

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

KENNETH JOHNSON

Pilot, Army Air Force, 4th Combat Cargo Group, World War II

1994

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Johnson, Kenneth R., (b.1923). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 95 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 95 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Kenneth Johnson, a Jackson, Michigan native, talks about his experience in the Army Air Force flying with the 4th Combat Cargo Group in the China-Burma-India Theater during World War II. Johnson discusses his limited awareness of the war as a Madison (Wisconsin) high school student and his decision to enlist and enter the Army Air Force Cadet program. He speaks of the train ride to a reception center in Santa Anna (California), College Training Detachment in Spearfish (South Dakota), and pre, basic, and advanced flight school in Santa Anna (California). He describes betting other units about marching scores and funding a dance with the profits. Johnson touches upon classes, getting airsick during aerobatics lessons, and flying a Stearman, C-47s, and C-46s. He remembers flying across the Atlantic and being shaken up by a Tokyo Rose radio program that named his commanding officers and threatened an air attack that didn't happen. He mentions his first base in Sylhet (India) and flying three trips a day to supply the British 14th Army. Johnson gives examples of his cargo: Bailey bridges, food, ammunition, troops, mules, and gasoline. He reveals how the pilots would go on oxygen and fly high enough to put their British guides to sleep so they could pilfer beer from the cargo. Johnson mentions the British shooting an Indian officer for stealing supplies and the lack of women helping British and American troops get along. He explains they didn't see many Japanese aircraft and suffered infrequently from ground fire. He talks about the Gurkhas and the similarities between English-supported Maharajas and Chinese warlords. Johnson portrays flying over the Hump to Kunming (China), and after the war flying in gasoline and supplies for Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalist Army, though he suspected the warlords sold the supplies instead of giving them to their troops. He describes the difficult terrain and pilots' having to bail out of planes due primarily to running out of gas and bad weather. He relates having his airplane's engines both temporarily fail and jettisoning their cargo. Johnson talks about how Chinese soldiers would be shot if they dented an airplane while unloading, so the Americans would do it themselves. He speaks of the goodwill encountered on his recent trip to China with other Hump pilots and describes how close-knit his crew became. He talks about how the Japanese's following orders made their surrender easier. Johnson describes waiting a month in Karachi (India), playing golf and tennis and drinking, and then sailing home on rough November seas. He relates his homecoming, having a full Thanksgiving dinner on embarkation in New York, discharge at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin), meeting his infant daughter, and entering the reserves. He talks about his time in the Selective Service

System including having the Madison office trashed during the Vietnam War, his commanding officer General Hershey, and the lottery system. He describes the prefab houses, frequently blown fuses, and thin walls in Badger Village (Wisconsin) and the relationships between GI Bill veteran students and the professors at University Wisconsin-Madison. Johnson discusses belonging to the Hump Pilots Association.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcription edited and abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

Mark: Today's date is October 3, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, and I'm doing an oral history interview this morning with Colonel Kenneth Johnson, who flew the Hump in the CBI [China Burma India Theater] in World War II. Good morning, Mr. Johnson.

Johnson: Good morning to you.

Mark: Please don't pay too much attention to this microphone, just ignore that man behind the curtain. I suppose the place to start would be to ask you some questions about what you were doing before the war. You were born in 1923, which means you graduated high school in—

Johnson: 1941.

Mark: It was a very propitious year, I guess.

Johnson: It was.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe where you grew up and some of your upbringing? For example, those were the Depression years. Did the Depression affect your family much or the people around you? Basically, describe your upbringing.

Johnson: I moved to Madison in 1935 with my family when I was about twelve years old from Jackson, Michigan. And yes, it was a little tough, but not too bad. My dad had a fairly steady job and he made pretty good money. And we found Madison was a lot more stable community than Jackson, Michigan. Fewer homes to rent, nobody was building, but people not having to double up too much like they did in Jackson. So I was -- the city was gorgeous.

Mark: Madison was.

Johnson: Oh yeah. And it's still nice.

Mark: So Jackson was a more industrial kind of town, I would imagine? I'm not familiar with Jackson.

Johnson: Yeah, Jackson was smaller than Madison back in those days even. Madison was only 55,000 people when we came which was really good size. In Jackson my dad built the prison there. He was the Director of Instructions.

Mark: So while you were in high school, Hitler was invading the countries of Europe and the Japanese were spreading throughout the Pacific. Were you aware of this

sort of thing when you were in high school or were you a happy-go-lucky kid who didn't really pay attention to the news?

Johnson: Everybody was watching this. And of course, the pacifists were busy, even Lindbergh. He was going to keep us out of this, saying let's stay on our own shores. It was that push-pull concept. As a high school kid you are a happy-go-lucky kind of person, you're right, that's true.

Mark: Was there much of a pacifist movement in Madison? This is a big University town, if anywhere I suppose.

Johnson: It didn't filter down to people like myself or people in high school. It just wasn't apparent to us.

Mark: I see. So you graduated in the spring of '41. What did you do right after high school?

Johnson: Well, my Dad had a culvert business so I went to work for him in the summer, creating muscles pushing steel around and getting ready to go to college.

Mark: Did you start college before you entered the service?

Johnson: Yeah, I was in engineering school for a year and a half before I—

Mark: Here in Madison?

Johnson: Yes, U.W.

Mark: Do you recall hearing about Pearl Harbor? Do you recall the instance?

Johnson: Oh boy, yeah! Pearl Harbor, wow gee. Oh Yeah that was fantastic! It just blew our – Course I was, well, I guess school was going at that time. It had convened for the winter, for Christmas vacation, so of course everybody was pretty excited about that.

Mark: Did you think, "Holy crap, I'm going to end up in the war?" Did you think much of it? I'm interested in your reaction as an eighteen-year-old young man.

Johnson: Right, I was starting thinking about where I want to go and consulting with my dad, his comments were, "You know, if you go into the ground forces you're going to not have a very comfortable life. With the Air Force, at least you'll come back to a bed and you'll come back to probably hot food." And he was right. That's true.

Mark: I see. So you volunteered for service then in '43. You had been in college for a while and decided to go in.

Johnson: ROTC, we were in the ROTC. It wasn't as materialistic, the ROTC, because we didn't have any guns. All the guns had been taken and sent to England. The old Enfield rifles and the 1903 vintage. So when we drilled it was with broom sticks.

Mark: I suppose you had uniforms and those kinds of things?

Johnson: Oh yeah. They were sort of hand-me-down uniforms. I think then they went to the band when we were done.

Mark: What prompted your decision to enter the military service at the particular time that you did?

Johnson: Well, the draft of course was quite strong and they start to breathe on you a little bit and not only that but there was a recruitment from the Air Force to get young people who were of college age and had some college— [interruption in tape] —also had their own air force and they were also in that inventory of people trying to get young people into their area. So there was a little push-pull deal going on between services.

Mark: It was my understanding that both services, the Air Force and the Navy, were highly selective. So I would imagine you had to take some aptitude tests or perhaps even physical tests to get into Army Air Forces in the first place.

Johnson: Oh, yeah, we took—

Mark: Did you take those in college?

Johnson: Oh yeah, I took those in college.

Mark: So you enlisted knowing you would be going into the air forces.

Johnson: And into the Cadet program. That was the focus and direction. Flying was important.

Mark: I would be interested if you could take me through the steps of your entry into military service. I suppose you had to get on a bus somewhere and go to someplace. I'm interested where they shaved your head and indoctrinated you into the whole thing. Could you perhaps describe going into the service? And perhaps, if you remember, some of your thoughts.

