amounted to. Mostly sitting around, on the outposts it was the same way.

Overy: Did you really feel abandoned?

Johnson: Not really, we knew somebody had to do it. We figured we were better off than the infantry, we had a little fire power there. But no, we didn't feel like we were abandoned.

Although we would have done anything to get out of there, to get back to the States. We had some crazy ones, they'd pull all kinds of stuff--haul dead fish around on a leash--there was some real dandy's. They would try to get out on a section 8. When I came back for pilot training and went to Fort Knox, Kentucky; I took my company down to train in Fort Leonard Wood. After we got back from there our battalion, the 2nd Battalion was mobilized to go over to the Philippines. I could have gotten out because I was the only man in the whole battalion who had been out at sea. Being the company commander, I couldn't live with myself if I'd bug out. I talked it over with my wife and everything, my conscience won't permit me to stay here in the States. I went along with them. We went on up to the Philippines over there. We were in the division ready and loaded up to there—(inaudible)--it's a good thing we dropped the bomb because they were determined to hold at any cost. When we dropped the bomb they changed their mind. When the war was over, I had my company down to Resolve Stadium, the big stadium in Manila. I went

out to this 29th Replacement Depot who was responsible for recovering the prisoners of war from Japan. I went out there and talked to the commander, I said “I would appreciate it if you give me a call if any of the 194th Tank Battalion people are recovered from the POW camps.” He said he would. So about two weeks later I got a call from him, he said he had gotten some men. I went out there that night. The day before they had recovered Ernie Miller and some other officers and they had left the morning before I got there. I asked where they were and they were headquartered in squat tents with boardwalks in between. He told me where these people were that I was looking for. I didn’t know what tent they were in so I hollered “Lee.” Lee McDonald was my cousin. I kept on yelling “Lee!” and pretty soon someone comes out of the tent and says “Jim!” I hadn’t seen him in over four years, and he recognized my voice. Sure enough, there were about eight-nine of them in that tent and we sat there until the wee hours of the morning talking over old times. They had just been recovered.

Overy: What was your reaction, seeing them?

Johnson: I was real glad to see them, they couldn’t give them too much beer or anything but they each got two cans for rations, two cans of beer a day. We sat and they were giving me their beer. We sat on the jeep there and talked for a long time, until about three in the morning.

Overy: Did they look awful?

Johnson: They looked bad, they were kind of bloated, they didn’t look good at all, some skinny, or bloated, but they were in good spirits-surprisingly.

Overy: Was Miller there with them?

Johnson: Miller had left that day, the day I got there, I had gotten there at night. In about three days they shipped the group that I had seen there that night, they shipped them home.

Overy: You left the Aleutians when?

Johnsons: I left the Aleutians in November, 1943, after 27 months.

Overy: What about that experiences in the Aleutians remains strongest in your memory?

Because that's an awful long time to be up there.

Johnson: I had no furlough or leave the whole time, and I was married at the time, I didn't see my wife for 27 months. But the worse thing about the Aleutians was the lack of things to do. The mainland of Alaska, Fort Richardson, there you could find something to do. But the Aleutians-- Russia has Siberia and we have the Aleutians. The only thing they do there is raise sheep. I flew over the Aleutians many times with this thirty man detachment I had, you look down and see little shacks with about 5,000 sheep.

Overy: Did you get enough to eat?

Johnson: There were times when we didn't get enough to eat. I recall one time at Umnak, they had civilians unloading supply ships carrying coal and coke in bags, there is nothing to burn, no wood or anything. We burned these in our tents to keep warm. At this time there was a strike and these civilians refused to unload the ships, and they were comfortable because they lived in better quarters than we did. They refused to unload the ships and this caused a lot of tension between them and the soldiers, they were about ready to kill every one of them civilians. Finally after so many problems and too many fights, I think maybe one or two were killed. So what they

did was take our soldiers and we unloaded the ships. But finally the strike was over, but that was quite an experience. We did get the coal out, because this was in the middle of winter too.

Overy: Were there any particular day by day problems of physically surviving in that kind of environment? I remember somebody saying that he didn't want to take his shoes off in the tent, that they were frozen or?

Johnson: The shoes, if taken off at night, would freeze, even with the heat. You can imagine heating a tent with the wind was blowing and that cold weather in the wintertime, it was tough. You had to bundle up real good at night. You were cold at night, got up in the morning and you were still cold. In the summer you were damp all the time, because that's the character of the land, it was always damp.

Overy: Any animals, or anything like that around?

Johnson: Yes, they had brown Kodiak bears, a lot of foxes around. We used to sit on our outposts and see the killer whales out in front of us. Seals, walruses, that kind of stuff.

Overy: Did you get any news about what was going on anywhere else?

Johnson: Yes, we had radios. That kept us pretty well up to date on the war.

Overy: Did any USO teams or the like come and visit you out there?

Johnson: On the mainland, yes, not on the outposts. In fact, I had dinner with Bob Hope on the mainland in 1941. Bob Hope and several others came up to Fort Richardson, Alaska. That night we went into the Officers Club and they were there. So we got in with their party, there were two of us, we sat in with them and had a few drinks. After they closed, Bob Hope says, "Let's get something to eat." He took us down to the Anchorage Grill and bought us a steak, all of us. He

was funny, no offensive language, he was a real nice man. The one I got to like was Jerry Colonna, we got to be pretty good buddies. There wasn't much entertainment on the Aleutians. We would take a jeep up into the hills, one time we got about 800 caribou moving with the jeep. At that time there were no restrictions, we ate caribou. Before that we got mutton, no meat was coming in so every day we got mutton, sheep. We got so sick of it the men wouldn't eat it anymore, we had whole carcasses of sheep into the garbage, we couldn't eat it all. To this day I don't care for mutton. As far as entertainment to the Aleutians there wasn't a lot.

