

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Farnham J. "Gunner" Johnson  
Lieutenant, Marine Corps, World War II.

1996

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**Johnson, Farnham J.** (1924-2001). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Farnham "Gunner" Johnson, an Appleton, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a 1st lieutenant in the Marine Corps during World War II with the Fleet Marine Force Pacific Forward Echelon and with the Guam Island Command. Johnson mentions his family moved from Minnesota to Appleton (Wisconsin) when he was age one because his father, a dentist and World War I Marine Corps veteran, left the Veterans Administration Hospital where he had been working to open his own dental practice. Johnson mentions he graduated from St. Mary's High School in Menasha (Wisconsin) in 1941 and attended the University of Wisconsin in the fall, where he played on the football team. He recalls hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor in the football dormitory and being one of the few who knew where Pearl Harbor was located. Johnson discusses at length his football career at the University of Wisconsin, in the Marine Corps, and as a professional with the Chicago Bears and the All American Football Conference's Chicago Rockets. In 1941, Johnson states the University of Wisconsin made ROTC compulsory for all male students; he describes doing ROTC drills in the livestock pavilion. Johnson left the ROTC because he was allergic to the straw and animals in the pavilion; however, he joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps instead. He comments that many of his teammates joined the Marines (including two who were killed in Okinawa) and suggests the Marines recruited football players because of their leadership skills. In July 1943, Johnson was called up to active duty with the V-12 Navy College Training Program. For one year, he attended classes at the University of Michigan as well as officer training and military drills. Next, Johnson describes attending boot camp in 1944 at Parris Island (South Carolina) with a group consisting entirely of "college men," mostly from Wisconsin, but also from Harvard and Dartmouth. He also details his pre-officer candidate training at Camp LeJeune (North Carolina) where he stayed for twenty-five weeks. Finally, Johnson was called up to Quantico Marine Corps Base (Virginia) and completed Officer Candidate School, earning the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant. Johnson criticizes the military for promoting an entire class of officer candidates to 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant too quickly, stating this was the reason for American losses in Saipan (Mariana Islands). After a brief stay at Camp Pendleton (California), Johnson was deployed to the Pacific with the Fleet Marine Force Pacific Forward Echelon which was scheduled to participate in the Invasion of Japan. Johnson recalls learning of the atomic bombing of Japan on the troop ship between Enewetak Atoll and Guam. Although trained as an infantry officer, Johnson was reassigned to be a staff officer at Island Command in Guam. He mentions he worked with General Henry Larson in Guam, an experience that prepared him for the workforce. In addition, Johnson also did sports-casting for a friend who worked for the Armed Forces Radio Station, WPLY-GUAM. After leaving Guam on points in 1946, Johnson's last duty was to serve as a prison guard aboard the *USS Samuel Chase*, guarding servicemen who had committed minor crimes and misdemeanors overseas. After delivering the

prisoners to Norfolk (Virginia), Johnson returned to the University of Wisconsin to finish his degree on the G.I. Bill. He characterizes the campus as “wall-to-wall servicemen” and notes there were many women veterans as well. Johnson recalls living in a makeshift dorm in the football stadium beside trailers that housed student-veterans and their families. Johnson majored in geography at the UW, and later he got a second BA in economics and a Masters in international management from the American Institute of Foreign Trade (Arizona). Between college and grad school, Johnson reveals he played professional football with the Chicago Bears (1947) and the Chicago Rockets (1948). He estimates that ninety-five percent of football players were veterans, included Bears coach George Halas, a World War I Marine Corps veteran. Johnson spends much time discussing his career as an international manager for B.F. Goodrich. He traveled extensively on business in Europe and Africa, and tells of being caught in the crossfire of military coups in Chad, Ethiopia, and Ghana. Johnson emphasizes that his Marine Corps training helped him cope with these violent political situations. In 1951, Johnson was called up to Korea; however, due to football injuries, he did not pass the physical. During the 1950s, Johnson sold rubber to the Chinese Air Force and Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists during the Chinese Civil War and to the French in Vietnam. Johnson reveals he traveled to Saigon and Bien Hoa (Vietnam) several times on business during the 1960s and 1970s because B.F. Goodrich was part of a conglomerate rubber company contracting with the U.S. military. Johnson retired from B.F. Goodrich in 1988 and settled in Alabama. Throughout the interview, Johnson illustrates how his love of geography lead to interesting opportunities: he convinced a warrant officer in Guam to send him back to the East Coast of the US (rather than the West Coast) so he could visit the Panama Canal; he traveled in Africa and Asia on international business, which he states was unusual at that time; and he visited Antarctica and Greenland during his retirement. Finally, Johnson explains that his nickname, “Gunner,” was coined by a sports announcer during his college football days in Madison.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Johnson (1924-2001) was born in Minnesota and grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin. He graduated from St. Mary’s High School in 1941 and attended the University of Wisconsin, graduating in 1945 with a degree in Geography. At the UW, Johnson played football and participated in the Enlisted Reserve Corps with the Marines. In 1942, he began officer training at the University of Michigan, eventually becoming a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant. Johnson served with the Fleet Marine Force Pacific Forward Echelon at Island Command in Guam from 1945 to 1946. From 1947 to 1948, Johnson played professional football with the NFL’s Chicago Bears and the AAFC’s Chicago Rockets. In 1950, he earned a Masters in International Management from the American Institute of Foreign Trade (Glendale, Arizona). Representing the B.F. Goodrich Company, Johnson traveled to Africa, Asia, and Europe; he sold rubber to the Chinese Air Force during the Chinese Civil War and to the French during the early stages of the Vietnam War. In 1988, Johnson retired from B.F. Goodrich to his home in Alabama.