Johnson: The bus ride was to Chicago, where we jumped on the train with a whole bunch of other people from our area and even some friends from Madison were traveling together to go out to Santa Anna, California. That was our reception center. It was a journey of about four days at least, because that train doesn't move terribly fast. And we'd stop for lunch and dinner at train stations along the way. Cards were being played. It was a sort of nervous time. We were going into an unknown. But we were young and when you are young you don't have -- fear doesn't seem to be too much of a factor.

Mark: I seem to vaguely remember that myself. So were you sworn in yet or were you just on your way to California?

Johnson: Oh no, you are sworn in. Now you are a member of the Army, you're a private. You haven't become a cadet yet but you are a private. You are assigned a serial number, which I can still remember, and then when we got into Santa Anna we went to the reception center where we were issued our clothes and it wasn't long before we were on our way to Spearfish, South Dakota where we entered that college training detachment, they called it "CTD", college training detachment.

Mark: What took place at Spearfish?

Johnson: Well, they had classes there of different— But because of my year and a half of college I didn't have to take too many courses, and because I had ROTC I was made the flight squadron commander, so I didn't have to march.

Mark: Good for you.

Johnson: I could watch my flight lieutenants march my squadron around. And it worked out fairly well. I played the trumpet so I got into a nice dance band there. And we flew a little bit in a little airplane, 65 horse powered Ronka aircraft.

Mark: Was that the first time you ever flew an aircraft before?

Johnson: That's right.

Mark: Was it exciting?

Johnson: It was very exciting, very exciting. But the airplane only putted along at less than a hundred miles an hour, so it wasn't -- and I think we had about maybe five or six hours. We were not at, I wasn't at the college training detachment area for about maybe two months probably and then on to the pre flight school.

Mark: Which was where?

Johnson: That was in Santa Anna also.

Mark: So you went to Santa Anna, to Spearfish, and then back to California.

Johnson: Yeah, yeah. And we didn't immediately go into our barracks for the pre flight school. We did have a little indoctrination time until the next class moved out. They had somewhere around 10,000 people that were moving through that at all times. I was in squadron 55 and we had a hundred people in the squadron. Every Sunday we would march; I always thought, "This would really be a great spot for the Japanese to come in and knock out a few potential pilots." Because we were all out on the parade ground, you know, I was unit fifty-five and there were some that were even higher. And we would bet certain other groups on whether we would score higher in the marching than they would. Each one of us would pitch in one dollar, so we had a hundred dollars to bet. And we would bet this outfit and that outfit, we might have five or six bets out at a time. Maybe we would lose one or two but by and large we marched better than the other guys. When we got through the pre flight we had something like \$12-1400 dollars in the kitty for our dance which was going to be in LA. We got John Scott Trotter's band; they used to play for Bing Crosby on the radio. We had this dance and spent our whole \$1400 dollars on it. It was a nice dance. The only bad part about it was the girl that I was on a date with, her car was stolen when we came out. After the dance no car, so that sort of took some of the bloom out of that evening. But that was kinda the -- PT was a big thing in pre flight.

Mark: PT was—?

Johnson: Physical training. And also we had classes on aircraft recognition, weather, navigation, things like that. Ground school type things.

Mark: I would imagine a lot of time in the class room.

Johnson: Quite a bit of time in the classroom, oh that was it. And then of course we went through our physical to determine whether we're going to become pilots, navigators, or bombardiers. I made it through as a pilot.

Mark: I would imagine that in the flight school and throughout this whole process there were a lot of wash-outs, people who left the program for various reasons because they couldn't handle it, or didn't want to.

Johnson: They didn't wash them out at pre flight but they washed them out when they got to primary basic flying. Primary was the biggest wash out area. It's a case of some people like myself who only little bit of time that I had in an airplane was in the college detachment area, so when you start flying in primary—and we flew the Stearman, a two winged open cockpit airplane that was a lot of fun, gorgeous airplane—but I didn't know whether I was going to make it through

because when I wrote out on the thing that said, “Do you get car, air or train sick?” I said no, not true. I used to get car sick all the time when I was a kid. So when we started aerobatics it was really a little difficult there and I did get sick. I had a very compassionate instructor and I was a pretty good flyer. But when he would go up and start doing aerobatics I would tell him suddenly “Stop! Stop! Stop! Because I’m going to get sick.” And if I did get sick, he just turned the airplane upside down and then I had to clean it out at the end of the day. But then I found if I flew aerobatics for myself and I knew what was going to happen, it’s that unknown, the stomach doesn’t react if it doesn’t know where you’re going, but if it knows where you’re going why then you can quit if you’re feeling a little queasy, if you’re by yourself.

Mark: So when did you learn you were going to be flying the cargo plane?

Johnson: That was in advanced. In advanced we went to a twin engine in advanced school which was just about the death of anybody who thought they were going to get into a P-38, P-51, P-40 or whatever. They didn’t need any more people like that. But they needed a lot of people to fly the heavy aircrafts. They were losing a lot of planes over in Europe. The attrition rate was like somewhere around 20% on some of these big bombing raids. When it come time for me to graduate which was in April, or May I mean, of 1944, why, I volunteered, which is a no no. But I did it anyway because I knew that I would be going into B-24 standby co-pilot training. That was like almost signing your death warrant. So I figured volunteer, who knows what this will be? And it turned out to be an excellent decision.

Mark: In retrospect. I was wondering if you can describe some of the men you trained with. What sort of backgrounds did they come from educationally, regionally those sorts of things.

Johnson: Well, by and large they were all about the same level of education, or close to it. They were all high school graduates. Some had some college time. They were clean-cut American boys, pretty well off physically; they could handle the physical training they were given which was pretty stern. I have remained friends with quite a number of people that I flew with. Particularly the ones that we flew with in the CBI. Some of the fellows in my group also volunteered out of advanced so we traveled together, we went through flying school together, and we went overseas together.

Mark: Was there much regional differences like rebels and yanks, you know, that kind of thing?

Johnson: That didn’t seem to come into focus at all. We didn’t have any black people. Because they just simply were not bringing them into that program. Now they did later on. They set up some squadrons of blacks pilots in 51s that flew over

in Italy. But we had every other religious group and there never seemed to be a problem.

Mark: That's interesting. Okay. You finished flight school in the spring of 1944. What happened after that? I'm interested in when you got your orders to go India.

Johnson: Well, then we went into training and we flew C-47s, DC-3 C-47s. We were out in New York, then we moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and then they started bringing in the C-46, which is about twice as big as a C-47. We got some darn good check out pilots from Reno, Nevada; they came in to check us out in these planes. They really knew how to fly them. It was an excellent transition, C-47 to C-46. The only sad part about it was that some of our group officers who were brought in from the airlines—when they set this group up they brought in some seasoned pilots even at the level of the regular pilot. We had some older heads there, not just people right out of flying school—but our group people didn't feel like they wanted to lower themselves and take instructions. After all, they came from the airlines and they were well seasoned, and we lost a plane overseas because of that. That's written up on that document that I gave you.

Mark: When did you go overseas?

Johnson: I left in early November 1944. It took us a while to get over there. We flew our own aircraft over. We had a hundred brand new C-46s that we flew over complete with a whole unit, everybody had all the equipment that we needed so when we arrived over there we were ready to go. We had our crew chiefs and our ground people that could maintain the aircraft and the whole bit.

Mark: Where did you leave from?

Johnson: We left from LA. We took off from LA and started on our trip, I can't give you the total group but we went across the Atlantic. We went in about thousand mile jumps, so it took us a while to get over there, it's a long way to go. We stayed overnight at different places. We finally arrived in Karachi where some of us picked up some gliders to tow across the India. And one thing that isn't in that document there that is sort of fearful is that we were flying from Ledo where the Taj Mahal is over to Sylhet, India. We were listening to the radio. We had our hundred foot antenna out and our low frequency radio going, and we could hear a Tokyo Rose. Now when we took off we opened up our orders out of LA to find out where we were going because this was all absolute secret. Now we found out we were going to go to India and the route we were going to go. So now that we were listening to Tokyo Rose she mentions the name of our commanding officer, our group. She mentions the names of all the squadron commanders, proceeds to tell us that we are going to get shot down by the Zeros as soon as we take off and start flying in Burma, which is our first mission.