Overy: Did you get mail?

Johnson: Yes, not too often though. I used to have a censor the mail going out, that was quite an experience.

Overy: Tell me about that.

Johnson: I was a mail censor in our company for quite a few months. Be careful what you say in your letters. By the time we got done with some letters it looked like confetti. We had one kid in the outfit, he had been up there for over a year, and he got a letter from his wife saying she was pregnant, and he was tickled. He was a backwoods individual, from Missouri as I recall. This is the kind of stuff that went on. Letters are what you really look forward to. But we had nothing to do with our money up there so we would sit around and play poker. There was \$800 dollars amongst us that we didn't send home so one night somebody would have \$800 dollars the next night somebody else, it kept milling around. That's all we had to do, and each time it went around it was a little less, so that's all we did was play poker. We kept busy during the day doing different things, scouting this sort of thing.

Overy: So where did you go to pilot training?

Johnson: In the Aleutians I applied for pilot training, anything to get out, we'd been there long enough. I came back for training, I went through preflight, primary, basic, and I was ready to go into advanced and I would have had my wings. I couldn't get out, I knew I had to do something before that so I went back to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Then I went with my company to the Philippines. Then after the war was over--I wanted to get out.

Overy: And you just didn't like flying, is that it?

Johnson: I didn't like the Air Force, I liked the armor better, the people. Well, we came back and we were taken on a train, the lieutenants didn't use very good tact. They carried this big ball and chewed people out. They always knew which one to chew out, it was a pity, they chew him out in front of the rest of the people. They never came or did it to me but they did it to other people. They knew which ones they could get by with. We just got sick and tired of this, it was harassment. We were already officers, just completed officers class, class 44J. Every one of them were officers, they had to choose either pilot training, bombardier, or navigator training, they were to be re-classified. A lot of them washed out, a lot of them quit early in the game. I just didn't care for their attitude. That's why we three went up at the same time, we had enough of it. I saw them chewing these officers out, young guys without enough gumption to fight back. That's all you would have had to do and everything would have been fine. It was bad to belittle a man in front of the class, you don't do that. If you have anything to say to them, pull them aside. I got tired and I was a little homesick for armor too, I'd been with them all along. One of the guys, Fred Sherbert, from Ohio, was in infantry, and he wanted to go back to infantry. I didn't use the GI Bill and I went out here to Brainerd and got my license and I flew out here for a while.

Overy: They were upset when you asked to get out?

Johnson: Yes, and I can understand why. They had already spent a lot of money on me, training me as a pilot. Then I come up and say I don't want to anymore. That's why I had to go up three times, they weren't going to let me go. I was a first lieutenant by this time. We were stymied in Alaska, we had one tank company, and at that time they had a TO&E that called for a captain, first lieutenant, and the next officer was a second lieutenant. At that time that was all they had, in that company we were all armor. When I came back here it opened up a bit, but in that tank company we were stymied.

Overy: So then you went to Fort Knox?

Johnson: Yes, there I was in charge of D Company, I was commander of the D Company, in those days it was the 770 Tank Battalion, they had five companies; Headquarters, A, B, C, and D Companies. A, B, and C were medium tank companies, D was a light company. I had M-24 tanks which were real fast, it was light but it was about as big as a medium tank but it was a lot faster, had more fire power and everything else; it was one of the newest tanks that came up. Also, at that time at Fort Knox, for about six months, my company was on the armor test board. Running tanks and armored equipment night and day, all night long. We tested all the new stuff coming out.

Overy: What was that like, how did you test?

Johnson: We tested everything, the running gears; night and day--they'd run 24 hours a day, tested tracks, engines, firepower, everything. We kept records on them and turned in reports on how they stood up. We'd run into some hitches, but the biggest hitch, it was unforeseen when we went to Alaska; those light tanks had an idler wheel in the back made out of steel. In the winter,

going down the road, we had no heaters at all, it was just cold iron. It would get about 34 degrees below zero and we would still be maneuvering. You'd go down the road and ice would build up on the idler wheel and it would just stick. It would get so heavy in there it would break the track, the steel track. Finally they started correcting that and the next tanks they came out with I believe had a rubber covering on the idler wheel. You could always tell when ice was building up, the tank would loaf. The tanks we had up there were clocked at 69 miles an hour, these were the ones we had when we first went to Alaska, the old M-182 or M-183, I forget. They were probably the step above the old Renault tanks, it wasn't much better than that.

Overy: So the equipment wasn't that good?

Johnson: Not when we first went in, when we first went in our main fire power was a .50 caliber in the turret. We had a bog gun down below, we had a .30 caliber in the turret-a coax gun, and a .50 caliber in the turret; when we first went in. Then we got the next tank up, it had a 37 mm in the turret, we had fire power then.

Overy: I understand the first tanks had perpendicular sides which made them sitting ducks?

Johnson: Yes, and some of them were riveted, all they had to do was hit some of those rivets and they would come off on the inside and ricochet around in the tank and kill somebody.

Overy: What did you do between WWII and Korea?

Johnson: I came back and helped reorganize the 47th Division, they dropped the 34th "Red Bull" Division. They reorganized after WWII and called us the 47th Division.

Overy: Tell me about this reorganization of the end of the 34th and the beginning of the 47th.

Johnson: After the war, in 1947 we reorganized as the 47th Infantry, and then we started the 194th Tank Battalion headquartered in Brainerd. A Company was from Long Prairie, Minnesota, B Company was from Aitkin, Minnesota, C Company was from Milaca, Minnesota, and we had some detachments-we also had a company from Princeton at that time. Since then it had been reorganized many times, shuffled around. But that's what we started with after WWII. Then we were federalized in 1951 again.

