

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
LYLE E. JOHNSTON
Infantry, US Army, World War II

2016

OH
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Johnston, Lyle (b. 1925). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate length: 2 hours 16 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Eau Claire, Wisconsin resident Lyle Eugene Johnston recounts his service in the Army during World War II from April 1943 to February 1946. Born in South Dakota and raised in Proctor, Minnesota Johnston was drafted into service a few days after his eighteenth birthday. The interview covers some of his life before service and then proceeds to his induction and his basic training at Camp Roberts (California). Johnston was also stationed at Camp Stoneman (California) and was transferred to Spokane, Washington before being assigned to a unit and deployed overseas. Johnston served in the Pacific Theater with the 7th Infantry Division. As a part of the 7th, Johnston participated in combat at Kwajalein, Leyte and Okinawa. He and his unit landed on mainland Japan just before the war ended. Johnston did not have enough points to be sent home with the 7th and so he was reassigned to the 98th Division and sent to Korea. In February 1946 Johnston was discharged and returned home to Proctor, MN. Other topics of note in the interview include: carrying a flamethrower that weighed about half of the narrator, the gruesome nature of heavy combat (at least one very close call and the loss of many friends and fellow soldiers), Japanese civilians seen jumping off cliffs to avoid capture, living conditions during the war and having brothers and then sons who were also in the military.

Biographical Sketch:

Johnston (b. 1925) served as an infantryman in the 32nd Regiment, 7th Infantry Division during World War II and saw combat in the Pacific Theater. He was discharged in 1946.

Archivists' Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2016.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2017.

Reviewed by Tristan Krause, 2017.

Abstract written by Ellen Brooks, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

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Brooks: Today is Thursday, January 28th, 2016. This is an interview with Lyle Eugene Johnston, who served with the Army, and this is what I have here, 3rd Battalion, I-Company, 32nd Regiment, 7th Infantry Division.

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: And during World War II, from April 1943 to February 1946. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Johnston's home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks and this interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans' Museum Oral History Program.

Johnston: Oh, wow. Okay.

Brooks: Yeah. [Laughs] So let's just start at the beginning, if you can tell me where and when you were born.

Johnston: April 22nd, 1925.

Brooks: All right, and where?

Johnston: In Timber Lake, South Dakota. [Laughs]

Brooks: Okay. So did you grow up there?

Johnston: No. We left. They had a big drought, and the farming wasn't anymore, and my dad was a tractor mechanic, and an automobile mechanic, and he couldn't find work. So, he—his brother-in-law said that they were hiring on the railroad in Proctor, Minnesota on a DM&IR [Duluth, Missabe and Iron Range Railway] Railroad. So, he went up there and he got a job, but there was five of us boys—four of us boys that were born, and we were all packed up in a car, and my oldest brother was—let's see. I was two, so he was five. And I had another brother who was three. Yeah, three. And then a younger brother that was just born, so there was five of us bo—four of us boys that moved to Proctor. And it was a little tiny town. Do you know where it is?

Brooks: No, I don't.

Johnston: It's just above Duluth, atop the hill above Duluth. It's a railroad town, and that's—that was the main thing that was going on there, was railroads.

They hauled iron ore, which that was just shortly before the war started that they were hauling iron ore day and night because of the—because they knew what was coming and they were hauling iron ore to help, and then they were making munitions, and airplanes, and stuff like that for Britain. And so they needed all that, all that stuff so they were hauling pretty heavy, and my dad got a job at the—it was during the Depression in the—let's see. I was two when we left, and so he got a job at the railroad, but they only worked so many days a week. And I was a middle child, and I had two older brothers, and two younger. And so every time we got a pay day, they went to Duluth to buy groceries because it was cheaper down there, and then they would go to the place where they had clothes and stuff, like. People donated for clothes for people to come there and take the clothes, so. It was a strange [laughs] —I was a middle child, so I always got to go because no matter whether the clothes were too big, they'd fit my two older brothers, and if they were too small, they'd fit my younger brothers. [Laughter]

Johnston: So I always got to go because [laughs] it was, that was the way it went, and it was—it's a strange thing. You got food commodities and different things like that, but not much of that just—just enough to, you know, tide you over and—and then the money that my dad made on the railroad, he brought us all up and then we had two more children—and then he had two more children. And another, had the only girl. She's still alive. And then we had the, I had a younger brother, and he's no longer—I'm the only boy left out of the five boys. And my sister, she lives in Texas. And we lived in Proctor. We lived in the fairgrounds because my dad took care of the fairgrounds. And it was a little tiny beehive house there, and it was just two bedrooms.

[00:05:02]

And can you imagine? Five boys and my sister living in one bedroom?
[Laughs]

Brooks: That's a lot.

Johnston: They had a double bed, but they had a bed that pulled out from underneath. I forget what they call them now.

Brooks: Like a trundle bed?

Johnston: Yeah. Well, yeah. That's what it was, a trundle bed. So, the two younger ones slept in the trundle bed, and then the two older ones slept in the other bed. So, that was a full-size bed, but we were kids, so it was okay. Little fights now and then, but—

Brooks: And all this time, were you going to school?

Johnston: Yeah. I started school when I was five in Proctor. It was a good school, yeah. It was a good school. I went all the way through and they had, during the Depression, they were lucky enough to get money from the federal government for—oh, what do you call it? They call it the program where they would build things, like the school in Proctor, they built them a new gymnasium, and it was a—and a swimming pool! Can you imagine that? In the '30s, '37? And I was in fifth grade, I think, when they opened the pool. But you couldn't go swimming unless you were so tall because the pool was so deep, you know. [Laughter] So, if you were too short, you couldn't go swimming because they didn't have anybody watching you. So, anyway, we were—I was tall enough, so I could go, but it was—that's how I learned to swim, and it was a really—back in the thirties, in '37, '38, '39, and I was—one time, when I was fifteen, that was in, would be '40 or '41. I was fifteen. My uncle and my—lived in South Dakota. He was married to my mother's sister, and so it was during—just had started the war, and they, down in Texas, they had a big drought, so all the sheep were dying. So, my uncle and a few of his friends, they got together and they hauled up five or six thousand sheep, and because they had all this land, and nothing on it. So, it was my job. I was a sheepherder. [Laughter] They had a little house, like a covered wagon, and that's where I slept. I had a rifle, and a horse. Of course, I didn't know how to ride, but. And then I had two Russian wolfhounds. Big, they're big, big dogs, about 130 pounds. And they would watch the sheep because the coyotes were really bad. So, they'd sit up on the hill, like, there and they'd watch, and if they see any coyote, the female would take off running, and she would chase that coyote, and they invariably run in a huge circle, maybe fifteen miles or something like that.