Well this sort of shook us up so to set up some kind of a retaliation thing, well, we didn't know what in the heck we were going to do if we were attacked. But we did set up a sling so that our crew chief could sit and look out the astrodome, a little thing up at the top of the airplane for navigational purposes to shoot the stars and so on. So the first few missions we flew, why, we had him sitting up there looking around to see if he could see any Zeros. But we never did see any Zeros so we finally abandoned that and he was glad of it. Because it wasn't very comfortable and besides that it was kind of bumpy, once in a while he'd hit his head. That was our entrance into the war zone. And it did shake us up some.

Mark: So you were based where? Was it India or Burma?

Johnson: We were based in India. We started out in a place called Sylhet.

Mark: I'm not familiar with Indian geography.

Johnson: It's near the Assam Valley up in the northern part of the state. And our mission was to provide all the elements of war for the British 14th Army under John Slim. He couldn't get anything except by air into Burma so that was before we went to the Hump we did that. We flew out of Sylhet for about four or five weeks. Then as he moved down to Burma we moved with him so we had the shortest possible routes to get to him. We were making three trips a day, we were flying a lot; I think I put in 130 hours in the month of January and February before we started getting some relief, additional pilots coming along to help us out. We moved down to a place called Argetella, India. Finally, we ended up in Chittagong, which is on the bay of Bengal and then we were able to get by sea then. With a hundred airplanes and three trips a day we went through quite a bit of stuff.

Mark: What sort of things were you carrying?

Johnson: We carried everything from -- Bailey bridging was one of the things that we hated to carry but it was necessary for them to span different rivers and streams and stuff like that.

Mark: A Bailey bridge I'm not familiar with.

Johnson: It's a steel bridge that can go together, bolted together. It comes disassembled and they assemble it on the site. We carried trucks if it was big enough, too big to fit in the thing they just simply cut it and re-welded it at the destination. It was cut in two or quarters or whatever you needed to do to get it in. We carried food, ammunition, gasoline, everything that they needed for war. PX supplies. Of course we always enjoyed carrying their booze over and beer. We enjoyed it so much that they'd send along a guide to make sure we didn't pilfer.

Mark: Which of course you would never do.

Johnson: We would never do that, well we wouldn't mind having a beer or two. So what we would do is fly as high as we could get the airplane and then go on oxygen, the only thing was that the guy who was flying to guide this stuff didn't have that so he would kind of slump over and go into a sleep, and at that time we would help ourselves to some beer. The strange thing about it is one of the places we went into was surrounded by Japanese. We had to call in to find out whether we could land or not; we didn't know if the British army had retaken the field or not. And if they had we'd come in to land and we had this guide along with us, and when he got out of the plane his bed roll went with him, and he laid it down in front of the plane. And when we left we rolled right over his bed roll and he had been in to the supplies and it broke some of the bottles that he had tucked into his bed roll. He was summarily shot; they don't fool around. It was an India officer from India. I don't know, he was probably a first lieutenant, something like that, but that was it.

Mark: He was shot by whom?

Johnson: By the British.

Mark: I was going to ask how the Americans got along with the British and Indian troops, I guess you had dealings with them too and other allies. There is a saying in our history, "If there is one thing worse than having an enemy it's having allies." I'm wondering how you got along with them.

Johnson: See, we didn't have the same problems that they had over in England, with our troops coming over that were laden with money and could entertain their women and stuff like that. First of all there weren't any women over in India. The Indian women were pretty near untouchable, I mean they had the untouchable caste but I mean the women in general were. They don't work, they weren't available as nurses, they weren't available as secretaries, they just weren't available period, so that was no problem. The British were busy fighting the war, and I mean that was a tough war. I've been reading about it, and you know when you're young you go over there as sort of a lark. You don't realize the total picture of what you are doing and what kind of a contribution you are making in this thing. It was a fierce and tough war and the people who fought it had to fight disease and they really had a tough go. And of course when we would come over and unload our airplanes that was our contact with it, but it wasn't a very long contact because as soon as we were unloaded we were off because we had to go back and get another load. And as I was saying we made three trips a day and more when we started flying at night. Then it was a different crew. Three flights was all that one crew could take in a day and keep on going. And then as I say, around in March or late February when we started

getting some extra pilots from the B-25s and from the P-51s because they just ran out of targets. I mean, they had run the Japanese planes clean out of Burma. We only saw a few Japanese aircraft.

Mark: I was going to ask, did you ever get attacked?

Johnson: We were bombed a couple of times in Chittagong by just a couple of planes. They had to come all the way from Thailand to do it, they carried mostly gasoline and not too many -- it was a long trip for them.

Mark: So it was mostly harassment more than anything else.

Johnson: We did have ground fire. But not even too much of that. We always checked the back end of the plane because that is where they would shoot. They never seemed to lead. On a course when you take off you are going one hundred and ten miles an hour so it's a big target but the holes that we did get were back in the rear end and everybody would get up in the pilots compartment. The crew chief would be up there, the radio operator, pilot, and co-pilot were up there. So that was the extent. I think, in my opinion, that the Japanese sort of figured there was no sense in shooting up because all this material coming in they might be able to get it. And at Mitivya (??) they did they did try to get it but they were not successful. They were desperate too, because their service and supply was lousy. They had stretched them selves so thin and they weren't getting any supplies in. Of course that is one of the reasons why they lost the war.

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Johnson: I think if they'd had one hundred airplanes like the British did, supplying them on a day to day basis as they moved along, they would have been a lot different fighting machine. They were sort of running out of ammunition.

Mark: Especially in those jungles back there.

Johnson: Oh yeah, 'cause were living off the land a lot. And the Burmese people didn't embrace them with open arms. As a matter of fact they were busy hiding everything that they had trying to keep from starving to death themselves. They took many of their possessions and they would dig them down in the ground. I met a British officer in Calcutta that had a beautiful ruby ring. It was a star ruby. He was given that as a gift because he was a forward person in Burma and befriending, drop some cloth and some food, and the Burmese people dug up this ring and gave it to him. Good gift.

Mark: Yeah, I would say. Did you have much contact with the Indians at all?

Johnson: Do you mean with India?

Mark: Yeah.

Johnson: Well of course the Gurkhas were a terrific fighting group. As a matter of fact they were equal to the Japanese as far as being ferocious and not giving ground and there was very seldom anybody captured. I only saw one live Japanese and one dead because they'd never surrender. But the Gurkhas I had no problem with, they were wonderful fighting people. Towards the end there was a social pressure to get out from under the British, and we didn't want to be— The Indians would go in groups with shovels and rakes and looking like they were going to attack, they didn't have guns but they had those things. So we started wearing our guns and traveling in groups and hoping that they wouldn't think we were British.

Mark: That was probably a good distinction to make. Yeah, this was the time of Gandhi and all that.

Johnson: They did later on separate from England. England was the good godfather thing, and the way they ruled India was to have the Maharajah of these different areas would rule the thing and that was the same way that the Japanese or Chinese operated too with war lords and so on in their country. But it did make a problem in Calcutta. They had great famine there and there was plenty just up the Assam valley but they couldn't get it because the Maharajah there wouldn't allow any food to be shipped across the lines. So people were dying by the hundreds and thousands in Calcutta, and people were living rather well just farther up the way. There wasn't much we could do about that.