Overy: Were you in the National Guard as a federal employee at this time?

Johnson: Yes, in 1949 I went to work temporarily as a field training supply officer. We furnished all the supplies for the incoming troops training at Camp Ripley. These were all my sections: I had the ammunition section, staging section, the commissary section, a billeting section and everything else. Anything the troops needed coming in for training was in my group, and I was the CO for that group and I had these different sections under me. I didn't go into that until 1959, prior to that time, when I joined in 1947, I was military auditor. Bob Mobline and I were together as auditors. Bob was the chief auditor and when he went to another job I became chief. Later on this supply officer job came open and the Colonel didn't know I wanted it. Sent to Camp Rutger, Alabama and assigned to Korea individually. We were with the 79th Tank Battalion, 2nd Division, the armored battalion of the 2nd division. We never did come off the front line for a full year. We stayed on the front lines in support of a ROK division.

Overy: And you went over to Korea when?

Johnson: I went over in November 1951. I was there until November 1952.

Overy: What area of Korea were you located in?

Johnson: All over the front lines, Imjin Pass, the Punch Bowl, Chorwon Valley, all of them.

Overy: You were right along the 38th Parallel, roughly?

Johnson: Yes.

Overy: What was the military situation like when you got there?

Johnson: Korea was a little different from WWII, you never knew when you were going to get it in Korea, They'd lob them right over the hills and into the mess line, in back of the lines; that sort of thing. A friend of mine Bob Olson from the 194th went into Korea about the same time I did, and he was in a regimental tank company over the Imijin Pass. We replaced that outfit when we went from Chorwon Valley to the Imjin Pass. They had been on the line for a while and we went over to replace them. They had put their officer's tents in this valley and just around the corner was the enemy. One day they got shelled, Bob got hit and wounded and the company commander that Bob was living with got killed. One landed right next to their tent. At the time I said, "No wonder you got blasted, you're looking right down this valley where they can see you." They moved out of there quickly. It was a funny situation over there. You would be going to the front lines and there would be open places where they could see you coming. Breezy Corners was one place where this was really sporting. I went up to the lines, I was in Battalion S2 at this time, I went up to visit this guy and every time I went up to visit him the bombs would be exploding by the side of the road. They had us bracketed with artillery. There was an enemy buffalo gun. This is a ground mounted gun, it is used from the shoulder but it has a tripod. It is a little bigger than a .50 caliber. Every time a vehicle went through there it would get blasted at by this thing, we some get hit. So I said that we had better get this guy. So Gardner, my friend from B Company, and I went to get him. I said we were going to make a run down this road, and you

get him when he opens up on us. We went through and he opened up on us. We had our tanks right back of the crest of the hill, with their 90mm on them. They spotted him with the spotter scopes, pulled the tanks up above the crest, and fired from about 1,500 yards out. It landed right in the middle of him. We didn't have any trouble with him for a while but three days later they had sent somebody back into that same place, with a buffalo gun. We just put up with him.

Overy: How did they locate him?

Johnson: They had these spotter scopes, they knew about where he was but they had to find out exactly, they spotted him by the puffs of smoke when he fired. But that was a funny thing over there, everything was underground. I was battalion S2 and I used to get maps, they would take photos of their front lines and everything was tunneled from the back. We had maps and you could see the dirt coming out of the back, from the tunnels. They tried to camouflage it but you could still see it. They had tunnels running all the way through. These tunnels would zig-zag off from the opening. So if we did get a round in there it wouldn't get everybody. They would just go around the corners and come right back. There was a lot of underground over there. Old Papasan was one of the biggest hills in Korea, they just pounded that hill. Night and day it looked like a big Fourth of July going on, tracers, artillery, everything going in, just bright in the night. The next day they would be right back out there. All they do is pull back into those tunnels and that was it.

Overy: What was your tank battalions primary concern, was it bad terrain for tanks?

Johnson: It wasn't too bad, we lost some tanks. I had a tank company there for a while when I was tank battalion S2, when I went over there they put me in S2. The unit commander of the battalion said, "Johnson, we got a B Company that needs rejuvenating, the unit commander

down there now isn't doing a good job at all." He came back in about three days and said that he had to send me there for a while to get them straightened up. I said OK under one condition, I had a friend Jim Gardner coming through the pipeline, you put him in Company B with me and I will go down there for a while and straighten them out. Three weeks later he came through the pipeline and I got him. I was Company Commander at that time, and he had to go to the rear for orientation for five days. I went back and asked the unit commander if I could take Gardner up there overnight with me up to the company. He said sure and low and behold we were shelled, they even had planes strafing down the streets, they killed a couple of MPs. Gardner got quite an initiation that night, and the next night he went back for his five day orientation. But I did get Gardner at that time, and I had him for about three months, that's all. Then I went back to battalion S2.

Overy: Why didn't you want any more tank companies?

Johnson: I was sick of tank companies, I would rather have a staff job. So I ended up in S2.

Overy: What was there about the tank, being commander, that made you want to get away from it?

Johnson: There was a lot of responsibility for one thing, which I don't mind but I like staff work too, and this is what I wanted to get back in.

Overy: A lot of maintenance in a tank company?

Johnson: A lot of it yes. A lot of grief with a tank company. You get it from up above all the time, it's a different ball game all together. Although there is an awful lot of pride in having a

tank company. It's just like the pride in having a battalion. It is a command position, the others are staff positions. You don't get the gaff in a staff position that you would get in a command.

Overy: Did you command a tank company in Korea under combat conditions?

Johnson: Yes, that was the one for about three or four months.

Overy: This was the unit in bad shape?

Johnson: Yes, I got them into pretty good shape.

Overy: How do you do that?