Johnston: And they come. They come back by when, they come by. The female come and sit by me, and the big male, he took off. In less than two or three hundred yards, he had that coyote down and dead, so. That was something to watch them. But then they, they would run right over the top of the sheep to get to the other side. Yeah. They'd run right over the top of them. [Laughter] It was the most amazing thing, and pretty soon they got—saw that they found it easier to chase a sheep and kill them than wanted to chase coyotes [laughs] so they had to get rid of them. But it was something. I was there one summer, in South Dakota. Timber Lake, South Dakota. Yeah.

Brooks: And do you remember when the attack on Pearl Harbor happened in 1941?

Johnston: Yeah. It was bowling, sitting, bowling pins in a bowling alley in Proctor. They had a little bowling alley there.

[00:10:00]

And, yeah, it was quite a thing because the bowling stopped immediately and everybody run over to listen to the radio. And it was—there was a number of the fellas that were already out of school. They left immediately because they were going to enlist, so.

Brooks: And what were—what was your reaction?

Johnston: Well, I was only fifteen, but I figured I'd wait. They wouldn't take me, anyway. I wouldn't, even if I lied about my age, you could tell I was as young a—

Brooks: [Laughs] But you knew you wanted to go in?

Johnston: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We knew that that's where we were going to go, no matter what we did. That's where we were going to go because—and a lot of the fellas, because when you got drafted, nine times out of ten, you were going to go in the Army. So, some of the guys left when they were seventeen so they could go in the Navy and the Marine Corps. And so, a lot of them left before their senior year was out, and they—so they got what they wanted. But it's strange, when I got my call, I would turn eighteen in April, and I went the next month for physical down in Fort Snelling, Minnesota. And when we got down there, they were asking the guys if you want to join the Navy, or the Marine Corps, or the Army. It's strange, but when you went into Marine Corps, you were no longer a draftee. The Marines always said they never drafted, but they did, but they changed them to volunteers. So, the Marine Corps actually drafted people in '43 and '44, so. [Brooks laughs] I mean, every time I see them being bragged about, yeah. I say, "Well, I know all about you."

Brooks: You said, well I bet—

Johnston: "You're not pulling anything over me. I know." I was right there watching them, but anyway.

Brooks: So then when you were drafted, did you have a choice?

Johnston: No. [laughs]

Brooks: They just said Army for you?

Johnston: I didn't have a choice. Yeah. Yeah. And I went in the Army, and—

Brooks: Do you remember what the—your—how you were feeling when you got the draft notice?

Johnston: Well, I knew that I was going to get it because I turned eighteen. Anybody eighteen, you're going to get a draft notice immediately. Because there was, you know, they had—they were short of cannon fodder. [Laughter] That's what you should say. But they were drafting them almost immediately, and I went down there and took the physical, and then they—you could go home for, you were supposed to take care of your affairs. Well, I was an eighteen-year-old kid. I didn't have any affairs. [Brooks laughs] So they gave you, I think it's ten days, and then you reported back and then you were officially in the Army. [Dog barks] That was in August, August, late August of '43. And they put us on a troop train, and troop train must've taken it out of Buffalo Bill days [laughs] because it was something. And well they had, an Outfit on there for making food because we were going to go to California, and they had food on the train, but the—it's a funny story. They gave us these biscuits, and you were supposed to wash them, scrub them, wash the [inaudible] or something like that because they had a coating on them. And if they didn't do that, you got the runs. [Laughter] A lot of the guys didn't clean their biscuits and they got the runs. Well, there's only one bathroom on a great big railroad car. I mean, imagine what that was like. [Laughter] It was—anyway, we were on troop trains quite a while.

Brooks: And when you ended up heading west, were you with anybody that you knew, anybody from Proctor?

Johnston: Just, just, yeah. I didn't really know them that well because they were from Duluth, and we overlooked Duluth. [Laughter] Anyway, they—we all got there and we all went to Camp Roberts, California.

[00:15:03]

That was an infantry and field artillery where they put you through, you know, indoctrinating you, went through all the stuff, marching and stuff like that, and the rifle range, and the bayonet drills, all the things that they did in basic training. So, we had basic training was, it was because of the war, they shortened our basic training to thirteen weeks. Normally, it was seventeen, eighteen weeks, something like that. And when I got done with basic, then I was—they had you assigned. I was going to be an infantry replacement, and so they let me go home for, I think it was seven days, and I got home. It was—and my older brother just came home. He was in the Army and he was in the Tank Corps in Texas. And we got to come home together. We had a hell of a good time. [Laughs]

Brooks: Yeah? What'd you guys do?

Johnston: Well, we went visiting all the local taverns and stuff like that. Well, they

used to come through and they'd say that, "Anybody that's not eighteen, or twenty-one, you better get out." But they were wearing uniforms, so they didn't say anything at all. [Laughter] So that's how we got to, got to a number of different taverns, and we had a good time, even took my dad and took him out. My mother was not very happy about it because we brought him home. He was a pretty happy guy [laughter] so we had put some of our uniforms on him. So, he was a Navy guy from World War I, and so anyway. We fixed him up with all kinds of stuff.

Brooks: And do you remember how your parents felt about having two sons in the service?