Mark: That's true. It sounds like you were very busy flying three missions a day and that sort of thing. I don't imagine you had very much spare time.

Johnson: No not until we started flying the Hump.

Mark: Let's just move on to that.

Johnson: Okay, 'cause after the war was over in Burma and Rangoon was taken, we were then assigned to the Hump. They took away at least half of our airplanes. And by this time we're starting to get all kinds of replacement coming in out of the training command, guys with lots of hours flying people around trying to teach them how to be pilots. We didn't need that many more so now they were sending these guys overseas. We went to great lengths to get these guys checked out and it wasn't long before they were able to fly first pilot. We figured the more they had the faster we could go home. It didn't work out that way. (laughs) But anyway, so by the time we started flying the Hump we had lots more pilots and fewer airplanes. So the number of trips over were fewer. I flew maybe fifty trips over or something like that. I had got some leave time,

and I was made to go into the tower and do some operating there. And we had a baseball team, I was the umpire. The team tryout for the team didn't make it so they made me the umpire. So it was a little more relaxed. Flying the Hump wasn't that much fun. We lost a lot of airplanes over the Hump.

Mark: I was going to ask how it was different than flying supplies in Burma. For instance where did you fly to? Did you fly to Kunking or?

Johnson: No, we flew to Kunming primarily. Kunming was the closest major city that had a good airport that would stockpile the material that we brought in, which was mostly gasoline. The gasoline was used to move people around into China for Chiang Kai-shek and for our own aircraft. The B-29s were there not for very long and then when we started taking islands in the Pacific that were closer to Japan they moved them out of China to bomb Japan. It was shorter routes. They gulped gasoline like mad. It took a lot of trips over for us carrying 10,000 pounds of fuel which is about thirty-three fifty-gallon drums. They would eat that up in no time at all. I don't know how many thousands of gallons it took to get to Japan but it was substantial. We also carried troops, Chinese troops, moving them back and forth with their mules. Very handy mules are.

Mark: That's mountainous territory around there if I'm not mistaken.

Johnson: Is it ever mountainous territory. The biggest mountains in the world, 'course we weren't flying over Mount Everest but we were flying over the mountains that were tending to it. And then they are 20,000 feet and the terrain is so difficult if you have to bail out, why, chances of moving through there were very slim. But they lost a lot more airplanes than they did in Manna because sometimes the guys would bail out when they ran out of gas over Kunming because they couldn't get down. See, there were so many airplanes coming in and if the field is closed down because of weather then you have to circle and wait for it to open or else they will send you off to some other place. Well maybe you run out of gas trying to get to that place so they just bail out and let the airplane go.

Mark: So these losses were due to normally running out of gas.

Johnson: Yeah, and weather, and off course, getting blown off course. They had upper winds that were a hundred miles an hour and we didn't have very good navigational aids. Just what they called an ADF, air directional finder, which homes in on a signal from a radio. The only trouble is if you have thunder storm activity it will home in on the thunder storm or it will just go with the needle wheeling around on the thing and you don't have any directional stability at all. So when we were flying down in Burma we could turn our command radios on and we could hear on the frequencies that were assigned for emergency, we could hear these guys up and flying the hump that were mayday, lost, in trouble, trying to get a steer. Just, "OK we're leaving the plane." I mean we'd hear that

scenario and it was kind of tough to listen to because we thought we thought we were going to fly that Hump too, you know. (laughs)

Mark: I'm sure. Did you ever come that close to having a situation like that? Or were you lucky I guess you could say.

Johnson: Well, you always have close calls. I had both engines go out on the plane coming back one time. And everybody was ready to jump out but one of them caught when we were frantically switching things that turn on pumps and all that stuff. So the engine caught. One engine was definitely out, I mean that engine had given up the ghost and was using about two gallons of oil an hour. They were going to change it but they said, "Take it for one more trip and we will change it tomorrow." Well that was one trip too many but we never even got to our destination. We got maybe an hour and a half out, we were at altitude and that engine started belching smoke out. So we shut it down and turned back to go to Chittagong and then the other one quit. But meanwhile the guys were throwing as much tonnage out of the thing to lighten the load of the plane because when you have a single engine you don't want to—you want to have a lighter airplane you don't want 10,000 pounds of cargo on board. They were busy doing that, well, then when the engine quit the crew chief, he was getting his parachute on and he was ready to go. And we held 'em up there and the thing started up and we got back okay.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the Chinese, the Nationalist Chinese, other than just seeing them at the airport? Did you get around in Kunming at all or anything?

Johnson: No. I never did get into Kunming because again it was a case of get this stuff out and turn around and go back. The Chinese that unloaded our plane were, they had these old Japanese trucks that they had gotten hold of maybe they were Chinese too but they were terrible trucks. The clutches were very jumpy and if they bumped into our airplane they would take them out and shoot them, I mean if they put a dent in the airplane. So they would back the thing up with about twenty or thirty feet before they would get to the cargo door and stop. Now there was all kinds of shouting and hitting but this guy is not going to back it up another foot. Because he knows if he bumped the airplane he would get shot. So we would have to jump in the thing and bump into our own airplane. But that was – we'd always drive those things back as they're jerking their way back. But life wasn't very dear. China was, of course, invaded by the Japanese and the Japanese were terrible invaders. When Dolittle bombed Tokyo from the carrier, many of his planes that made it back to China, they were befriended by the Chinese. The Japanese in retaliation shot 180,000 Chinese people. And 180,000 people doesn't make much of a dent in China's population, but that's a lot of people. It would be like shooting the whole city of Madison. I just went

over to China this spring as a Hump pilot and we were greeted by the Chinese people there.

Mark: You went to Kunming?

Johnson: Yes. We went to Kunming, Beijing, and a number of other cities. Every city that we attended, why, we were given a big banquet. In Kunming it was the greatest because they have a monument to the Hump pilots there. So we went out to the site of this monument which is beautiful. We were surrounded by Chinese dignitaries and aviation and all kinds of little speeches were made, television cameras were winding. Then we had another bout with them where we set around the hotel and told them about our exploits and flying the Hump. Or as much as you can when everything has to be translated. You could only get about two sentences out and the translators got to go through it. And everyone is smiling and bowing and making gestures of goodwill and then we had the big banquet. So the whole trip was marvelous and we only had three of us Hump Pilots. That was our major encounter with the Chinese, and encounter with the Chinese otherwise was just in business type. You know, the business of war.

Mark: I wonder if you could describe some of your crew members? Did you have the same crew while you were flying into Burma and then into China or was there a lot of changes in personnel?

Johnson: No, we flew the same crew in the same airplane when we were flying into Burma. Of course it is a pretty close-knit group. Our crew radio operator, Johnny Austin, was probably one of the best radio operators, luckily you know, I mean this is an assignment. And our crew chief happened to be one of the richest men in the United States now and he still was pretty well off back in those days. But he still was a dedicated and hard-working guy. He was a sergeant. And the chief pilot that I started flying with, luckily I got a guy from Texas. A big Texan and he was older than I, and he had experience flying B-26s and tool target. So he taught me quite a bit. He and I flew together for a few months until I got checked out as first pilot. Then pretty soon we were flying every other day. We then had extra people coming in, as I explained, to handle co-pilot duties, reluctantly though. B-26, B-25, P-51 pilots didn't take too kindly to flying a C-46, that's not very glamorous. They would come in and not do anything. We ended up doing everything. Putting the wheels up, taking care of the throttles, mixture control and the whole bit. But they did get a little more friendly when they found out that every mission we were flying was counted as a mission. If they got twenty-five or fifty missions they would get to go home and it didn't take very long to get that. We got a mission every time we landed and that was three times a day so it doesn't take very many days to add up to the twenty-five to fifty missions.