Johnson: Be fair with them, firm with them, and lay the law down on the line; you produce or else. But you still got to be fair with them. I don't have anybody in any of the three tank companies that I had from WWII or Korea; and I say this with pride; I still get along with them, even the enlisted men. They still stop by to see me once in a while.

Overy: What makes a company bad, how can you tell?

Johnson: It was a wishy-washy system is what it was. The men were even getting restless, of the commander they had before. He wasn't fair with them, he didn't seem to know much about armor tactics, this sort of thing. They had made a couple of attacks with this other company commander before I took over, and they'd gotten a couple of jackpots; hit mines, not proper reconnaissance; they didn't know what they were going into. Although in my company I lost some tanks too but it was no fault of mine. We hit mines but I never lost a man--I had three tanks in the Chorwon Valley one time, we were trying to bypass around this little bridge they had. There was no trees or nothing, everything was black; except this little country schoolhouse sitting by itself. The trees around it had its tops shot off, that was all, you could see for miles.

On the other side was the enemy, big tall hills and mountains. But I got the tanks out. If you lay down enough firepower, covering firepower, you can go in and hook onto the tanks and pull them out.

Overy: What kinds of missions was your tank company ordered to do?

Johnson: Mostly supportive, harass the enemy. We had quite a few attacks into these different places. Tanks were supporting the infantry, we'd move right in with them while they were advancing. Infantry on both sides, behind the tanks.

Overy: Was the terrain suited for tanks or were you primarily on roads? Or could you maneuver cross country?

Johnson: We could maneuver across country, tanks were pretty formidable weapon. It could go just about anywhere unless you hit the swamps, bogs. I've had them buried with just the turret sticking up in Alaska. Couldn't hardly get to the tank to pull it out. It was buried, and on top of that, it had both tracks stalled. This tank just sat in there with the turret sticking out. We had to dig all that mud out of there and put down the road. We put the tracks back on and hooked about three tanks on it and pulled it out. It looked like a hopeless case when we first looked at it, but we got it out. We never abandoned a tank. Alaska was fine, but they had a lot of mountains on the mainland, and a lot of swamps. In the wintertime you could go just about anywhere, the swamps were frozen. The mountains limited you though. (Inaudible).

Overy: Did you have any close calls in Korea? Could you tell me about some of them?

Johnson: Quite a few. One of them was that buffalo gun, got shot at lots of times. Another time the executive officer of S2 and I said that we would go up to the front. Our battalion

headquarters was right behind the front. He was a little afraid to go up to the front, this Major Lyons, he didn't want to go and I said to come on, I had Jim Gardner with me at this time too. We three got in the jeep and started up there, we got to this Breezy corners and started down this hill. Artillery was coming at us on both the sides of the road. Once they got close enough I said, "Bail out!" We all three bailed out and hit the ditch, leaving the jeep sitting there. They had us bracketed good with artillery incoming. We laid there about fifteen minutes while they were pounding all around us. They didn't even hit the jeep, poor marksmanship. We thought surely we'd lose the jeep. Finally I told them when this lets up just a little but, make a dash for the jeep; I'm getting in that jeep and pulling out, if you don't get there you're left behind. So when it let up we got to the jeep, turned it around and got back out of there. If we'd kept going we'd been right down in the slop of it. When we turned it around and started back up the hill the artillery started back up again. It followed us all the way over the top of the hill. There were a lot of instances like that. They planted a shell right in our mess hall one time, over the top of a hill. It didn't kill anybody, but it was right next to the mess line. Scared a lot of people though. Another time; have you ever seen a tank burn with full load of ammunition? They planted one, I don't know how they did it, but we had tanks sitting behind this hill, nobody in it. They put a round right down through the top hatch. It blew and started a fire, then all the ammunition went. It blew the turret about sixty feet away, that big heavy piece of steel turret, blew it right off the tank. That tank burned for two days, red hot. That turret must have weighed about ten tons. That was all she wrote for that tank. Many times when you went to the front you didn't know what you were going to run into. You never knew from one day to the next whether you were going to get it or not. The day we left, Gardner, Kenny Johnson and myself, we were on orders to leave, they said tomorrow there will be a truck there to pick you up. We decided not to wait for the truck, we

said we're leaving tonight. We jumped on a freight train and rode that all the way into Inchon. We didn't want to wait until the next day. That's where we were to catch our ship, Inchon. We got out of there right away. (Inaudible).

Overy: Were your opponents Chinese or Korean?

Johnson: Both. We used to talk to them on our outposts. They would holler at us, "Hey Joe!" On our outposts we had a real protective way of defending our post. We would pack explosives in empty shells, wading, rocks, glass, stone, anything you could get in there and we had them dug in on the other side of the hill, they were wired together, and then barbwire in front of that. If they got through the barbwire they would set off these explosives. (Inaudible). Just like a mortar.

Overy: Did you have tripwires?

Johnson: We could use tripwires, some were set on ignition, if we knew they were coming we touch them off.

Overy: Did they mostly come at night?

Johnson: Mainly the infantry came at night. Those Korean commanders had a funny way of discipline. We were on the front lines in bunkers, and we had one of our pistols stolen. We had an inclining who did it, we were in support of this ROK outfit at the time. They found the kid who had stolen the pistol. The next morning the pistol was outside the door with the finger from the guy who had stolen the pistol. That was their discipline. If they were caught stealing they'd chop off a finger, caught twice you lose two fingers. He's caught three times he loses three fingers. And the 4th time you got no fingers left, they chop them off, that's what they do.

Overy: Were the ROK soldiers fairly decent soldiers or not?