Interviewed by Michael Telzrow, 1996

Transcribed by Rose Polachek, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2004

Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2010

**Interview Transcript:**

- Mike: This is an interview with Farnham J. Johnson. The date is November 8, 1996. The interview is conducted by Michael Telzrow, for the Wisconsin Veterans Oral History project. Okay, I want to start out with some questions about what you did before the war. What year were you born?
- F.J.: 1924.
- Mike: And you grew up in Wisconsin?
- F.J.: I was born in Minnesota and moved here when I was one and into Appleton.
- Mike: What type of work did your father do?
- F.J.: My father was a dentist. In Minnesota he was with the Veterans Administration and he was a WWI Marine who enlisted even though he was a dentist. He was gassed and wounded in France, and came back and went to the Veterans Administration as a dentist in Minnesota. When he got enough money he moved to Appleton and set up his own practice. That's how I got there.
- Mike: So he was a Marine in WWI in France?
- F.J.: WWI.
- Mike: Great. So you grew up in Appleton. What was that like? What did you do before the war started? Obviously you went to school in Appleton?
- F.J.: No, I went to grade school in Appleton and then I went to St. Mary's High School in Menasha, WI and graduated from there in 1941.
- Mike: And that was right after, right before Pearl Harbor?
- F.J.: Right before Pearl Harbor.
- Mike: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard that Pearl had been bombed?
- F.J.: Yup, I think everybody does. I was in the rooming house over here near the stadium with some other football players and one of the other gentlemen that lived in the rooming house came in that afternoon and said the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and I was a geography buff so I knew where it was. A lot of people didn't know.
- Mike: Break out the map and show them huh?

- F.J.: Yeah.
- Mike: So this is why you were in school here.
- F.J.: Yeah, I was a freshman.
- Mike: And you were playing football?
- F.J.: Yes.
- Mike: Did you receive a scholarship or did they do that back then?
- F.J.: No. We got some very good benefits and we got a mail job that was over in Elizabeth Waters and we worked for something called the Madison Business Association down here. We walked around the square taking down license numbers which we didn't understand what it was for. Later on you could make sure that it was a market survey, to find out where the cars were coming from, but we were paid pretty lucratively for that.
- Mike: What position did you play?
- F.J.: I was a defense, well, here at Wisconsin we went both ways. I was an end and professionally, I played only defense and was a kicker also.
- Mike: So those are the days when they didn't have, you played both ways most of the time?
- F.J.: In the college, in the college. In the pros I had only played defense, defense, special teams and kicked.
- Mike: So you heard about Pearl and how soon after that did you enter the Marine Corps?
- F.J.: Well, it's a funny story on that one: 1941 was the first year that it was compulsory ROTC. I was in the ROTC program here at Wisconsin, everybody had to be then. Before that, it was not compulsory. In 1941, they made it compulsory. In January of 1942, the Wisconsin freshman team was called back to practice on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. We practiced in the stock pavilion out here. They ran the cows, the pigs and the sheep and everything out at 3:00 p.m. and put sawdust over the top of their droppings and we then ran in and squished all through the sawdust and the rest of the stuff. It turned out that I was very allergic to some of these things. I ended up in the hospital with a tremendous case of asthma and something I never had before. As a result I had to leave the ROTC program. Which is funny because then I joined what they called the ERC, which was the Enlisted Reserve Corps, where you had the choice of making your service, choosing your service at a future date. In those days, I was only 17 at that time and I didn't have to, I wasn't eligible for the draft. The draft was for

18 and above, so when I turned 18 and then I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps, and then chose the Marine Corps as my branch.

Mike: The ERC, that was connected with the University?

F.J.: No. It was a government program, just putting a pool of people so they knew who you were, before you had to be drafted.

Mike: And you chose the Marine Corps?

F.J.: I chose the Marine Corps.

Mike: Why did you choose the Marine Corps?

F.J.: Well my father was a Marine, and most of my teammates at Wisconsin were Marines.

Mike: Oh really?

F.J.: Yeah, in fact, Elroy Hirsch and Pat Harder, John Gallagher, Bobbie Hanzlik, Bob Rennebohm, Fred Negus, Gib Holgate, Wally Dreyer, you name it. We'll get into that a little later as I get into it, but then we had everybody's all American, Dave Shreiner, and Bob Baumann, who were killed in Okinawa within two months of each other, Marines.

Mike: So, when your time came to enter the service, you went in through this program--

F.J.: It was the V12 program and called up on July 1<sup>st</sup> of 1943, active duty.