Johnston: Well, eventually there was four.

Brooks: Oh, wow.

Johnston: But that was after the war. Well, my brother that's two years younger than me, no he was—he got drafted just in '45. The war was winding down quite a bit, so.

Brooks: Did they—did either of your parents ever talk to you about how they felt about you leaving?

Johnston: Well, it was sad, because I had never been away from home other than herding sheep [laughs] but because in those days, you didn't go. You stayed home, and got a job, and probably got married, and stuff like that, but. Everybody knew where they were going to go. A lot of the guys had already gone because they were in the Navy or the Marine Corps, and they didn't have a—they had an Air Force, but it was the Army Air Force. There was no separate Air Force. So, and we got to California, and we had—took the basic training, camped out in the hills, and stuff like that, and—

Brooks: How did you—

Johnston: Fire tra—fire and shooting all the [dog barks] all our weapons and stuff like that on the firing range, and bayonet drill, and all different things, and did lots of hiking, lots of sometimes ten, twelve miles in a full field pack, rifle, helmet, everything. And I was pretty tough on that. I only weighed 135 pounds. [Laughs]

Brooks: Wow! How tall were you?

Johnston: Well, I was close to six feet.

Brooks: Wow!

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: You were a skinny kid.

Johnston: Yeah. Yeah. So, I ate everything they had. [Laughter] I used to volunteer for KP when we were out in the field for a field exercise. Then, I'd get to eat all, all the food that was left over. [Brooks laughs] So, after thirteen weeks in basic training, I weighed 140 pounds.

Brooks: Okay. [Laughs]

Johnston: So anyway, it was—so we did all those physical exercises, and went to a few schools, and it was—we got to go, after so many weeks in basic training, we got to go to town. We were given a—and then we got just a one-day pass. It was never—we never—an overnight pass. And we went to little towns like that and had a few parties and stuff like that. People were—they saw hundreds of thousands of soldiers in their little San Luis Obispo, and I forget the name of the other town.

[00:20:12]

But they were so used to the GIs being there that they just got to be just an old thing. Never—just another GI, so. But they were good. They had USO [United Service Organizations Inc.] and they had some dances and stuff like that. Of course, I never knew how to dance anyway, so. [Brooks laughs] I enjoyed the food they had, though [laughs] and so. And it was all right. I was glad that I didn't go down to Louisiana down to that swamp country where all the mosquitoes, and the bugs, and the snakes, and the alligators, and stuff like that are out. And so I was lucky I got to go to—it was up in the mountains in California.

Brooks: And did you know pretty much right away that you'd be going to the Pacific Theater?

Johnston: No. Nobody knew. Nobody knew. Just—it just—like the Marine Corps or the Navy, they all went down to South Pacific, so. Anyway, no we did not know and we got our orders, and we got a—we had that delay enroute though, so I got to go home for seven days, and we had to find our way home, and only home. So it was tough. Sometimes, I didn't get home until—I only had two days left [laughter] and I had to go back, so. And anyway, but I got to go home anyway, and say goodbye to everybody, and so when we got back, we went to Camp Stoneman, California. And then from there, we went to—got one of those old trains, got on it, and went all the way up to Washington. Spokane, Washington, and we were going through the mountains, and we looked up ahead. You, once in a while, you

could see the engine. They're all steam locomotives. They all burnt coal, and that's all they burnt in the railroad in Proctor, too. It was coal. And when the steam engine was going around one corner, we looked. It was a DM&IR railroad train. That's what, the ones they were using up in northern Minnesota!

So they had brought them all the way out to California and pulling those troop trains [clears throat] because they were big. They were the double boiler. They were—they called them Mallets and they were the biggest steam engines made at that time. That's the biggest one they ever made, and that would pull those big, long troop trains through the mountains where they didn't have to have two trains and two engines. I was surprised [laughter] and so when we got to Washington, they put us in the barracks, and they—of course, they gave us all our shots for overseas.

R. Johnston: I'm going to go in here and I—to the bathroom, and I'll sit and read my "Reader's Digest." Okay?

Johnston: Okay.

R. Johnston: I think I can get through here. Yeah.

Johnston: Can you get by?

R. Johnston: Yeah. Yeah, I can.

Johnston: We've got to—yeah. Fort Ord, I think, was the name of the place there in California, and they had—you had to finish all your shots and stuff like that, and then they gave you equipment for going overseas and stuff like that. And so you got loaded on a cruise ship. It was a USS *Matsonia*. It's still in operation today. It was a huge ship, passenger ship. But what they did, they plugged up all the other decks. They plugged up so there's no light showing on the out—and they had all the bunks and everything on the outer, on the outer deck, stacked three or four high, and that's where a lot of guys got—I know I and three other guys, we got a state room.

[00:25:10]

But pretty soon, they put—pretty soon, there was six of us in there. [Laughter] But it's the only place they could smoke. I didn't smoke and two of the guys in there, they didn't smoke. And they'd come in there, because you couldn't smoke on the out—on that deck that was enclosed, so they'd come in there. Man, it was horrible. I finally traded one of those guys, one of those smokers, his bunk out on the upper outer, on the deck, you know, and his bunk bed, so. At least I got out of that smoke-filled air, because man, that—it made me sick. I almost got sick a bunch.

Brooks: Did you ever get seasick?

Johnston: Once, but that was later on, and we were—so we got there at Hawaii, and we set up camp right below, there's a place there called Pali Pass. It's a big mountain. It goes over the mountains into downtown Honolulu, and it's a switchback road. Yeah. You'd almost see your taillights [laughter] when you're going around the corners. And so, we got to go to Honolulu a number of times, but then they shipped us to—oh, it was a big base there, one they bombed pretty heavy when the Japs attacked it.

Brooks: Pearl Harbor?

Johnston: Yeah. It was, but it was the name of a—it was a certain, I can't remember the name of the place, but it was a big barracks. So, we did some exercise and walked in the mountains, and did firing exercise, live firing exercise, and stuff like that.