Johnson: Yes, they were different. They weren't as good as the Americans were by far. Another thing we got mad about, one time we were on the front lines, and this Korean colonel of a brigade or something, we were in support of his outfit. He was an arrogant little pipsqueak son of a gun. He owned a bunch of land there with timber trees on it. The Americans were buying his timber, paying him millions of dollars, to build the bunkers to defend him. This guy was the most arrogant little SOB I'd ever seen, I locked horns with him a couple of times. In fact I lifted him off the front of his desk one time. He was a nasty little stinker. He didn't know anything about command or anything else but they had given him an honorary appointment to Colonel. He finally squirmed away, lurking, a lot of people were after him. Can you imagine us making a millionaire out of this guy? We're over here defending his country and paying him for his logs. He probably stole the land in the first place. Strange. Another time, I had an officer come into my company when I was company commander, they dropped him off at this ROK outfit I was supporting. He had a duffle bag, this duffle bag was stolen out of a tent. The company commander of this Korean outfit went through all of his people and found out who had the bag. He hauled them all out and he was poking them in the ribs with a Maddock pick handle. He'd hit them across the shins and everything else trying to find out who stole that bag. Finally he found out who stole that duffle bag. The last time I saw that guy, you couldn't step in and stop it, they had him by the heels and were dragging him off, they beat him with a pick so bad they broke his legs, arms, and everything else. This was their discipline. They used to use them a lot for going into mine fields, why I don't know. We had quite a job getting two of them out of a mine field one time. They called them Ivanhoe forces, because they were attached to us. They had gone into this mine field and two of them were laying in there, still alive but all blasted, legs and

everything else. They were in there yelling and we had quite a time getting them out. We finally got them out, they were yelling to beat the band. They had walked right into this mine field.

Overy: Were they ordered to?

Johnson: Their commander says, "We're going to sweep this area here," so that's what they do. They should have gotten the engineers to clear the area. There were other strange incidents involving these ROK outfits, they were different. But they were sincere, trying to be good soldiers. We used a lot of them for choggie parties, hauling ammunition up to our gun positions. They'd haul a great big 90 mm on each shoulder and choggie up the hill to our tank positions, and supplies. They were good at that, our GI's carried one round, they carried two. I had another incident with the Red Cross over there. They used to come up to the front lines, behind the hills at our gun positions, and sell doughnuts and coffee, the irony was that they charged ten cents. One day while they were up there we got shelled. They cleared out of there in a hurry and never came back.

Overy: When you were integrated with the ROK units, how was the relationship in regards to ranks between the two units?

Johnson: They tried to square it away between themselves but almost always it was the American commander in charge. There were a few of them, if they had one rank above you they'd try to pull it. A bird colonel would try to pull rank on a lieutenant colonel, even though he didn't know what he was doing. There were a lot of them that were real good, real fine, reasonable people. But there were a few of them that it went to their head.

Overy: Did you have any SOP-standard operating procedure-concerning this? (Inaudible chatter)

Johnson: It was because we just didn't do it, that's all. If they had a chance they would send your unit into certain death, that's the way they were. The Turks were something. We replaced a Turk outfit, they had occupied a bivouac area just before we got there. You should have seen the mess. They don't use latrines, garbage cans, anything. You got to go through and clean up before you can even bring troops in. A mess, trash all over the place. A lot of patrols went out, and these Turks would go out on a jeep patrol at night to try to harass the Chinese, or North Koreans. I've seen them come back with two heads hanging from the jeep poles, they loved knives, that's what they'd use. They were blood thirsty stinkers, those Turks. They'd go out on night patrol and ambush some of these people, enemy patrols trying to get through our lines. They'd come back half boozed up with heads on the jeep. They were ruthless, they loves knives. They rather have a knife than a gun.

Overy: Did you have much contact with troops from other nations besides the Turks?

Johnson: The Dutch, we had contact with them quite often. They were good, most of them were infantry. The ones I had contact with were infantry. That was it, the Turks, the Dutch, and the Australians were there too, and the ROK, we were next to that ROK outfit. When the division went in to the rear to rest, our tank battalion would stay on the front lines.

Overy: What were your daily responsibilities in S2?

Johnson: Coordinating with higher headquarters, enemy information, we had a lot of that, maps, everything. Whenever we had an attack we were in on that. We knew what the enemy forces were, what they had, what we were up against. Also, we had a reconnaissance, S2, the main tool is reconnaissance. We used them quite a bit in enemy territory, it keeps you busy.

Overy: Is that pretty dangerous?

Johnson: I used to go with them once in a while for information.

Overy: What were you looking for? What kind of information would you get?

Johnson: A lot of information we got from troops that had gone through an area. It's hard to tell, the only way you can determine what you're up against as far as enemy troops are concerned is thought movement in the rear and maps. You've heard of Pork chop and T-Bone, I was there. I was in battalion S2 but I was up on the main line that night, one night when they came through. In battalion S2 I flew over enemy territory. I've been shot at, bracketed with artillery and anti-aircraft. We used to look down and see the Chinese and the North Koreans thumbing their noses at us down in their trenches. We flew right over them. I had over a hundred hours just flying over enemy territory in this light airplane. We have been bracketed with flak. My biggest scare was when I just started flying over there. We were flying over enemy territory, and you have to know where your artillery positions are in back. (Inaudible). All at once I heard the loudest crack I'd ever heard, the plane rocked and everything else. I said, "What the hell was that?" He said that it was our own artillery shelling us. From that time on we made sure we knew where our positions were and when they were going to be firing, so we could stay out of their way, their line of fire. They'd shoot at us with rifle fire, we had some holes from rifle fire, shells gone right through. You could look down and see them waving at you. This was the day before Pork Chop, and I was flying that day and I spotted a whole convoy of enemy foot troops coming in to meet at Pork Chop, T-Bone and those places. So I called in artillery on them, gave them the location and the artillery came in. They were still marching up from behind the lines. The artillery bracketed them and blew the hell out of them. They were right out in the open and the artillery put everything they could on them. It is a terrible thing to watch. I backed out of there but I could still see the shells going in, blasting them.