Mike: Okay, called up in 1943 and you went to a regular induction and they sent you to a boot camp?

F.J.: No, no, all they did was that we showed up [laughter] and we were shipped over to Michigan. The University of [Michigan] in the V12 program, which was a place for training program for future officer candidates and what you get is a holding period while they allowed us to mature a little more. We were there, I was there for a year.

Mike: What type of activity did you do there?

F.J.: Went to school and played football, but in uniform, in uniform. We were, it was the Marine V12 unit, there were 230-240 of us and then they had a Navy unit there of about 2000. We lived in old dormitories and we had to take a number of courses that were specified by the Marine Corps, Physics which nobody passed, and Trigonometry and Map Reading. Other than that we reported to formation in morning and night and went to regular military drill.

- Mike: I see from there you sent to Parris Island, South Carolina?
- F.J.: Right. Yup, boot camp.
- Mike: That was your standard boot camp training?
- F.J.: Standard boot camp, yeah. We still hear from our drill instructor.
- Mike: Do you really? That's wonderful. And how long was that, how long was boot camp? Do you recall?
- F.J.: Eight weeks.
- Mike: Do you have any memories of boot camp, any particular memories that you can think of?
- F.J.: Well, they were, it was in July and August and you can imagine what Parris Island is like in July and August. It was a thrill, let's put it that way. Everybody talks about how tough you are if you can get through it but getting through it in July and August I think is as special programs.
- Mike: So the fellas that you went to boot camp with, they were drawn from throughout the country or mainly from Wisconsin?
- F.J.: Mostly from Wisconsin and about half were from Wisconsin and the other half were from the east, Dartmouth and Harvard, in that area. They mixed us up.
- Mike: So they were all college men?
- F.J.: Yeah, all college, 100%.
- Mike: Okay, and then from Parris Island you went on to Camp LeJeune?
- F.J.: Camp LeJeune. That's what they call an officer, OCA, Officer Candidate Applicant Course which I took five times. [Laughing]
- Mike: Obviously it was difficult then right?
- F.J.: [laughter] It got to be funny. They took us by age, you see the reason we were in holding at LeJeune was that they were crowded up there at Quantico in Officer Candidate School. They took us by age, why I was the youngest of all in the group from Wisconsin and so I was in, they started with A, B, C, D, E companies and I was in E Company. They called that Kiddie Camp because we were all so young. So as A,B,C and D went, we finally got to go, but in the meantime, this course was only five weeks. So I was there about 25 weeks and took it five times. We just

repeated, but they also allowed Elroy Hirsch and Hank Lashanski and few of us to play on the local football team.

Mike: Who were you playing? Who was the team? Playing against other service teams?

F.J.: Other service teams yeah. We played Bainbridge Naval Station, Fort Monroe, Camp Maxwell. It was, we had pros and we had pros and college ball players.

Mike: So the competition was pretty tough?

F.J.: Oh yeah. In fact, I noticed in Wisconsin in 1942 we played Camp Grant and we played Great Lakes and they had professionals and in 1943 at Michigan, we played Camp Grant again, so and then we switched around next year, we were playing Le Jeune.

Mike: I've heard of the teams at Great Lakes being really good.

F.J.: They were highly competitive, yes. Paul Brown coached there.

Mike: Okay, so after this period you go on to Quantico.

F.J.: Camp Quantico.

Mike: Your officer training, correct?

F.J.: Right.

Mike: How was that? Was it fairly rigorous?

F.J.: Well, having had all that training down there at Le Jeune, it was really a pipe. I mean we, basically the same stuff that they were teaching at Le Jeune, in fact they took 300 kids off and because the reason they suffered so many casualties on Saipan, Second Lieutenants. They took 300 of the class that was ahead of us and didn't even send them to officer training school, they just put bars on them and sent them on over. A lot of those kids got killed in Okinawa too. That was, Bobbie Adams and Tom Cook and a couple others were really good friends of ours at Michigan, who had gone ahead of us, got caught in that special class. Well, the same with us, it took a helluva casualty rate because the Marines use the theory of the platoon leader being up front as opposed to certain other services, you know have the platoon leader in the back. They don't –

Mike: So they are right in the thick of the action.

F.J.: They are always up there, that's right. That's why they took all the football players. The Marines look for football players.