Brooks: And at this point, you were already attached to your—

Johnston: No.

Brooks: No, you weren't yet.

Johnston: No. This is all, we were all suckers waiting [laughter] to be assigned.

Brooks: Ah.

Johnston: So anyway, when we got down, when your name would come up, they'd call, and they took a whole bunch of guys, and, "You're going here," or, "You're going there. You're going there. You're going to report over here." Schofield Barracks was the name of that place in Hawaii. So, I was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. They were just got, came down from Kiska and Attu. They were fighting in Kiska and Attu when the Japs attacked the Aleutians. And they can—boy, they were a total mess when they'd come back. Those guys had frozen feet, frozen hands. They never had proper equipment. They never had winter equipment when they attacked the Japs and then they fought off. On one island, they were killing one another. They thought they were the Japs, and they were the—Japs had already left! And on that island, and they were shooting at one another. But they were really a mess. They didn't have any winter equipment when they were up there or anything. You really felt sorry for the guys because I don't know how they ever let them go into combat later because they didn't look like they should go anyplace. They looked like [laughs] they should go home. But anyway, they worked with them and stuff like that, and so. And we got loaded on board ship, and we left

Hawaii and we went to Kwajalein. That's a small island in the South Pacific. I can't spell it, but.

Brooks: That's okay.

Johnston: It's got a funny name and the Japs were there, but we fought alongside the Marines. The Marines were there and I met two of my friends that I went to school with that were in the Marines.

[00:30:00]

They're both—they're both gone now, but they were okay, you know, in the Marine Corps there, and they died later on. And it was—we got there, and the fighting was almost over. So, they gave me a flamethrower. I weighed 140 pounds and the flamethrower weight eighty-five. [Laughter] I'm climbing up and down those mountains. Everybody was grabbing me by the shoulder straps and helping me get up, and it was—then we got done on that island. When we were waiting to board ship again, they brought in some more replacements, and I found the biggest guy I could find, and I gave my flamethrower, and I took his rifle. [laughs] He says, "I don't know nothing about flame throwing." I said, "Neither did I, but I'll show you." [Laughter] So, I showed him and so then, I became a rifleman.

Brooks: Why did you get the flamethrower in the first place?

Johnston: Because I was a young kid that didn't know any better. [Laughs] Yeah.

Brooks: So you—did you pick it, or someone handed it to you?

Johnston: Yeah, they said—when I got in there, they said, "Well, you look like you could handle a flamethrower. This is yours." Man, the first time I put it on, I thought I was going to break my arms, my shoulders. It was biting into your shoulders, and it—it was heavy. It was fully loaded with the flame retardant stuff we had. It was, you know. It weighed eighty-five pounds. Maybe that's why, my brother always said, "You always walk stoop-shouldered." I said, "Maybe that's [laughs] the reason why. I don't know." But anyway, it was—I carried it, but we didn't, we didn't do much fighting on the island because the island was pretty well taken over and we did—I did use it at a couple pillboxes, but whether there was anybody in there or not, I don't know. But so, then we, when we got done with that island, then we packed up and we went to [pause] oh, shoot. Leyte. At Leyte. I don't know how you spell it. I think it's L-E-H-T-O or something like that. Leyte or—

Brooks: I think, yeah. I'm pretty sure it's got a "Y" in there.

Johnston: Yeah. Yeah. That was a Japanese-held island in the Philippines, and the

Japs were pretty well—had quite a few people on there, the Japanese people. We made the landing and come over the mountains, and it was quite hilly. And [pause] it was [pause] well, I'd never really seen heavy fighting like that. We had a lot of snipers and lost a few people and had to be so careful where you stepped because they had booby traps all over the place, and they were hiding in caves and [clears throat] they were—at night, the Japanese were sending small boats and they were reinforcing the island with troops from the main island. And we didn't know it at the time, but—and so we—and then they had Halsey. He was the chief of the Navy forces. This is a true story, now. They got a big thing, that there was a huge Japanese attack force, aircraft carriers and stuff like that, heading right down towards where we were. He took his whole Navy and went chasing after them. And the Japanese had two small fleets. They were coming from up different straits alongside of Kwajalein coming up, and we didn't have nobody. There was a couple, they left a couple cruisers or something like that, and some, and some destroyers and they took everything. They took our troop ships the food, everything!

[00:35:12]

We had very little to eat on the island and we had no like K rations. [Laughs] If you know what they are, they're—they're not very good eating, that's for sure. But anyway, he ran away and left us! And the Japs were coming down, and those Navy ships that he left, boy, they took a pounding. I think one cruiser got sunk and the—and we kep—they kept screaming at—what'd I say the name was?

Brooks: Halsey?

Johnston: Hmm?

Brooks: Halsey?

Johnston: Yeah. Bull Halsey. They're screaming at him to, "Get back! Get back!" And he wouldn't even—still chasing those [inaudible]. And they turned around, and took off, and come to find out, they didn't have any airplanes or anything on those ships. They had nothing! There was a false to lead Halsey away, and they did that. And they really raised hell with us out on Kwajalein. No, it wasn't Kwajalein. It was Leyte.

Brooks: Leyte, yeah.

Johnston: Yeah, it was tough because the soldiers kept coming across the straits and the Navy; they really did a hell of a job, the ones that he left there. But anyway, they finally screamed and hollered enough at him to get his ass back here [laughs] because that's where all the Japs are, and he bound and

determined he was going to—he did sink, I guess, a number of ships, and I think he sunk an aircraft carrier, but there was no airplanes on it! The Japs were so short of airplanes and pilots, especially pilots. They had pilots that were—they were around in the war. If they were lucky, if they had an hour flight time before they sent them into combat. And but before that, there was Navy pilots they had on the Jap ships. They were re—they were good pilots. They were holding their own against American fighter planes and stuff like that. Anyway, after they got shot down, they didn't get picked up like a lot of the American fliers got picked up. He finally got back, finally had come back. And they were going to fire him and send him back to the U.S., take his command right away from him. But, he was a hero before, so they—he didn't. They didn't. I don't know if they ever—I don't think he was ever put in charge of a big fleet. I think he was like a second command after that. I'm not sure. But anyway, they wanted to fire him. MacArthur wanted to fire him because—send him back to stateside, that's all the good he is. He don't listen. He don't listen. So, anyway.