Mark: That adds up real quick I imagine.

Johnson: That adds up quick, but whether they were able to go home on that I don't know. But what we got was counted as combat hours. And every hundred hours we were given a medal, either a DFC or an air medal.

Mark: So you flew missions to the Hump until the war ended basically.

Johnson: Right and after the war.

Mark: How come?

Johnson: Because they were still bringing gas in. Because Chiang Kai-shek still needed the fuel, because he was then going to start fighting the Communists. The only thing is the Communists had been sitting up in Northern China and they hadn't been doing too much about fighting Japanese, a little bit here and there, but not—. China would have maybe prospered a little if the communist Chinese, because they had a little bit of army then, a little more controlled army than Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek's army was a little more war lord type army: ill equipped, and poorly fed. Any time the materials would come in some of these war lords would simply use it for their own use and the troops wouldn't get any of it. I mean, if it was clothes or shoes they'd sell it for the money, and trucks and things like that. So the Nationalist Chinese Army was sort of a laugh. What they finally did was said we got to do something about training these people. So we flew a whole bunch of them over into India, I'm saying we but we didn't do it, our transport people did. And they spent about six months bringing these guys up to speed. They needed to feed them to get them strong enough to operate, got shoes for them and outfitted them. This was the army that was partly instrumental in taking Myitkyina. Myitkyina was the final place we flew the Hump from. But that was an early take over and it was enhanced and held by the Chinese troops that we had. Then of course Chiang Kai-shek said he wanted his troops back in China so that was the end of that episode. No he's got highly trained and well equipped people back in China. That was a plus for him but kind of a minus as far as driving Japanese out of Burma was concerned.

Mark: How long after VJ Day were you flying into China?

Johnson: We flew into China till early September. So it was a least another month after VJ Day. That was the end of my flying. I was then made operations officer, and as operations officer why then my job was to get the crews up and get them going. We got a little more loose about flying. We wouldn't fly if the weather was really sour because we figured that when the war is over that we needed to loosing any more of our crews and things on this, flying gasoline over for Chiang Kai-shek. We weren't too sure he was even going to get. Towards the end the Communists started moving down and they told us, "Don't try to protect

these things.” This was an internal deal within China, and if the Communists grabbed it we had nothing to do with that. So we weren’t going to lose any lives fighting over that gasoline for Chiang Kai-shek.

Mark: The Chinese Civil War. Do you recall hearing the news that the Japanese had had the bombs dropped on them, and that the Japanese were going to surrender?

Johnson: Oh yah. Oh yah. And not only that but some of our people flew into Singapore right after that. And of course landing in Singapore, the place is lousy with Japanese that are all armed. The war is supposed to be over and they weren’t too sure whether these people had gotten the word. We didn’t have any, all we were carrying is forty-five pistols. But they did. I think this was the pretty much the case except for some places in the South Pacific where they hadn’t gotten the word, and they weren’t going to give up and they were still fighting for the emperor and all that. The transition was unbelievably—the Japanese are, you know, when they are given a command they do it. They don’t sit around and think I’m not going to do that or I’m still mad at these guys and all that. They just follow orders.

Mark: I’m interested in if you can describe the process in going back to the states. I assume you were not discharged but you were put in the reserves or something like that?

Johnson: Well the trip back was, some of the people if they had enough points could go back by air. I didn’t quite have enough. I was married and I had a child and I had seven decorations and so on. My age was a little low, I was kind of young, so I think you had to have a hundred and thirty points and I had a hundred and twenty seven. We flew back to Karachi and then we waited for our General Callen ship to get fitted. It needed some parts so we spent about a month sitting around Karachi, which wasn’t too bad because now that the war was over the rationing, the booze rationing, was lifted. They had plenty of that because they had been hoarding it all over the place. Every officers’ club now had plenty of beer, you didn’t have to come in with chits and the officers’ clubs in Karachi were fun to visit.

Mark: With chits.

Johnson: Well you would come in to the officers’ club and for ten rupees you could buy ten drinks. That’s thirty cents or less a drink. That wasn’t too bad. And we played tennis and we played golf on a sand golf course. I never had done that before.

Mark: One big sand trap.

Johnson: We had bicycles we could get around on within the base itself, waiting for this ship to be outfitted. I think they had to bring something in from the states. I don't know what it was. But anyway this was a single-screw ship that carried five thousand troops. We departed late October, early November, it took us close to a month to make the trip. We were going through the Red Sea and through the Swiss Canal, and the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic to New York. We had some woman on board some WACs and WAVES and they of course were segregated and guarded by Marines. Because they didn't want to have any problems with the enlisted people that were down below in the lower decks. We did have a special services orchestra which I played in because I brought my cornet along and they had to let me because I was an officer. And it was a really good band. We had two third trumpets, I played one of the third trumpets. We had Cozy Coal on the drums and they had some good people, they enlisted some good people in that special service. So we would play. The weather was okay and all the way through the Mediterranean why we had every night we would have dances and entertainment of some kind or other. Which gave a chance for some mingling of the troops with the girls, but not too much.

Mark: And by design I take it.

Johnson: And by design. But you can see there is always a problem when you have to segregate troops and I think they are running into that now all the way through the Military. They did try to keep this group from mingling with that group, which is too bad. And when you are so close to discharge too.

Mark: That brings up an interesting point; on this ship back what was the mood, what's the spirit?

Johnson: Euphoria until we hit the Atlantic then every one got sea sick then that was the end of that. The band disbanded there was no more— They saved a lot of food because people weren't eating. I got sick, I was sick the whole way.

Mark: Was it especially rough trip or was it just that people didn't have their sea legs yet?

Johnson: Oh it was terrible! Oh, the trip across the Atlantic in November is -- and the North Atlantic, it was pretty far North to get to New York, why that is semi-North. It was wild this ship was going up and down seventeen, eighteen feet. And the people that were up in the bow and stern that were maybe five, six, or seven deep, they would have these step up bunks for the enlisted people. Oh those poor guys and of course if one guy would get sick they would start to smell that stuff. Terrible.

Mark: Kind of a chain reaction. We need to turn the tape over, I don't want to miss anything. [gap in tape] I think we are back on. So when did you land in New York?

Johnson: Well it was right at Thanksgiving time. We had a Thanksgiving dinner that was tremendous. Eating was not very exciting over in the CBI. If you like C-rations and K-rations, that was pretty much our diet. We finally took one of the officers who was not doing much and had him go around the different bases to see what they were doing as far as preparing these things a little more palatable way. And he came back with some recipes to doll up this food a little bit. Same food but doll it up a little so it wasn't the same monotonous thing.

Mark: Was it a C-ration cook book or something?

Johnson: I suppose, a C-ration cookbook. (laughs) It was helpful. The wieners, they could put them in a little hot dogs in a basket or whatever they call it, you know what do they call that when they put a little dough around it. They could deep fry them.

Mark: All I can think of is pigs-in-a-blanket. That's not what that is, something like that. In the town of Oscar Myer you'd think we would know that.

Johnson: Yeah we should know that. One time we did send our plane to Calcutta, we all pitched in some extra money to buy some steaks. So back they came and now we could come into the mess hall and we could say I'll take that one. You could pick out your steak and watch them cook it. Boy, I picked out one that looked like it was just gorgeous, nice and thick and when it came time to try and eat it I couldn't even cut it with the sharpest knife. I mean because those old cattle that they have are revered and they don't kill them when they are young. And when they die of old age there isn't much left as far as good eating is concerned, they are like hide. So having a Thanksgiving full turkey dinner at our port of embarkation in New York was a real treat. And another treat was to see the nifty looking gals that were standing around passing things out.