- Mike: Athletic types.
- F.J.: Well, as leaders.
- Mike: Okay, so you went through that fairly quick, from there you went to Camp Pendleton?
- F.J.: Camp Pendleton for a short time before I went overseas. I went overseas in the summer of 1945.
- Mike: Camp Pendleton, was that for any particular training?
- F.J.: Yeah, it was for what they called a troop leader school. Another school [laughing] I went to, school of the school. Yeah, they were teaching us how to teach other people, that was it.
- Mike: So, can you explain, or tell a little about when you actually went into the Pacific?
- F.J.: Right. Well I went in August, we left in August and of course the war was winding down then you know, and when the war ended some, I was in somewhere between Eniwetok and Guam on a troop ship. We eventually got up to transit center on Guam. Our group was scheduled to take over platoons for the Olympic operation. I don't know if you were familiar with that. Olympic operation was scheduled in later October, early November of 1945 and would be the first landing on the main land of Japan, on Kyushu. And the first, the third, fourth and fifth divisions were the point and that was what we had been sent out to pick up there. We got to the transit center and there was no more invasion, so – here we had a bunch of these people out there. So that we were scattered into various places. Some went to divisions, almost all went to divisions, but there were a handful of us, I think probably 7 or 8 of us that were shipped up to Island Command Guam as staff officers which was a new thing to be, because we had been trained as infantry officers.
- Mike: So where were you when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?
- F.J.: In between Guam and Eniwetok.
- Mike: So you were in transit?
- F.J.: Yeah.
- Mike: Do you recall anything special about that?
- F.J.: No.

- Mike: Is there any, I imagine there would be some feelings of release that--
- F.J.: No, well we got to Guam; the surrender was happening you know up there at Tokyo Bay. That's really, there were rumors aboard ship but there wasn't anything really concrete until we got to Guam and Tokyo Bay was coming up, you know, the 4<sup>th</sup> of September or something like that.
- Mike: So you were trained as an infantry officer and then found yourself as a staff officer. How did you, was it hard to adjust to or did it matter to you?
- F.J.: Well it was--as you look back on it-- was real good because it gave me a heck of a lot of training that was useful in the business world later. I worked directly for a Lieutenant Colonel who reported directly to the General that commanded the Isle of Guam, heavy Henry Larson. So I was, we were associating with people that were extremely highly placed and learned a lot of the procedures although they were military in nature, they were stuff that we could utilize in the business world later on.
- Mike: Right. Right. Okay, so the war, in effect you are over here in Guam now, what happens after that?
- F.J.: We went home on points, you know how many you accumulated. I was scheduled, I could have gone home in January of '46 but I said "what the heck for?" I'm not going to get back to go into the second semester of school. The other thing was that they had offered me a regular commission when I graduated from OCS, but it would take a year before you--before [you are] on probation sort of, while you take-- well, I decided I wasn't going to take the regular. I wanted to go because I hadn't finished my degree. I wanted to go back to school, but I figured, well heck, its, January, we wouldn't get home until February, the semester has already started. I am making a about \$180/month which is pretty big money and why not just see it through, and I'll go home in time for football practice and school to start see? So, what happened, after Guam, I stayed there until the Island Command was turned over to the Navy and a friend of mine was the radio station manager, Armed Forces Radio Station at WPLY-GUAM, and he asked if I would come up and do the sports for him. So I went up and I did that for a couple of months, and then a friend of mine was a warrant officer at the transit center, and I had told him I wanted to go to the East Coast. Everything went to the West Coast. The reasoning was-- I think I told you I enjoyed geography, and I said I will never, ever get a chance to see the Panama Canal, and if we could-- Well what happened was, the warrant officer out there at transit center found a ship coming in and they had to put about 220 prisoners aboard. These were minor offenses and they needed an officer to take them back to Norfolk, Virginia. So I got to go see-- but I had these prisoners under my command for about 30 plus days, going to Hawaii and then Panama and then up to Norfolk. I want to explain the prisoner thing: these were not

dangerous people. These were guys that had been picked up for drunken disorderly, for speeding if you can believe that, reckless driving and things like that in the Corps. So I took them back and that's when I had the troops. It was the only time I had any troops really under my command.

Mike: That was on the *USS Samuel Chase*.

F.J.: *Samuel Chase*, yeah.

Mike: What type of ship was that, do you recall?

F.J.: Well, it was a personnel, it's the old African meteor, which was a pretty nice ship. It was run by the Pharaoh lines –

Mike: Oh, so it was converted –

F.J.: It was converted into a troop ship but it had a lot of, it wasn't a bad ship. The other one that went over on the *Appling*, that was awful.

Mike: What to you remember from that one?

F.J.: Well, they had us four or five stacked high, because they said they were running lieutenants out there as a dime a dozen, and so they packed us just like--

Mike: Just curious, I was in the Coast Guard for eight years. How was the food on the ships?

F.J.: On the *Appling*, it was atrocious going out, coming back it was acceptable. You were in the Coast Guard then? They have some pretty good food there don't they?

Mike: Yeah. Okay, so you get to Norfolk with the prison detail.

F.J.: I turned the prisoners over.

Mike: You turn the prisoners over and where do you go from there?

F.J.: I went up and came back home. That was, I got home in August and I was home for about two weeks and we reported for football practice down here.

Mike: So you went right back to school?

F.J.: In fact, I had to go I was still in the service when school started and I had to take a day off to go down to Great Lakes to get discharged.