Brooks: And while he was off, were you in—

Johnston: He was way away! He was a thousand miles away from us.

Brooks: Yeah. And on the island, was it pretty much combat every day?

Johnston: Yeah. Every day. Every day. And we found that we had some sad situations where the Japs were holed up in a cave and stuff, and they had civilians, [pause] women and little kids, maybe some men once in a while, but not very often. And when we were going up to these caves that [pause] the Japanese were pushing us, kids holding them [??], coming out behind them and firing at us and killing us. It was a [pause, crying] so what would you do? So. Wow. We tried to get them to lay down, but some of them didn't understand and it was just sad. Couldn't let the Japs get away, so.

[00:40:00]

Somebody starting firing and so we all did, and so. Can't blame anybody, but it was a sad situation because we probably hit women and children, but we didn't leave any Japs alive after that. We allow them to surrender no matter what. So.

Brooks: Did the way that you approached combat change after that?

Johnston: Yeah. Quite a bit. Brought a change right there, a change right there. We didn't take prisoners. Yeah. We did later on, well that's later on when we were on at Okinawa, but we'd kill everyone we could find, and they tried to take, get boats, and tried to—the Navy sunk a lot of those ships that were hauling troops from the little island over at [inaudible] island and the

Navy sunk a lot of them, and alligators got a lot of them, and sharks and stuff. So after that one, they tried to escape from the island by getting on the boats. Well, we just—we shot them all up. We didn't let them get away. So. Anyway, that was—your mind changes. You just wonder. What would you do? What do you do? So. It was a—that was our first time that we've ever had to—I've ever had to do anything like that. I don't know if I hit anybody or not, but I was shooting just like the rest of them. You would try to hit the Japs, but they were hiding behind the others. So.

Brooks: And when something like that's all over, do you talk about it amongst yourselves? Or how do you cope with it?

Johnston: You always—nobody said anything because they knew the—they knew that they did something really bad, and it—so, we didn't do—we talked about it once in a while, but not very often. No, no. Didn't want to talk about it. Nobody did. So, we just kind of pushed it under—well, they'd say, "Push it under the rug" and stuff like that. So, it was a— [pause] so anyway, we finished up on Leyte and they—we weren't there very long, maybe, maybe three or four months.

Brooks: And this was in 1944?

Johnston: Yeah, something like that, '44, yeah. And then we went, put a—got on board ship and we didn't know where we were going to go and they never told us anything [Brooks laughs] in detail. We were heading out and it was quite a trip up to where we were going, which was Okinawa. And we had a big ceremony saying goodbye to our people that didn't make it on that December day [??] and stuff like that.

Brooks: At Leyte?

Johnston: Yeah. We had a big ceremony and we had to bury a lot of them there. So.

Brooks: Do you remember how many lost from—

Johnston: Oh, I don't remember. It was—

Brooks: Too many.

Johnston: It was—we had—I had the, what do you call them, squadron I was in. There's twelve men and I think we lost four out of the twelve. A couple of real nice guys. One was—one was my good friend. [laughs] He had a—he was a little Mexican from not Arizona, from New Mexico. He was from—he was drafted. He was an American citizen and he was the same age as I was, and a really nice guy. His dad used to send him loaves of bread, but inside the loaves of bread was little containers of real hot sauce.

[Laughter] He would drink that down like it was pop.

[00:45:02]

R. Johnston: Donald [??]?

Johnston: What?

R. Johnston: Would you do me a favor?

Johnston: What?

Brooks: I'll pause.

R. Johnston: Will you turn—

Johnston: He let me taste some of that hot sauce, and I'll tell you, I thought my tongue came off. [Laughter] It was hot! And he was drinking it, like, he was sipping on it! Actually, his dad used to send it. That's why he would hide it in a—he'd send him a loaf of hard bread and be—the bottle would be inside there.

Brooks: Do you remember his name?

Johnston: Pardon?

Brooks: Do you remember his name?

Johnston: I used to know it. [pause]

Brooks: It's okay. Maybe it'll come to you later.

Johnston: Yeah. I was thinking, trying to think of it the other day, and I—you lose so many that—

Brooks: It's a lot of things to remember.

Johnston: Yeah. And then the other fellow was—well, that was a different time. But anyway, that was—he was—he and I were the best of friends. We had a lot of Mexican people in our Outfit because when the—during the war, there were allowing people from, young men, from Cuba and from Mexico, to come in. And if they enlisted in the service, they would, when they finished up the service, they were automatic American citizen. Did you know that?

Brooks: I didn't.

Johnston: No.

Brooks: It's not surprising, but, yeah I never—

Johnston: Yeah. You always, there were, you know, they needed manpower and stuff like that.

Brooks: Yeah.

Johnston: And yeah, we had a few from Cuba and they were nice guys. Well, once in a while, a bunch of the Spanish people would get together and start jabbering in Spanish. [Laughs] We got mad at them one time and said, "You're in American Army. Speak English." So, then they were pretty good after that because they thought we were going to beat the hell out of them because they [laughs] could—we weren't—we thought they were talking about us, you know? We didn't know. So anyway, they were—they didn't jabber anymore in Spanish and spoke English. They could speak English pretty good, too, especially ones from Cuba. And he spoke English too, because he was—he had gone all the way through high school.

Yeah. Anyway, when we—and we left Leyte. I have to think back a little bit. We pulled into Okinawa. We were sitting out there in these troop ships and waiting for the people that were landing before us. There was Marines and Army. [pause] They were just playing around on the beach. They didn't leave! They were riding horses and everything. The Japs weren't even bothering them. They shot at them a few times, but not very much. [Laughs] We're sitting out there. They put us on these little tiny boats. LCVPs [landing craft, vehicle, personnel] I guess they called them. And we were out there in a big circle going around, and around in a circle waiting for them fat heads to get off the beach because we couldn't come to shore. I said, "Get out of there."