Overy: Were you ever involved in interrogating prisoners?

Johnson: Yes. Some of the Koreans. But most of the time the ROK would interrogate the North Koreans, then pass the information on to us. The Chinese, we used to catch some of them coming through. I questioned some and then sent them to the rear for further questioning.

Overy: What were the difficulties in being in S2?

Johnson: Well, if you're going to make an attack, and you don't know what you're facing, if you can't get enough information, that's what bothered me. You might be walking in to a hornet's nest or something that isn't too bad. You try to get as accurate as you possibly can, to keep from getting a lot of casualties. But on T-Bone and Pork chop, I was on OP that night, the sky was so full of flares, artillery and everything else, exploding above, it was steady, all over-- that night on OP, when this attack was going through they shelled the hell out of those guys, but still they kept coming, over the dead bodies. They never stopped, that was a bloody mess too. The irony of it is; when you see young kids get killed in combat zone but not due to combat, due to some carelessness. In Korea one time Jim Gardner and I were going up towards the front lines when we heard this explosion, loud explosion. We rounded the corner and here were two bodies laying and a bunch of guys standing around. These two bodies were laying in the road, one had his head blown off and part of his shoulder. The other one was so full of holes he was torn to pieces, and the bodies were still quivering. I got a hold of the sergeant and asked him what happened, he was in shock. What happened was, the American engineers, in the wintertime had planted charges in the bank, to make a road or something. They had planted two charges, and one went off. Each one of them thought that it was their charge that had gone off. The both ran up there at the same time thinking their charge had gone off. They just got over the top and that

sucker went off. Carelessness, it was a shame, too bad that stuff had to happen. Another time, after the war was over in the Philippines, these two young fellas were hitch hiking right outside of Resolve Stadium there on the road. We had a lot of black market going on over there, and these two kids were all dressed up to go into Manila, hiking along the road. A truck ahead had stopped for them and they ran ahead to jump in the back. The truck behind, which was stolen by a black market bunch, smashed into them as they were climbing in. He caught this one kid and took both of his legs right off. They were completely smashed off, and it didn't even knock the guy out, he laid there. We called an ambulance right away, surprisingly he didn't die, I checked on him later had he had survived, but both of his legs were smashed off. And this guy that had stolen the truck jumped out and took off, and he was another GI. This is the kind of stuff that was bad. (Inaudible).

Overy: Did you have any problem with troop morale in Korea?

Johnson: Yes, a little bit, but not as bad as the Aleutians. In Korea, there wasn't much to do. Get a few days off and maybe go to the east coast or back of the front lines, or eat shrimp. Or go down to Seoul, but there wasn't much left of Seoul at that time. At least you could get away from the lines. In the Aleutians there was no place to go.

Overy: Did you wonder why you were there, did the troops?

Johnson: Well, WWII we could understand why, we were attacked, Pearl Harbor and this sort of thing, but the Korean thing was a little bit different. It made you wonder why you were there.

Overy: Were you angry when you were called back for Korea?

Johnson: No, I joined the Guards on my own free will and accord, and this is what I expected. It didn't bother me a bit.

Overy: Did you have any hardships about going back?

Johnson: It was hard to go and leave your family, but other than that, no. Of course, the second time I went, the Korean War, I had already started working at Camp Ripley and my job was secure for when I came back. I went right back into my job again so that was pretty good. My job was held for me.

Overy: What rank were you when you went over to Korea?

Johnson: I was over in Korea about a year, and I was only a captain when I went over there.

Overy: Were you promoted during the war?

Johnson: No. I was in an armor battalion again. Battalion S2 called for a captain, that's as far as you could go.

Overy: What was the competency of your superiors in Korea?

Johnson: You run into both good and bad in anything, no matter what it is. While we were there we had two different battalion commanders. One was real qualified and the other was kind of wishy-washy. He was a reserve that was pulled back in also from another outfit. All he wanted to do was get back home too, you could blame him, same as everybody else. Most of the higher up commanders were regular Army, and a lot of them were West Pointers, had made a career out of the military. Some of them could get pretty hard-nosed, and some of them were real fair, real good commanders. You ran into both sides.

Overy: Did you have any contact with civilians in Koreans?

Johnson: The only contact we had with Korean civilians were our houseboys. The houseboy we had for our officers was named Kim Cup Su. I told him one day about the United States, what we have over here, bridges, cars, refrigerators, everything else. It was hard for him to understand that we had all this stuff. They had very few bridges over there, the roads were bad-- I told him that someday they would have new bridges, fancy roads, cars, and everything else. He said, "No, never happened!" That's what they have now. Of course we built Korea, now they have pretty modern cities. Seoul isn't like it used to be, I'll tell you that. It was a mess when we were over there.

Overy: Seoul had been fought over four times?

Johnson: Yes, but it looks like a real modern town now, it's changed. We poured billions and billions into that country over there.

Overy: What was living conditions like over there?

Johnson: Almost always tents and bunkers. 38th Parallel, the front line was all lined with bunkers, with this Koreans logs-most of them.

Overy: Was it hard living-enough food, shelter?