- Mike: Okay, so you were discharged, you didn't have any reserve obligation after that?
- F.J.: I did. Yeah, yeah. I was--
- Mike: Effectively inactive though.
- F.J.: Inactive reserve, yeah.
- Mike: So you went, you go right back to school, right back into football practice.
- F.J.: Right.
- Mike: What were you studying at the--
- F.J.: I had completed a major in geography but then I went into economics and then eventually I drew my Masters degree in international management.
- Mike: Okay, so you stayed at the UW to finish your Masters degree?
- F.J.: No, I finished my Masters degree at; well I started it at what was called the American Institute of Foreign Trade in Phoenix, or Glendale, AZ. That name has changed now to the American Graduate School of International Management. We got a bachelors degree out of AIFT and then I had to go back in 1978 to do a little bit of extra work to get my masters.
- Mike: Talk a little bit about your experiences at UW right after the War in terms of were there a lot of former servicemen?
- F.J.: I would say wall to wall servicemen. Yeah, there were just totally-- a non-serviceman was an oddity. It was-- the GI Bill so overwhelmed the campus that it was-- men I am talking about. But there were a lot of women veterans too that were back there.
- Mike: So they were taking advantage of that as well?
- F.J.: Yeah.
- Mike: Did the school, how do you think the school dealt with the influx of veterans? Did they handle it pretty well?
- F.J.: Outstanding. They did a real, yeah, I lived out in the stadium. They had dormitories in the stadium and down below they had trailers for married couples with children and everything. It looked like, you know you look down and you see the trailers and you see the little kids running around and it looked like a primitive painting.

- Mike: Sure, sure. So you are playing football, and I am just curious, what kind of team did you guys have?
- F.J.: Pardon me?
- Mike: What kind of team, what kind of season did you have at that time?
- F.J.: In 1946 we were supposed to be very good and ended up in 4 of 5.
- Mike: Really?
- F.J.: In 1942 we were #3 in the nation.
- Mike: Really?
- F.J.: Yeah, in fact number one in one pool. That's what I thought. You know Elroy Hirsch did not come back. The coach was a guy named Stooner, was a, left somewhat to be desired. In fact, I got in trouble with him.
- Mike: He's not the ex-Notre Dame player, is he?
- F.J.: Yeah.
- Mike: Is he?
- F.J.: Yeah, he was a horrible coach. He was a hell of a player but evidently, --
- Mike: Not a very good coach though?
- F.J.: Horrible.
- Mike: So after you graduate from UW you went straight for your masters, --- right, or did you?
- F.J.: I played. There was a year with the Bears in 1947 and the old Chicago Rockets in 1948. In the meantime, off season, at the end of the 1948 season I got banged up both years pretty bad. It was very obvious to me at that point that I was never gonna make it and my career on the field was ended. At that point, I had heard about this American Institute of Foreign Trade and so after in December of '48, I enrolled out there and started in January of 1949 and stayed there until June of 1950. In the meantime, the International Division of BF Goodrich Co. came out there and interviewed and offered me a job. This place is the training grounds for thousands of people. It had just started. In those days, nobody ever thought of international trade and-- so it was the start of-- and that's where I went out, Goodrich came out and I went to work for them in the 1950.

- Mike: I see. So you played one year with the Bears. I am curious, how did that work? Did they have a player draft then or did you go try out?
- F.J.: Why no, I still had a year of eligibility left, so I wasn't drafted. They could have drafted me but even because my college class has graduated in '45. Most of the pro-teams thought that I was going to play the 1947 season because I had that year of eligibility left. I decided because of my run-ins with Stooner, the coach, that it wasn't worth hanging around and so I thought I better make some money while I can.
- Mike: What were they paying football players back then?
- F.J.: Oh brother, yeah, this is, I got \$5,100 a year for my first year. On a \$4,500 base salary, we had the all-star game that year. We played in the all-star, the Bears did and there were 12 games and you divide your \$4,500 by 12 and you come out to \$375 for the all-star game, we got an extra \$375 and then I got \$75 for three exhibition games, so that's a total of \$5,100. Then with the Rockets the next year, I got more base, \$4,800, but there were none of the perks in the thing. I've always said, now some of the quarterbacks make more in the first five minutes of the first game than we made all year, you know.
- Mike: So, I guess, was Hollis coaching the Bears then?
- F.J.: Yes.
- Mike: And how was he to play for, was he –
- F.J.: Oh, he was outstanding. He was—unpredictable is a nice word for it-- on the game day. During the week he was very thorough and we had, preparation was intense during the week. But on game days, sometimes he didn't know his own name. He was a hell of a great guy. He paid, he didn't pay well, as you can see, but he came up the hard way. By the way, he was a Navy captain, four-striper. He was in both wars, he was an Ensign in WWI and a Navy captain in WWII. A lot of people don't know that but he raised money the hard way and he didn't-- but once you got through, you know, wherever, once you played for him, even though I was only with him that '47 season, he would back you up on anything. Your recommendations, and tell everybody how great you were and all the rest of this crap.
- Mike: Would you say that most of the guys that played in the NFL had served in some of the Armed Forces?
- F.J.: Oh yeah, I would say probably 95%. Some were in things like merchant Marine but they all contributed. There were very, very few during that period of '46 to '51, '52, that had not served, yeah. In fact it reads like a book you know, 39 months here, 38 overseas here.