And we got sick. If you ever get behind a diesel truck or a Greyhound bus, and that diesel fumes. To this day, if I'm behind one of them, I just stop and pull over or get around them. I can't stand diesel fumes. We were out there for three hours circling in that diesel fumes from all those boats, were diesel fumes. That's what they had, or if you—and the sky was blue. It was so bad. And we circled out there, I would say about two or three hours.

Brooks: Why did you have to wait for the other folks?

Johnston: They wouldn't get off the beach.

Brooks: Why did they need to get off the beach?

Johnston: So that we could land.

Brooks: So you could—okay.

Johnston: There wasn't any place to land. All their boats were all over the place.

Brooks: There was that many of them.

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: So you needed them to move on so you can get in.

[00:50:06]

Johnston: Well, they didn't care if we landed or not. They were having too good a time. [Brooks laughs] They weren't going to get off the beach and get shot. So anyway, it was—I got sick and they—I was laying down at the bottom of the boat. There wasn't much room to lay down, but I was laying down there because it seemed to settle me down a little bit, rather than everybody was doing their thing over the side. [Laughter] And I didn't want to join them, so. Anyway, I was laying there and the guy got up next to me and he was—tripped over me and he let go right in my face. And I joined him right there. [Laughs] It was—because they really fed you good before a landing. Most of the time, you couldn't eat, so we used to take some of them food and stuck it in our pockets, you know? Oh, it was horrible. I could've killed that guy, but he was so sick that—so he went up over the side and there I am in a mess. [Sighs, laughs] It went over me. Finally let us go ashore. I took my blouse off and I took my helmet off, and left my rifle and everything there, and ran out in the ocean. [Laughs] Tried to wash that off, but there's no way you're going to wash it off. And nobody would even come near me for [laughs] because I smelled so bad, but it was—so the first—sometimes, some of the casualties that we had, some, they would, sometimes they would come in after being shot or whatever, and they would throw their clothes because they didn't need their clothes because they were working on them. And they threw all their clothes in a pile. So, I went over and I got a better jacket. [Laughter]

So. It was, we started up the mountain, and they were—Japs were, that was the first time, the Japs never attacked. They kept moving back. They kept moving away and we had to climb those damn mountains and they were looking right down, right down at us. Some of the cliffs, we couldn't get up. We had to go around and they were waiting for us when we went around. So the cliffs were almost straight up, and they would sit back out of sight and drop hand grenades over the side. Where would we go? We

were stuck looking up at that thing and we had to get the hell out of there, so we went back. I don't know how they did it but it's another Company or something that finally got around and they wiped them out on a—there wasn't very many of them up there. They were holding up the whole regiment, the whole battalion, or whatever we had, and they finally went along the cliff face there and they were on top of that cliff and they wiped them out so we were able to get around. Otherwise, I don't know how long we would've stayed there [laughs] but there wasn't very many of them, the Japanese there. They held up the whole, us all, for must've been a day and a half at least, and couldn't advance. Tanks weren't any good. They couldn't get up there. Anyway, we just—they finally got around. We all went around then, but it was quite a long cliff, surprising. And the Japs were all holed up in that big castle. There was a castle there. They were—we chased them all the way to the end of the island and they were—they kept moving back, so we didn't really—oh, we got quite a few of them, but there was—they kept hiding on us and you'd only, see, two or three of them would hide in a hole and sometimes you'd walk right by them and they shoot you in the back.

[00:55:12]

Sometimes you had to turn around and go back after them [laughs] behind you. So, but that's why they were there. They didn't come out and scream and holler and attack on that island. That was the first one. I guess they learned their lessons on the other ones. But anyway, we got almost to the end of the island, and there was that big castle, and a big mountain. And they were all holed up in there, and they had honeycombs of cave, after cave, after cave. They would come out and shoot and run back in the cave, and even with a flamethrower. We could shoot in there, but they're already gone too far back. So it was just, you just had to go in after them. But that was tough to do because every little turn and stuff like that, well, they would throw hand grenades around the corner and you were out in the open and they were hidden. So anyway, it was—it took quite a while and when we finally got to the end of the island, they're—hear the—a lot of the Jap soldiers were jumping off the cliffs, the big cliff. And women and children were jumping. I don't know why. I guess they believed what the Japs told them, that we were going to attack them, and kill them, and rape them, and stuff like that. They took their little kids and jumped. Sergeant, he grabbed the one woman with her child and he tried to stop them, and she fought him, and she pulled him over too. He went over. So, we didn't—we then figured to step back and let them jump. So, that's what we did. So, I don't know how many other GIs tried to help them and it happened to them, but—

Brooks: Did you have any translators with you?

Johnston: Hmm?

Brooks: Did you have any translators? Anyone who spoke Japanese?

Johnston: Well, some of the Japanese people, that's a Japanese-held island. It was a home island for Japanese, so there wasn't very many—there was a number that could speak English, but we didn't—if they could speak really good English, we would. Otherwise, we didn't keep them. We'd turn them in to the captain, and we had some white guys that could speak Japanese. And they would talk to them, and they'd turn them around, and using him as an interpreter. Then, we found out one guy was a doctor. He was educated in the U.S. and one Christmas, before in '40 or something like that, he and his family went back to Japan for a visit. And they kept them there and they wouldn't let him go, and they forced him into the Japanese Army. He was a doctor, an American-trained doctor. And he finally let us know that he's an American citizen, actually, what he was! And they drafted him and put him in a Japanese Army! That was really strange. He was no spring chicken, either. He was probably in his early forties, maybe. But he had a wife and child, and his son was drafted too. His son was sixteen, seventeen, something like that. They wanted to go home and they wouldn't let him go home. They kept him there in Japan. That's what they did to him. [Laughs] So. He's a nice guy. I only got to say hello to him once when I brought in a prisoner, but he was—interrogate him and stuff like that. So. It was—we didn't have very many prisoners. They did, they fought, most of them fought to the death. Even when they were wounded, they were still fighting, so.