Johnson: It wasn't too bad. We had supplies, they got supplies to us pretty well. The only trouble we had, in the winter we burned kerosene in our heaters for our tents. The tanks outside would freeze up, so about 2:00 A.M. you had to go out and try to thaw that sucker. We started to add gasoline to the heaters to keep them from freezing, pretty soon we started getting fires, explosions--an order came down from headquarters. No more gasoline, if it froze you had to

thaw it without gasoline. All we had over there were tents most of the time and bunkers on the lines. Another comical event, I went up to stay with Jim Gardner overnight one time, he had a platoon from B Company on the front lines. There was a Korean captain up there too, with this ROK outfit we were supporting. This trench stretched along the lines with a bunker about every 100 yards. I wanted to go up to the crest of this hill so we could see better and shout at the Chinese and Koreans. We started up the hill and artillery started coming in at both sides of the trench. It went on for probably a minute or something like that. We would duck into one of the bunkers on the side. We thought we had it figured out, they sent barrages every three minutes. We thought we'd go through the trench in a hurry and get up to the next bunker. It didn't work that way. We went up that trench and they fooled us, they didn't wait three minutes. One ran up one side of me and down the other before I hit the ground, back into the bunker. We always joked about that. We got up to the point though and yelled at the Chinese and North Koreans for a while. They'd holler at us and we would holler back, some of them were kind of friendly too, surprisingly.

Overy: When you were sent over, was the understanding that it was for a year?

Johnson: That's about what it was, you're supposed to go for about a year and then be sent back. We had enough points to get back anyway. Then when it was over I came directly back and was discharged out of Federal duty. Then I came back and helped reorganize the 147th, I was on that board too, I helped on reorganization of the 47th Division too.

Overy: You're the first person I've talked to that preferred armor over flying, why is that?

Johnson: Armor got into my blood. I liked tanks, maneuvering and this sort of thing, commanding tanks. At least you had a command, you wouldn't have that in the Air Force, aside

from the one plane. I was classified as a B-24 Bomber pilot, but I never finished. I knew if I'd finished they wouldn't have let me go, and I wanted to go back to armor.

Overy: What were some of the problems in being an armor officer?

Johnson: Same as being an infantry commander or anything else. It's the same in any command position. In armor you had pretty big logistical problems, especially in combat zones. You have a tank that will probably get a half to three quarters a mile on a gallon of gas. It takes quite a bit of supplies to keep them running.

Overy: Is there a sense of comradery with tankers?

Johnson: Yes, you bet there is. It is something like the Marines. Something about an armored outfit, where you're close-knit. Armored people stick together. The majority of them were a pretty rough bunch, you get the edges off them and they settle down. We used to really maneuver them in the mainland of Alaska, there was nothing we couldn't do with those tanks. Back in those mountains, we made up our minds and we always made it through, some of them looked impossible but we always made it. In the dead of winter to the middle of summer. No heaters in the tanks either. We had two kinds of tanks up there too, some ran on gasoline and some ran on diesel. You started the diesel ones with a shotgun shell. In the back of the bulk head this hatch opened and you put a shotgun shell in, and you fired that to get the engine going.

Overy: What is it like living inside a tank?

Johnson: It's pretty cramped. We were supposed to have only seventeen tanks, two in headquarters and five for each platoon. But we had over 30 tanks in Alaska, in our company. The reason for this was that a lot of them were dead, especially in the winter. So to keep the full

complement going you had to have a certain amount for reserves. It's completely different in the winter for an armored outfit. Sand in the summer, in the desert, in the winter you got ice. Things don't work quite the way they should. When we were in Alaska, we were issued these Alaskan parkas, as a test group. They were made out of fur, I got even pictures of that stuff. They were made by Eskimos, they stunk because they had soaked the hides in urine to cure them. They didn't last long, we had six of them in our company, the officers wore them as an experiment. They didn't work, we used them for less than a week.

Overy: Did you feel almost an affection for your equipment, your tank?

Johnson: Pretty much so, you take a lot of pride in your tank. If one guys doesn't do his share for maintenance, the others will get on him. They all are in the same boat. In Korea, we had one tank just below a hill, and they had incoming fire from the enemy, and this tank was hit three times. The first round came in a bored a hole through the tank, it kept going. This armor piercing shell went right through this heavy plate. The second one was a 4.2 mortar that hit on the back deck of the tank, shook up the crew but didn't kill anybody, still didn't knock the tank out. The third one that came in was a dud, a 4.2 mortar that came through the grill and broke up on the engine, powder all over the engine.

Overy: What are the worries of a tanker?

Johnson: You've got to be careful handling ammunition when you're in the tank. These big 90 mm shells, if that thing goes off, or if the breach doesn't close you could clean the whole turret out. Or getting hit by a penetrating round. You think about these things. It's dangerous, they aren't invulnerable. Look at North Africa during WWII. That African desert was littered with

tanks, both German and American. Same thing now over there in the Middle East, no place to hide. I hope to God nothing happens over there, it ain't worth it.

Overy: (Indistinct chatter). I'm curious about you going to the Philippines, when did you leave for the Philippines?

Johnson: Right before the end of the war, before they dropped the atomic bomb. We left May of 1945, we went to the Philippines and it took 37 days on this ship. We got over there, they dropped the bomb and the war was over. We were scheduled for the invasion of Tokyo. That's what they sent our armor outfit over there for. It was a good thing we didn't. I was there in the Philippines until November or early December.

Overy: Were you doing training before they dropped the bomb?

Johnson: Yes, we were doing some training, we had done most of the training in the U.S. before we left. But then when you get off the ship you get more training. After the war was over they took our battalion and we were guards on a quartermaster dump in the southern Philippines. That's where we seen a lot of black market activity. We had civilians working in this dump, it was fenced in and we hired civilians, at the end of the day they would leave out the gate. They were stealing us blind, they would put on about five pair of underwear out of stock. Some of them would carry cans, and they would get about five GI shirts inside these cans. They would get five pairs of socks inside mess kits. Finally it got to the point where if we caught them stealing, we would take everything away from them except their shorts. Then we would put them in this stockade that looked like a corn crib, just overnight. It stopped it, heck of a way to treat people but we had to do something. This was right in Manila. A lot of the GIs were in on the black market. They'd steal trucks, make up phony requisitions and everything. One guy we caught

with a whole load of sugar, he was a sergeant and had a phony requisition. While he was loading the truck we figured out it was phony, we had ways of checking. When he came in the officer on duty approached him and said that it was a phony requisition, where did you get it? He pulls out a pistol and starts shooting up the office, a GI .45 caliber. He ran out, got in the truck and took off, never did catch him. He got away with a whole load of sugar for the black market. Some of those guys made millions over there, after the war.