- Mike: The Chicago Rockets, what league was that?
- F.J.: That was in the All American Football conference.
- Mike: That's where the Browns came in.
- F.J.: Browns and the 49ers came out of and the Rockets, the Colts, the Bills.
- Mike: And were you guys any good, the Rockets?
- F.J.: No, we were horrible. The reason, we had tremendous injuries. That's when Elroy Hirsch got his skull fractured. He was with the Rockets. He got his skull fractured against the Browns in 1948, and we had Angelo Bertelli was the Heisman trophy winner, and he blew his knee in the first play of the first game. We were--
- Mike: Injuries killed you huh? Okay, and you decided to leave football primarily because of the injuries.
- F.J.: Yeah, I had no opting out. See in those days they couldn't do knees.
- Mike: Not like they can today. You get your Masters and you go to work for BF Goodrich? And where did you work for that company, in what part?
- F.J.: Well I started in Akron and then I took over the office in Washington D.C. This is international; I never worked at Penney's in domestics. I took over that Washington International office, which was calling on the foreign purchasing commissions, the embassies, that sort of thing. We were selling a lot of things out there to the Chinese Air Force which is Taiwan and the Chiang Kai Shek group, and a lot to the French who were fighting in Vietnam and Indochina then they call it, Dien Bien Phu. So that was my two big accounts, were the Chinese Air Force and the French Embassy for stuff back in Vietnam.
- Mike: Did you get to travel to the Far East?
- F.J.: Not then. I was only there, I did get to Vietnam, but I'll get into that later. I went from Washington-- I was there for about--well I had replaced a guy that had been called to active duty by the Marine Corps. So, when he came back then I was superfluous, and I took over as manager of the Hawaiian operations. Hawaii was [then] a territory. It still had not become a state, so it was international. I was in Hawaii for about two or three years, three years, I guess, and then I went to, I was transferred to Holland. I was in the Hague for pretty close to a year and then transferred up to a subsidiary in Hague and in Sweden. I was transferred up to Sweden, Godrich Fasco, and in both of those instances I covered Spain and some of the other areas because we were building naval bases then.

The naval base of Rhoda and the pipeline that runs from Rhoda up to Saragosa, up through Madrid, San Pablos Moraino, those air bases and everything they weren't there then. So I was there from the beginning and the bases of building the bases in Spain but I went from there. From Holland to Sweden and then I was down in Denmark for about 6 or 7 months in setting up of a program there. Then I moved up to, back to Sweden for about 6 or 7 months and then was out in the Philippines for about almost 4 years. Came back to New York for a short time, the New York office International and then moved back into headquarters and eventually ran the export sales operation and the market intelligence operations for BF Goodrich International.

Mike: You mentioned earlier that you believe your training, your Marine Corps training paid off.

F.J.: Yeah, true. I just needed that Vietnam thing. During Vietnam I used to go into Saigon quite a bit. I was head of the export sales group then and we had the contracts there to supply all the rubber to arm KBRJ, which was the big conglomerate of construction companies. RMK was Raymond Morrison Knutson, JH, that was the-- Jones construction?-- oh well, anyway--Raymond Concrete pile?-- Anyway, that armed KBRJ thing. So there was millions of dollars of rubber products going in there for the equipment. They were building bases and keeping the roads open and everything. The military wasn't doing most of that stuff. See, there's been private contractors were doing that. They were in the infrastructure and so that's why I was going into Saigon and Biên Hòa. I got up around Biên Hòa a couple of times, but that's as far as I got. But I was in and out of there numerous times during the--

Mike: This is during the '50s right?

F.J.: No, this is during the '60s and '70s. Although I had been in there in the early '60s, but these were late '60s and early '70s. Where it helped me, the Marine Corps? Part of my jobs, a lot of this stuff was going where no other people had gone before, particularly in Africa. A lot of, we were trying to develop business in Africa. There was a lot of saturation in Latin America. There was the Asian countries were wooing pretty good, but Africa looked like, so I was one of the few that from American business that was concentrating and trying to set up American distributors and possibly even factories in some of these areas. I was caught in a couple of rather unique situations. One of them that stands out was in Chad. I was in there doing a market survey. I got in there one night and the next morning I was supposed to be at the Embassy at 9:00 or 9:30 a.m. and I got called down to the, the girl at the switchboard only spoke French and my French wasn't that good, but I finally, she said she couldn't get me through for some reason. Well the room I was in was fairly sound proof but anyway, I was writing a letter, I just was writing my mother-in-law and I said that I just heard some sonic bombs, must be the French