[01:00:15]

Brooks: How did you end up bringing in a prisoner?

Johnston: He was knocked out cold.

Brooks: That helps.

Johnston: Someone hit him over the head with a rifle button, so. Lieutenant says, told me, he says, "Drag this SOB back and" because the interpreter was really close behind us, and the captain or lieutenant, he was another interpreter. He was U.S. Army and so I dragged him back there, and he finally came to, and they were talking to him. And so they—he was sixteen. Fifteen, sixteen years old and he was a student and they were so short of troops that they drafted him, and set him, and half the time, whether he was lying or not, I don't know, but I didn't stay around. But the captain said, "Yeah. He tried to tell us that he didn't even have a rifle." Somebody got shot or something, and he would pick the rifle up and—you're supposed to pick the rifle up. And whether he did or not, I don't

know, but sometimes they—sometimes they lie a lot. [Laughs]

So anyway, it was a dog-eat-dog world. Lost a lot of good guys. That's what was not too bad about the irony [??] because you didn't know. You didn't really. You just knew about them. You know, you'd talk to them and stuff like that, and find out where they're from and stuff, but as far as being really friends, you only had a couple, really, of really good, good friends, and that really hurt you when they were wounded or killed, so.

Brooks: Did you have any close calls of your own?

Johnston: Yeah. [Laughs] Yeah.

Brooks: Hard to avoid?

Johnston: Yeah. [Laughs] I and two other guys were in this foxhole on a ravine. We were on one side of the ravine, and the Japs were on the other side of the ravine. And the, our artillery was firing. The three, three guns were firing. Well, two were firing hitting that ridge over there where the Japs were, and the third one was going right down our side. Guys were flying all over the place, flying over the foxholes and stuff like that. And they finally got them to stop, but the guy who I was with, one was a really Ital—young Italian man. He lost his left hand, and that's where that New Mexican boy, they—he got killed, so. That was that time, so.

Yeah, that was a sad time. Laying out there and they come along and I was out of it. I didn't know. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't move, and they were—took my dog tag, half my dog tag, and my rifle, and they thought I was dead. [Laughs] But I could hear them, but I couldn't talk. It's just—it was a shock. And so then I finally came to, I chased after them and I got my dog tag back and I got my rifle back. So, that was [pause] first sergeant, he was a smartass, anyway. Nice guy, but always smarting off about something. He said, "What the hell you come back here for, Johnston? I thought we killed you!" [Laughter] But he was always smarting off like that. Well, a while later, he was a jeweler. He had a—he was from New York and he had a jewelry store. He and his dad and his family had a jewelry store. Frost, his name was. Sam Frost. Nice guy. Sometimes. [Brooks laughs] Sometimes he was a little smartass, too, because he thought us people from—he thought anybody that was west of the Mississippi were nobody.

[01:05:04]

[Laughs] They thought we didn't know nothing. [Laughs] It was strange how they talked, you know? They thought the United States ended at the end of the New York State line. [Laughter] But, it was a lot of—a lot of

them were—he was, he was Jewish, and our lieutenant was—what the hell was his name? He was Jewish and [pause] I don't know if it was because they were Jewish that they didn't send them to Europe, but I know a lot of Jews that went to Jew—went to Europe, but they were—sometimes they didn't want them to go because the Germans would find out they were Jews and shoot them. That's what they, that's what they did. But, he was nice. Blum [sp??]. Blum. Lieutenant Blum. He's a great guy. Little, skinny guy, and he had a—every, every month or so, they'd get a ration of rum and he didn't drink. He didn't smoke. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke. And he would line us all up in a row, and he'd give us all a shot of rum. [Laughs] Nice guy.

Brooks: Split it between everybody?

Johnston: Huh?

Brooks: Just split it between everybody?

Johnston: Yeah. Well, as far as it went, as far as it would go. Yeah. [Brooks laughs] He got two bottles. I think one was whiskey and one was, oh, brandy. One was brandy, and whiskey, and he'd go as far as it would go, and if he went all the way to the end and he had some left, he'd start over again. [Brooks laughs] Nice guy. [Laughs] I never drank whiskey before, but anyway. It was, he was a nice guy. He didn't make it. He didn't make it. He was always out in front of everybody and [pause] he didn't make it, so.

Brooks: Do you remember where you lost him?

Johnston: Someplace on Okinawa. I wasn't with him, but I just heard about it later. Because you, sometimes you're so—he was a Company commander at that time. He was our squad leader at one time, but then he got—when we lost officers and stuff like that, the other got promoted up. He got to be captain. So, we didn't see him much after that because we were in a different squadron, different areas and stuff like that, so. But he was a nice guy. He was a schoolteacher. That—he was a schoolteacher! I didn't even find that out until after he—when we were—they were talking about him. He taught in some New York school there. Mmm, I bet he was a good teacher. Yeah. Because he could talk to people and he could understand, you know, and then stuff like that. He was, he would tell you what was going on. It was—he was a good teacher. [Laughs] But we had a few Jewish people in our Outfit, yeah. I don't know if it's because they wouldn't send them to Europe, or what, but I know there was a number of Jewish people that [inaudible]. Yeah, my brother was telling me that. They had some Jewish people in his Outfit and they always said that, "If we get captured, I'm going to shoot myself." Yeah. Whether they did or not, I don't know, but. That was their attitude because they, if the

Germans found out you were Jewish, they would have shot them anyway.

Brooks: So your brother was in Europe?

Johnston: Yeah. He went to Europe. He went to—I sure wish that he would—he would've—he talked to me a number of times. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. He was the first—he drove a half-track. You know what a half-track is?

Brooks: Mm-hmm.