Overy: When you first went to the Philippines, did you know you were preparing to invade Japan?

Johnson: Yes. We knew it, through the grapevine. Being on the officer of the day we got wind that this was going to happen.

Overy: Were you given any specific instructions?

Johnson: Not then, but we did get a few orientations before we got off the ship. This was all secret information, we were going to take Japan; this is just before they dropped the bombs, there are going to be a lot of casualties; there probably would have been. After the bomb was dropped it was all forgotten. But we had our LSTs out and ready to go. We had a massive force at Manila Bay there, thousands of ships, as far as you could see. This was the invasion force; we were just a little cog in the big machine. If they had executed that it would have taken quite a bit of planning to make it work, on that little island of Japan.

Overy: Any regrets about the military?

Johnson: No.

Overy: You say you think about your military service.

Johnson: Yeah, lots of times I do. The friends you make, and all this other sort of things. The good times way surpassed the bad. Although the bad, you can probably forget about them. But I've been lucky is all I can say really. Come awful close sometimes, but I was real lucky so I'm satisfied.

Overy: How do you think your experience in those two wars affected you as a person, as a man?

Johnson: I think any military service, not counting the war part of it, is good for anybody. I think its good experience for young people, good experience, you learn a lot of things that you probably wouldn't learn if you weren't in the military. There's a lot of people today, I think it would do them a lot of good to go through about a year or two in the military. I had no regrets at all as far as I'm concerned. (Inaudible).

Overy: Where there any good times that you remember?

Johnson: Yes, lots of good times. When we get together over beer or something like that, we talk about the old escapes and this sort of thing like that that happened. Like Gardner and I before he died, every once in a while we'd get together and talk about the old times. Had some good laughs.

Overy: How would you compare as far as the fondness of your memories or the lasting quality of your memories between WWII and Korea, which sticks in your mind the most? Does either of them stick out much?

Johnson: Well actually both of them do. They don't seem like that long ago. World War II or Korea don't seem like that long ago. I still think about both of them and the people we knew. I still hear from the people in World War II. I get correspondence from the few people that are left.

I have people dropping in from down south when they come through here, they look me up. The company I belong to in Alaska, the 602nd Tank Company I was telling you about in Alaska, when I left there, shortly afterward they did ship the company back to Fort Leonard Wood, I think it was. On my way back from pilot training on the west coast, I stopped there in to see them. And they were there at the time, the whole company was. I hadn't seen those people, that was 1944. I hadn't seen those people at all, the whole company, since then. So, about four years ago I called the company commander, George Turner, whose dead now but at the time he was alright, and told him I was coming through, I told him my wife wanted to go down and just see the old bunch. So I told him I was coming through, I sent him a letter that I was coming through. I was going to be at the Holiday Inn and such and such a place and I'd like to see some of the guys from the old outfit. So we went down there, and I bought drinks and such for them and rented two rooms. I'll be damned, every stinking one of those guys showed up. I hadn't seen them in about 35 or 36 years.

Overy: That must have been a heartwarming experience

Johnson: It was. I tell you it was. I had a first sergeant, Cussman who showed up, Turner showed up all those people showed up except the ones who had died in the meantime. Hale Golden, who was my platoon sergeant, when I had a platoon. He used to come to camp with an Illinois National Guard division when I was a supply officer in Camp Ripley. He was a major last time I'd seen him. But he had died also. Incidentally, this guy, I say was my platoon sergeant and he won the welter weight boxing championship of Alaska in 1941. Real fine guy, not a smart alec at all. Real typical. But Goldie had died and Cussman since I had been down there four years ago had died. Turner is dead. Quite a few of the others have died since then. But I'm real

glad I went down there. They all showed up, every one of them. That's what made me feel good. I was surprised. We had a real good evening.

Overy: A question that I usually ask, as kind of a final question. You fought in two wars. You went twice. What were your feelings when there were lots young people's refusing to go and burning draft cards, going to Canada hiding, what was your feeling at that time?

Johnson: Well, to be honest, in the back of my mind I questioned that Vietnam thing too.

Overy: You did?

Johnson: You bet I did. (Inaudible) I probably didn't understand what was going on. But I had a pretty good idea. I think it's a shame to use our young kids as cannon fodder when they done away with the cost plus 20 percent like they did, profit, like they did in World War II. Now it's an open book. World War II is they held manufacturers to cost plus 20 percent, you knew that I'm sure. They didn't during Korea and they didn't during the Vietnam War. Now if we're going to fight a war, the way I feel about it, to protect our democracy, such as it is why can't your big corporations sacrifice a little too? We need to fight a war to protect our way of life then why can someone else do a little sacrificing too. Instead of using our own kids as sacrifice for personal profit. This is exactly, I can't help it, I've looked at it many different ways and this is the way it comes out to me.

Overy: Where you angry at these kids refusing to go?

Johnson: No. I was kind of neutral. I could understand some of it. Some of them were arrogant. I think it's wrong some of the approaches they used to get out of the war. But I can understand their position too. So, that's they only thing I didn't care for. It's the way it goes to be honest,

I'm not trying to cover it up. I've been in this long enough to know what's been going on for years. And it's a dirty shame.