practicing over the desert. No sooner had I heard that then I heard, you know, some noise that didn't sound quite right, so I finally called down to the girl again and she sent up a cook that spoke English. And as I opened the damn door out there, I could hear all this damn machine gun fire and everything going, so he told me that the coup had started. There was a Christian President Malloum, and a Muslim Prime Minister Habre who hated each others guts and they were going at it you know. So that went on for, we were trapped in there for four days. All my great Marine Corps training and everything I kept saying, well hell they'll run out of ammunition, they're just firing. It was sky rockets, and then boom, helicopters coming in, WWII planes coming down along the river and we are all six blocks from where all this crap is going on. It's hairy because at night, they didn't know where they were firing and the door was metal, cinder block and metal on the one side, and big picture window over here overlooking the Chari River over in the Cameroon. So I said Jesus, anyway, I said hell they are going to run out of ammunition. They didn't, in four days, they were going. The imam of N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, got the French general there, and he told them to get those damn planes out of the air because they couldn't, they weren't being flown by Chadannians. They were being flown by French pilots. He said "Get them down or otherwise I am not going to be able to control my troops." And they were doing well. In the mean time, they killed off 5,000 people you know. The Red Cross, this is a city of 200,000 people so I mean, 5,000 and Red Cross is headquartered at the hotel. Everybody took off except the guy from CARE, George Ratcliff from CARE. The international Red Cross had about 4 or 5 people there, trying to scrape up the bodies and negotiate cease fires and the rest of this stuff. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day, the US Embassy said we will get you out, you know. So we went through the lines and through both lines in the convoy, white flags flying, got out to the airport and just hung around there for a while and then nothing happened. The plane didn't show up so down through the lines again, and I went back to the hotel where I was and then the next, at that point I said "I'm taking off." I couldn't hang around here when this thing blows up. So I was going to swim the river. The problem was the river is of course full of crocodiles, see, but I had it made. There was another place down about 2 or 3 miles which I would try first. There is what they call a paroch, a dug-out and so I could get into that maybe and it cost only \$20 they said, you know, equivalent of \$20 U.S. to get a guy to take you across. But you had to go through all this fire area to get there. The other one was that I'd just take off right in the back of the hotel and go, get across the river into Cameroon, then it was about six miles down the road there was a Cameroon Army post. Then 60 miles through the bush down to the next airport. So I could get a, this is why I carry plastic bag now, so I could put my passport and my wallet and everything like that, and put it around my neck and get some shoes around the neck, and shorts and a shirt, see. And now I carry a knife, you know, ever since then. That was a major one. I was in the one when the General Acheampong in Ghana over-threw Busia, the president in Ghana. We were going out in the

middle of the night, the airport was secured, they thought Busia may show up, you know, by land, so they had the airport ring. I was trying to get on a plane out to Uganda, Ethiopian Airlines. The damn, you had to ride, a fork wheel truck pulling these cabanas along you know. We were in these cabana things being pulled and the god damn thing, this was about 9:30 at night and all the nights are on and the plane is out there somewhere. When it was ready to go, they would radio it and they would turn on their lights to get them off, see, but in the meantime the damn forklift starts to backfire. And all hell, there were tracers coming out all over the son of a bitch, I hit the deck on that one boy I'll tell ya. I was in Ethiopia one time when they overthrew Haile Selassie. They grabbed my passport, they had a couple of goons tail me all over town, you know, in the cab with me, tailing me. I couldn't leave the hotel, there were only 20 of us, a big Sheraton Hotel and there were only 20 people in the whole damn hotel. All of them, there were 18 newspaper people and television and French, all French and Italian. Not an American in the damn bunch and a Canadian map maker, cartographer and myself. That was all that was in the hotel so – the hotel is 400-500 people. It was kind of bleak, except for the goons, those are little things I say, you got you Marine Corps training really helps you later on as well as it does during the war.

- Mike: So, it must have been very difficult to carry on any kind of business after and elsewhere, that was in turmoil.
- F.J.: Oh yeah, it is, it's difficult to do it. But the French have been doing it for years and the English. In the Ivory Coast today, you have more French than you had when they got into Paris. So the French would always get the screws out of it. They, French has compulsory military training or if you don't have, France has, if you don't do military you got to go and perform some civic work or something like that. A lot of these kids opt to go to places like Ivory Coast, old French colonies and build bridges or teach French in the schools. So they are more French now than they were when France owned them.
- Mike: So you spent quite a lot of time in Africa.
- F.J.: Yup, South Africa, quite a bit. I was trying to have a factory built in South Africa and I was trying to build one up in the Cameroon. That's why I ended up in Chad because there are five countries that are in what they call a central frank African area. Those five countries are in an economic unit and they would have bought tires if I would have had the factory in Cameroon. I was trying to build one down in South Africa too, that fell through.
- Mike: So a lot of the business that you were doing was military related, in other words you were selling a lot to the US or making a lot of products for the US Government also during that period?