Mark: As you got off the ship.

Johnson: Yeah. They had great hair-dos and nice dresses you know none of this military drab that we had been looking at now for a whole month. All these gals and the contrast, I mean, all these girls all of a sudden that we thought were pretty good looking, they faded. A definite fade.

Mark: So what did you do when you got to New York?

Johnson: Well we were only there for a few days. And then we were assigned a train and on our way back to our station to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. And where we were

ushered out. And I entered the reserves. I made the decision to stay in the reserves at that time. So I wasn't entirely out but pretty much so. Because I found out that I was in the volunteer air training reserves which only meets once a week and you would sit around and talk about current things. They had outside speakers and things like that. It wasn't really a training for any Air Force type thing. I went on an active duty tour in 1950 because I was between jobs and I needed a little time to write out resumes and this was a good way to do it. I spent a couple of weeks doing that and getting paid for it. I was in Detroit at Selfridges field. My reserve training continued on that weekly basis—

[End of tape 1, side B]

Johnson: —until 1957 where I got into a pay a crew in the Selected Service System, in 1957. And that worked out. By the way, Milo Flaten who you interviewed was also in that. And we had a fellow that I knew from school, he was a teacher in school, Victor Lancing (Lanning?), he started this unit up. And they had units all over the country, Selective Service. It was small. Some of them were Army, some were Air Force, some were Navy. Ours happened to be an Air Force unit but we also had Army people in it and Navy and Marines. In strength of about a dozen, maybe a little more or a little less depending on the ebb and flow of people. The Selective Service System reserve was a super outfit to be in; people in it were absolutely top notch. They picked out good people all over the country to be in the thing. It was a real -- I mean, when I'm saying selective, they were very selective. So I was real lucky to get into this thing. The reason I got in this thing wasn't because I was so great but it was because I knew Victor Lancing (Lanning?) and he came around from high school and Nacoma School where he was a teacher. So he started this thing up and he asked me if I had any names. So I had a couple of names I could give him, so we got some pals in there that were friends socially and so on. Then Victor died in 1962 or 3 I guess, and then I became the commanding officer of the unit then.

Mark: Until what time?

Johnson: Until I got out in 1974.

Mark: I see. So you were involved in the Selective Service activities through the Vietnam War.

Johnson: Yeah.

Mark: I can't remember if I asked Milo about this or not. Was that a rough time to be in the business of the Selective Services?

Johnson: It wasn't a very terribly popular thing; our image was pretty low, the reserves were pretty low. We did train on Monday nights, we'd train every Monday night,

and we had a forty-eight drill deal and two weeks active duty. So out of the fifty-two weeks were fifty weeks that didn't allow you to be off much. You couldn't get sick or you can't be going on vacation, things like that. We were meeting at the state head quarters for the Selective Service System which was just adjacent to the campus. And they were trashed.

Mark: Where was it? Was it in the Red Gym or where was it?

Johnson: No no, it was just off of Regent street, over near the stadium, on one of those off streets one block off. As I say they were trashed by some people, came in and took records and strewn them all over and tore them up. So we spent a fair amount of time bringing these records back and trying to resurrect them. They were all not micro filmed or any thing, it was all pretty much—

Mark: They weren't all on computer like they perhaps would be now.

Johnson: No. Well the whole system now is down to nothing now, all they do now is register people and all they have to have is a name on it. But it was a – our active duty tours were informative and fun and interesting. I was in Washington about three times on tours of duty and so were the rest of the people in our unit. General Hershey was our commanding officer of the thing and he was a four-star general, and he had a lot of clout.

Mark: Did you know General Hershey personally?

Johnson: Sure.

Mark: Nice guy?

Johnson: Oh, down to earth guy. You know, he just didn't have any -- his military bearing was probably, on a scale of ten, about a three. But he was just a good ole Indiana boy and so he was a terrific guy to get along with Congress. Of course that was a big thing to get along with Congress because I think their budget was something like sixty million dollars a year to run this thing, which was just like a spit in the ocean as far as money—. They blink and they spend more money than that. But it still was not a very popular thing and they were in a difficult situation because the military really didn't want a lot of people. Fighting the Vietnam War didn't require -- we had like two million people come of age every year and they were only taking like maybe six, seven hundred thousand. So something had to be done with the rest of these guys. If you went to school you were out, if you had any kind of an excuse your draft board would give you an excuse. But some of the people that were against the war didn't like that. They wanted to be written up in the paper, so they would defect and do all kinds of screwy things that they didn't have to do to get deferred. As I pointed out, they could only take so many. The difficult thing was that a lot of the people they were taking were the less educated. Now after going to school, people are going

for six years sometimes. They may never get out of school because maybe if you do you might get drafted if you kinda lose that 3-A deferment. So they were taking—I'm speculating a little bit on this—they were taking a lot of black people and they were a little bit up in arms saying, "Wait a minute, you know, how come we are the ones that have to defend this country? This is supposed to be a across-the-board type of thing." And the military weren't terribly happy either because they like to get educated people, otherwise they have to try to educate them. It was getting to be a more sophisticated army, and you had to be to smarter in order to operate it. All that equipment they had was expensive and difficult to handle.

Mark: Did the lottery system effect the way you did your work at all? When that was introduced in 1969 I think?

Johnson: Well of course, that lottery system was just another way to cut down the inventory of people so that we didn't have that two million surging in continually. So the lottery system was a way of saying, "Okay, now maybe we can operate this thing and get a better spectrum of education and stuff."

Mark: Yes, that is what I was wondering because that was more across the board? Well we've gotten ahead of ourselves. As you know I'm interested in the Badger Village. So let's start with your discharge from active duty at Fort McCoy. I was wondering if you can you take me through the steps of the discharge and then going back to Madison.

Johnson: Well, the discharge was painless. I mean everybody thought this was great, now we're going to be able to wear something besides this khaki and stuff. And then so after the shaking hands and getting the discharge papers they put us on this slow moving old milk train from Fort McCoy to Madison. I mean it seemed like it took longer for that train to get those few miles than it did to get all the way from New York. But of course the homecoming was just excellent. I was married before I went into the service and I had a child that I hadn't seen now and so now I get acquainted with my child and also my rather new bride. We lived for a while with my folks until we could get into Badger Village. Well we finally discovered that Badger Village was available. That was one of the areas that married people could go and live. Not the best choice really, because they had other places but they filled up awfully fast. So Badger Village was our choice and I had another friend that was a pilot that I had known through Nacoma School and so on. So we were living next door to each other. Now the units up there were, you all most felt like you were in the next guy's place because the walls were so thin.

Mark: At Camp Randle there was a trailer park.

Johnson: Yeah they had a trailer park there.

Mark: You had prefab houses or something?

Johnson: Yeah they were little prefab houses. They were one bedroom, a living room kitchen thing, and they were one right next to another. One story. No basement in it, just a kind of crawl space there. So people were kinda on top of one another. You could hear conversations if you really wanted to concentrate on that and turn the radio down. But the price was low, the price was like seventeen and a half dollars a month and that included the electricity. We had two fifteen amp circuits coming in and that wasn't much and you can't load that up or you will blow the fuse. Housewives soon learned that they couldn't plug in the hot plate and a space heater on the same plug in deal there or that fifteen amp fuse would go. The gals all had hot plates because the only stove we had was a wood stove and nobody knew how to use those.

Mark: There were wood stoves in these little—?

Johnson: Yeah wood stoves. And they had pot belly stoves for heat that used soft coal, which we had to buy. We had to buy the soft coal. You would crank that thing up in the winter time so that it was nice and warm and hot and red hot, you know. You would bank it at night so the next morning you would open up the draft and it would go PACOOO and up would go black smoke all through, which gave your wife some thing to do all day in order to get the thing cleaned up and ready for the next day. So the living there was not exactly like being a pioneer going across the country but it was not exactly what you could call being in the laps of luxury.

Mark: No, it doesn't sound like it. Were there many fires? I can't imagine there wouldn't of been any with these coal stoves and electricity.

Johnson: No, they didn't have fires. They had, of course, around the stove they had a thing for embers, an inert material there, probably something against the law, a fibrous material that could breathe and stuff like that. But we fixed the place up. We put some wall paper up and we finally bought a little seven cubic-foot refrigerator to replace that thing that you used with the ice, you know, the old ice box, empty the water and stuff like that. Seven cubic-foot, now this is really small, but as soon as the neighbors found out we had this with the little freezer chest across the top they were all knocking on the door bringing their peas and corn and beans and frozen stuff over to stick in our refrigerator. So pretty soon our refrigerator is full of everybody else's stuff, not ours, then they would be knocking on the door to come and get the stuff. Then you open it up and it isn't there. So now there is a problem about who stole their or who has eaten their peas or whatever. We never could reconcile. We finally just had to say, you know, "We just can't do this, it's no way to operate. Now we'll just have it just for ourselves." But that was not popular thing, we became unpopular. You don't want to have too much more than the next person or they might stone you.

Mark: Yeah. What sort of – was there a community center? I lived in Eagle Heights for more years than I care to think about any more. But there is a community center up there and there were certain social activities. Was there any sort of thing like that up there?

Johnson: Yeah, they did. They had a school there that had been erected for the people that worked at the Powder Plant. And this had a place to play basketball. Not a full size gym but it had a high enough so you could shoot baskets. They could have dances there or parties, card parties, where you could have a number of people. Socially it was difficult to entertain in your own unit because it wasn't big enough. So if you invited a friend over that was soon known and people would say, "How come you didn't invite me over? It sounded like you had a lot of fun." Because they could hear what was going on. So I think what we found out, and you find out things as you go through life, we found out that being really friendly with the next-door neighbor is not maybe a really wise idea. As life has gone by we have been friendly but not super friendly with the next-door neighbors just for that reason.

Mark: Just to clarify something. When you came back you had just gotten married before you entered the service.

Johnson: Right.

Mark: And you had not seen your child before.

Johnson: No. No, my daughter was born in early July and I was on a rest leave at the time and I didn't find out about it until the next group came up. So it was like about maybe four weeks before I found out that I was a father and what the gender was. So my daughter was five months old when I got home. But anyway back to Badger Village; it cost us two bits a day to ride the bus, and that was a round trip. And the people that, talking about the fuses and stuff, they'd load the fuses up and they wouldn't blow them but they had, everybody was right up to the very top and then the oil fuse would go out on the transformer. That darkened the whole place so now nobody could cook. They had to wait for the guy to come out from Sauk City to put in a new oil fuse in. It would take maybe an hour to get him on the move and he'd come out and climb the pole and put the fuse in and POOW it would go again because everybody would still be on line. He would only bring one fuse out so now he would have to go back and get another one. By this time people would have given up and they started eating peanut butter sandwiches or going out to eat if they had a car or eat cereal or whatever. So by the second time he put the fuse in things would stay put. But meanwhile you lost all this study time unless you trotted over to the library, the library had a different circuit. They would be lit up so you could read or do whatever homework you had, which was plenty for engineering school.

Mark: I was going to ask. You studied engineering before you went in and you resumed that. In your observation and your personal experience were the veterans particularly studious?

Johnson: They were terrific. They were tough. It was tough going because they were so intense. I mean the education was. There wasn't any fooling around, no socialization of it. It wasn't that there was competition, but competition existed because of the grade averages were higher than they would have been under normal circumstances. The guys were older and apparently wiser and certainly dedicated in engineering. Some of them had had a lot of training in the military, particularly in electrical engineering. Because they had gone through radar school and stuff like that.

Mark: Did that account for credits or would that just give them experience in their classes?

Johnson: No, they still had to take the -- they were given, I was given almost thirteen credits which would have been a normal semester in a regular school. But we were talking about nineteen to twenty-one credits in engineering school to graduate. So rather than just take a couple of classes and as a push off they gave you those from your experience in the military. Every one got that, depending on what they needed. That's kinda what it boiled down to get your final degree.

Mark: Did the veterans get along well with the professors?

Johnson: Yeah, they did. I know that there was some professors that were really shaky. I mean they were old guys that had been there and their tenure just hanging on. I had one funny thing happen when I was taking a mechanics test. I had had some gouges from a couple of friends of mine that were really smart, they had just old tests you know and so on. And I would study those before going in to just get the feel for the direction of where the things were going. So my gosh I sat down to this test and it was exactly the same as the test I had been studying. The numbers were the same, the questions were all the same. All they did was to go back into the archives and pull out this test. So now I wasn't exactly the A student, and you know you developed a path, if you are a C student you were a C student. And here I am I have the opportunity to ace this test. I mean I could get a hundred on it easy, no problem. But I thought, "Aha!" A little wily, so I pulled a ninety-three on it and the instructor was even a little concerned about that. I mean, "Johnson, how come you are so smart all the sudden?" (laughs) I didn't tell him why.

Mark: One of the reasons I brought up that questions was that these professors were used to nineteen- and twenty-year-old pimple-face kids. This was having a lot of difference to them. The professor on the stage and here are these kids. Then

these vets come who have been through a war and that sort of thing. Some of the accounts that I have read there was some stress between the professors and the veterans. "The veterans didn't take any crap," was one of the quotes I've come across. Did you notice any thing like that?

Johnson: Well, it was as I said, everyone that was going through was interested in getting through the school. They weren't going to start making a whole bunch of waves. That, I think, was primarily because some of the professors, as I pointed out, were not exactly gung ho. They were going on their old notes. We spent a lot of time in some pretty silly labs. What kind of coreless steam engine, I mean, you go down to a coreless steam engine lab and you go through that. It's only like two credits but it consumes a lot of time. Time is -- you got to be sitting on that bus going back and forth to Badger Village. You can't study much because you are bouncing around, and it's cold and the lights are bad. So that part, you know, you think, "My gosh why can't they modernize this thing a little bit?" You have to take this heat power lab and the steam engine. I haven't seen one since I graduated.

Mark: But you did it none the less. I have a couple more questions about Badger Village, and then we'll move on. Were there a lot of people with children up there?

Johnson: Yes.

Mark: School age children perhaps?

Johnson: No, I don't think school age. I think mostly they were, I mean, they weren't that old. I might of been one of the younger ones there, but I don't think there were too many that were in school. Some were just starting out, going to school on the GI Bill. Might have been twenty-three or twenty-four years old, so most of them were babies.

Mark: Now this isn't your personal experience, but your wife isn't here and I can't ask her this. Do you know anything about the social activities of the wives up there? Did they get together and did the kids play together and all that sort of thing?

Johnson: In a small way I think they did, yeah. It's hard for me to know because I wasn't there. I don't think they sat around playing cards and things like that. There was a lot of work to do up there. We didn't have a washing machine so you had to do it by hand and that took a lot to get the water out. The big things, why, we would do together like the sheets; we would twist them to get the water out than hang them up outside. She had to do some shopping and we didn't have much money. I think I got ninety dollars and I had a supplemental from the state for about twenty for a while, 'till they kind of ran out of money. We had to make out a financial statement for the state. I came along and saved enough money to buy a

car. So I finally bought a car so I could get back and forth without busing. When they found out I had a car that ended my supplemental twenty dollars from the State of Wisconsin.