- F.J.: Not during that period. When I was in Washington, I was selling mostly yes. Washington, that was early on. My mission at that point, you see, Europe, this is in 1951, Europe was still recovering. They hadn't got their factories built back up so they had to draw things like tires, and belting and hose and all the rest of that from us until they got rebuilt.
- Mike: If we could just talk for a moment about when you were recalled back to active duty for Korea. Let's hear a little bit about that.
- F.J.: I was in Washington, and as I say, I think I had replaced a Marine that had been called back, when he came back just about the same time coincidentally, I got my orders to come back. So I reported up to Cleveland and in the mean time, I told you I had been injured a couple of times so they, I was not able to pass the physical. However, they didn't discharge me until 1954 so I mean I had--
- Mike: Potentially you still could have been called, had they needed you. You were married at the time.
- F.J.: Yeah.
- Mike: And family?
- F.J.: No.
- Mike: You did a lot of traveling when you were working, how did your wife like that?
- F.J.: Well, that's why I've had five wives. [Laughing]
- Mike: [Laughing] Answers that question. [More laughter]
- F.J.: It's awful you know, I made a joke out of the damn thing, but it's the truth. You go on one of these things, these journeys, and they are journeys, in order to save money you can't just jump on a plane and go and come back every two weeks, you know, so you go on four, five, six weeks at a time and when you come back, I mean you are beat. You are done. It takes three or four days, in the mean time the poor wife is sitting at home.
- Mike: But especially if you dodge bullets.
- F.J.: Absolutely, which is not uncommon.
- Mike: So you stayed with, how long did you work with BF Goodrich up till then?
- F.J.: Actually, I retired from there on 1/1/88. The last six years I was down in a subsidiary in Alabama, where in fact, that's where I live now. But I was

sent down there to put this company that they had bought, into international business and I went down and did that and then they sold the company out from underneath me. Well I had a short period of retiring so I said "well I am not going to move back North." They said okay we'll work out a program for you. In the meantime the company that bought the thing from Goodrich asked if I would stay on as a consultant, so I was triple-dipping there for a while. Now I'm just, still a consultant, advising them on international business, international affairs, market intelligence, that sort of thing and doing some of the same basic stuff that I did before only I am at liberty to work with other companies. I have worked with other companies, introduced them, but I am still basically on one account.

Mike: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

F.J.: I am a member of the Legion, the American Legion. A member of 40 and 8. I'm a member of the Marine Corp. Reserve Officers Association. I was a member of the VFW, I'm not anymore. When they turned thumbs-down on [George H.W.] Bush, that was enough for me.

Mike: Does your old Marine Corps unit ever have any reunions?

F.J.: No. In fact I look every, it was a very unique, you see I was part of what they call F&F Pack, Fleet Marine Force Pacific Forward Echelon. Most of F&F Pack was back in Hawaii. The Forward Echelon was this small group of people that was under Larson as Allen Command One. The higher, most of them were, the higher ranking officers are all dead. There were very few of us, maybe 10-15 of us that were up there in the first lieutenant, second lieutenant areas, so you could have a reunion, there was a reunion of the Michigan Marines, two or three years ago, but I was on my way to Antarctica.

Mike: What were you doing there? Business?

F.J.: No, I just wanted, I had never been there.

Mike: Really.

F.J.: I'd been everywhere else, so what I would try to do is Antarctica and Greenland in the same year and I didn't get to Greenland so I just, I got to Greenland in August of this year.

Mike: Really, how was that?

F.J.: It was unique, but after you've been to Antarctica, nothing compares. It's quite different, it's unique.

Mike: I got to ask you how you got the nickname "Gunner?"

F.J.: It was a sports writer up in Menasha, Wisconsin and a referee. Randy Haas was a wrestler at Wisconsin, was a sports writer for the Outboard Post Crescent, and Ance Vower who was a Wisconsin scout up there and a referee, they said, according to what they say, you know, Bower said "He runs like he's shot out of the gun." And Haas says, "He's a gunner all right," you know, and that's where it stuck. He started to call me "Gunner."

Mike: We talked a little about how your Marine Corps training and experience helped you in the business world, do you think that compulsory military training would be a good thing?

F.J.: Absolutely. There is no question in my mind, I think the French system is correct that you should slam it towards the military, but give the option of service. You can have your choice of doing it when you come out of high school for, usually, the French go something like 18 months. And if you'd go overseas I think it's only a year and-- but I absolutely believe in it and you know a lot of, there are a lot of similarities. You hear about people in business plans, got to have a business plan boom, boom. All that is, something you've taken your military situation and say we are going to do this and we're going to do that and this is how we are going to do it. It's very similar. The business plan is the same thing as a plan of attacking a target line.

Mike: Organization.

F.J.: Organization, absolutely.

Mike: A couple of more questions about your experiences right after the war. Did you, what other benefits did you utilize, do you recall, that you used after the war, outside of the GI Bill? Were there any other type of state benefits that you recall you used?

F.J.: Well, I used the 52/20 club I think for about four or five weeks. Are you aware of it?

Mike: I am not.

F.J.: WWII called it the 52/20 Club. If you didn't have a job you had benefits for 52 weeks, you got \$20 a month, or \$20 a week. So I think I used about four or five weeks of that. And then I did, I never owned-- because of my traveling and everything I never owned a home until I went to Alabama-- and I used the GI loan on that. Yeah.

Mike: Well, I believe that's about it.

F.J.: Well, I appreciate it. It's been fun reminiscing.

Mike: Yeah, that's great. I like to hear your stories and really appreciate you contributing to the oral history project.

F.J.: Well I think you have a great organization and I'm just sorry that I haven't known about this before. I'm going to be making it there, when I come up there, I'll make this a trip. You have some great, great things in this museum.

Mike: Wonderful, I'm glad you like it.

**[End of Interview]**