Mark: You mentioned being able to hear your neighbors. When I lived in Eagle Heights we had neighbors that fought all the time. And this would be a very stressful situation for a lot of young couples, especially if you hadn't been married that long. I'm wondering if you wanted to, this is a kind of personal thing, but if you could comment perhaps on was there much marital stress, was there much divorce in a place like this? Could you hear your neighbors fighting?

Johnson: Well I didn't hear them fighting but this friend of mine lived next door, they were divorced. You could see the stress of here you got this young bride who has lived in the bosom of her family, you know, with the amenities that they had back in those days. It isn't much compared to what we have now but it was a heck of a lot greater than what you would get at Badger Village. You go to Badger Village and you think, "Wow, this is the best part of my life and here I am fooling around in this place. Having to try to cook on a hot plate, having the thing belching black smoke all over." It was discouraging. Your spirits have to be uplifted some how and it was difficult to lift them because there wasn't much social type activities except the little things that you could do together that were simple. Maybe you had a beer and not even much of that because of the ninety dollars a month. You were mostly eating hamburgers that were laced with bread, meat loaf type things and that continued on and on until there wasn't much meat in it but mostly bread. Stretching, stretching. Because the baby came first, you know, the baby gets so that the budgeting thing—

Mark: I've got one right now, actually. (laughs) I know full well.

Johnson: Well we moved out of there when the rats started to become aggressive.

Mark: Really.

Johnson: Yeah. There was a thing in the paper, the *Chicago Tribune*, where some baby had its nose bitten off by a rat while it was sleeping.

Mark: At the Badger Village?

Johnson: No, in Chicago. It was in the paper so when my wife saw that then I couldn't sleep after that. If the rats started going gnaw gnaw gnaw I would get kicked out of bed and I would have to go over and kick the wall. That would shut them up for a while and then they would be back gnawing on the wall again. You could hear them. They were down underneath in the crawl space. So we got out of there after about one year.

Mark: Then you moved into town?

Johnson: Moved into town.

Mark: One more question on the village. In terms of transportation about how long of a trip was it on the bus?

Johnson: Well, the bus was, depending on the route they took and conditions of the road, you know it would be probably forty-five minutes. Sometimes they would take an alternate trip so they didn't have to go over that hill if it was snowing or so on. They had a number of them and they were all the old little school buses for little kids. The seats were uncomfortable. The worst ride I had was one that was real old that had bench seats along the sides and they had the mother-in-law door that opened up into the wind and the door stuck open in the middle. When we were going home why that blast of air would scoop through the thing. We were sitting huddled up as close as we could get to keep warm to keep from freezing to death.

Mark: I was going to ask about winter. Were there just some day where you just didn't get to campus? Was that a problem?

Johnson: They closed it down one day and that was a day that my friend and I, he had a car so we came in. I don't know how long it took us, hours for us to get in. They were plowing the roads, they had fifteen feet of snow piled up on the road in some places. They came through with Caterpillar tractors and we would inch along behind the tractor until we got to where it was wind swept and then we could go. When we got in there school was closed, we took the whole trip for nothing. I think it was the first time they had closed the school down because of weather.

Mark: So you've mentioned that you used the GI Bill to finance your education.

Johnson: Right.

Mark: Was that the case with most veterans that you knew?

Johnson: Yes.

Mark: Did you ask that sort of question? I don't know if you even asked that.

Johnson: Oh, we were all on the GI Bill. It was probably one of the best things the government ever came up with. As far as educating a work force of people that could do something for the country. The investment was terribly wise.

Mark: There were other aspects to the GI Bill other than the educational part. There was the 52-20 Club. You went to school so you might not of taken advantage of that.

Johnson: I got on to that in a little interim time from the time that I came back and the time I could get into school. The timing I can't remember why, for some reason I got back in November and school didn't start until January fifteenth or something like that. So I had a little period of time that I could get in on 52-20. Not too long but some.

Mark: There was a housing provision as well. I was wondering if you used the GI Bill or perhaps a state program to buy a home when you finished college finally or were you able to finance it your self.

Johnson: Yeah right. My dad was a great help. He owned some property around. He had a small house that we moved in to when I got back from Badger Village. And then when I got out of school I was able to start paying him some towards buying the house.

Mark: So when did you finish your education?

Johnson: In summer school 1948 I graduated.

Mark: You went to work soon after that.

Johnson: Right after that.

Mark: You stayed in Madison?

Johnson: I stayed in Madison.

Mark: Until today.

Johnson: No, I went to Kenosha for a couple, two three years. I worked for the Simons company there. I worked for Gissel Machine Tool company when I got out of school for about three years. Then I worked for Simons Company, then I came back and went into my dad's business.

Mark: I just have one—

[End of tape 2, side A]

Mark: —last area to cover, and that involves reunions and veterans organizations. I wonder if you ever joined any veterans organizations while you were in college or after that, and why or why not.

Johnson: Yeah, I belong to the Hump Pilots Association and they have a meeting every year. I go to not every one, but it's been really a wonderful deal. The first ones that we went to, why, I had one good friend of mine that I flew, but we were the only two people. Then they had a meeting down in Little Rock, Arkansas, oh about six or seven years ago. One of the guys that was on the committee was also a member of our squadron and he just got on the ball and just wrote to everybody. So it ended up that we had we had about twenty-seven people from our squadron attending that. Now we are really getting down to the old buddies getting together. Now the stories are flying like mad.

Mark: About half of them true?

Johnson: (laughs) They can re-live all kinds of things and it really was great fun. They were all good people. So now every time we go to a reunion we see them, and this makes a reunion more meaningful. 'Cause there were a lot of people flying the Hump. We had the Air Transport System, ATC, and we had Troop Carrier, and we had Combat Cargo. I was the 4th Combat Cargo Group, so there were four groups. We had a hundred airplanes in ours and they did in theirs too. Some of them were flying 46s and some of them 47s. So we had, thousands of people were flying over in Burma, in India.

Mark: When did all this start up? I assume it was quite a few years after the war.

Johnson: Oh no, the Hump Pilots Association cranked up soon after the war was over.

Mark: Were you in college when you started to go?

Johnson: No, no. No, no. I didn't start doing that until I had enough money to. I think it cranked up probably in the late '50s when the Hump Pilots Association, because it takes a while for something like that to materialize. Then you have to gather in the names of people and set up budgets and how much money are we going to charge to belong to this thing. Get an executive secretary and mailing out the newsletters and things like that. It is a real wild thing. I think they got something like three or four hundred thousands in the kitty. Which is a big bone of contention every time they have a meeting. Says, "Where are we going to do it at?" Well they said as we get smaller it's going to cost us more per unit in fellow to keep this thing going so we have got to have it in the kitty to do this. The executive secretary has to be paid and big mailing costs and all that. But they have written a couple of books, a big thing, and people contributed something that happened to them during the time that they were in the war. So it's is a valuable outfit.

Mark: What about the Legion and VFW groups, did you ever join these them?

Johnson: No. You see, I was busy as a reserve officer. I was involved. There wasn't any reason for me to get into some social type deal like that. I had plenty to do as a Commanding Officer. When you start going through the ratings of Navy, Marines, and Air Force and Army people, they are all different. You have got to do a good job otherwise they don't get promoted. You have to say nice things about them. Some of the adjectives that you use for the Navy don't operate for the Army. They are separate but equal. You say, "exceptional," not good, see. That'd be good for one outfit but not good for another. So don't make the mistake of giving them a "superior" or "exceptional" or "outstanding" or whatever.

Mark: Different language for each of the services. Well that's pretty much all I had. Is there any thing you would like to add?

Johnson: No, I think I have just about run out of gas.

Mark: Well, thanks for stopping in. I appreciate it. Let me turn this thing off here.

[End of interview]