Johnston: It's the most ungodly vehicle you ever seen in your life. There's no protection. So, the top is wide open.

[01:10:01]

You just throw a hand grenade and wipe them all out. But at one time, the half-track—they had four .50 caliber machine guns and after, when the war was pretty well progressing along and they got the Germans, there wasn't very many German airplanes left anymore. So, they moved him up to the front. And you know what his job was? When he'd find a pillbox? He'd keep shooting with the four .50s and just tear it all apart. That, that was his—so he got up in front like he wasn't supposed to, but he got up there even if he wanted to [laughter] because he was a, he was the driver, a half-track driver. But they were in the Battle of—they were the Battle of the Bulge, and he was the first armored units that crossed that bridge at Remagen. Did you ever hear about Remagen?

Brooks: Mm-hmm.

Johnston: The Germans were supposed to dynamite it, but they didn't dynamite it, and then their whole unit got across, plus a whole bunch of infantry got across, and then the bridge fell in. It fell in. You know, there was quite a few guys that lost their lives because they were out in the middle of that thing when it went down. But they already were building another bridge alongside of it, so. "And dad," he said, "I didn't know what I was going to do," he said, "sitting over there." [Laughs] And waiting for some help, and he says, "There was no help coming." But the Germans were already pulling back, so he said it wasn't too bad, so.

Brooks: Were you and your brother able to communicate at all while you were in?

Johnston: No. No, no, no, no.

Brooks: Too difficult to get letters—

Johnston: Yeah, yeah.

Brooks: Back and forth?

Johnston: I never could write letters. I'd get letters and they would get so soggy and stuff that—hey, that's how I got my diploma! I never got my diploma, you know. I left. I got drafted out of the, out of high school.

Brooks: Oh, really?

Johnston: Yeah, and when I got over to—they sent me my diploma. [Laughs] And then, in the jungles there, you got it in your barracks bag. It rains [hits hands on table] and the sun comes out. It rains [hits hands on table] and the sun comes out. It rains [hits hands on table] and the sun comes out, and all your clothes are all mildewy, and your boots were all falling apart, and your clothes were falling off. They're all white from the sand and stuff, the salt in the water. Yeah.

Brooks: So they sent you your diploma and you had to carry it around?

Johnston: Well, we never carried the barracks bag. They loaded them up on these little small boats. After we went ashore, then they loaded your barracks bag because they, they figure, "Well, if you ain't coming back, what the hell's do you need this for? [Laughs] We don't want it." So. They left it on the beach and the shore, and so they got soaked and wet, and mildew, turned, turned green and turned white and stuff like that. Sometimes the natives would dig into them. We had writing material and stuff like that, and stamps and stuff. Well, we didn't really have stamps. We had those—what the hell do they call them? Envelopes. What the hell do they call them? We could write a letter home. We didn't have to have a stamp. They were always read by an officer or something. They were supposed to be, but. What the hell do they call them? [inaudible] thing?

Brooks: It's a certain type of like military mail?

Johnston: Yeah. They were envelopes and they had a—you would open the envelope up, and you wrote inside the envelope, and then sealed it up, and you'd put your name on there, and you weren't allowed to put, you know, where you were or your address or anything like that. And what the hell do they call them, anyway? We used to send a lot of letters home that way and sometimes we would write the letters and leave them in our barracks back and come back and went out and left them. They're all moldy. [Laughter]

[01:14:48]

Brooks: So did your diploma make it back home with you?

Johnston: No.

Brooks: No. [Laughs]

Johnston: No. We had an experience when we were in—we got loaded up and on our—we were going. We were going, we were loading up and going to Japan after the war was over. It wasn't over yet because we landed in Japan two months before the peace treaty was signed. We landed in Japan and we came ashore just like a regular combat landing. Here was all these little Japanese kids waving at American flags [laughs] on the shore, on the beach. Yeah. That was really something. [Laughs] But we came ashore. There was no fighting. That's all we saw, and then—

Brooks: This is mainland Japan after Okinawa?

Johnston: Yeah. We landed in, right by Osaka, Japan right on the beach. The lieutenant couldn't find any of us when he got to shore. [Brooks laughs] Maybe I shouldn't—maybe you should shut that off for a minute. [Laughs]

Brooks: You want me to pause it?

Johnston: Yeah. [Laughs]

Brooks: Is it—okay, we'll pause it.

[End of OH2060.Johnston_user_file 1]

[Beginning of OH2060.Johnston_user_file 2]

Brooks: Okay, so this is the second file for the interview with Lyell [sp??] Johnston, January 28, 2016. All right. So you are on mainland Japan.

Johnston: Yeah. So we were in Japan and they sent our regiment to Korea! We went to Korea. Of course, the war was already over. The peace treaty had been signed and we were sent there to disarm the Japs because there was a lot of Japs in the army bases. They were still there waiting to be discharged, and I suppose some of them were Koreans too because the Japanese had a lot of Koreans in their army. But they, we got to Korea and that—we were in—I had a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] and there was an interpreter [hits hand on table] and a lieutenant [hits hand on table] and a driver, and we were running around there and looking. We knew where they were, and so we were camped and then every day, we'd go to a different camp or wherever it was, and the interpreter and the other guy would talk to—tell the Japanese they were—that the war was over, you know, because some

of them, some of them, they didn't really believe it, but anyway.

That was our job and they would—then the lieutenant would—he would have to go around and call all the trucks, and the Jeeps. They didn't have Jeeps. Tanks, and any other military vehicles, you counted and put them on a piece of paper, and then some guys would come, were supposed to come later and pick them all up, and they put them on a barge and dumped them in the ocean. Did you know that? We did the same thing. They were doing the same thing when we left Okinawa. They were dumping tanks and everything in the ocean off of Okinawa. Airplanes! Brand new airplanes! Dumping them.

Brooks: And the American Army didn't want to use them or bring them back or too much?

Johnston: Well, they had so many and they had more coming because the people, whoever were building the tanks, had a contract. They were supposed to deliver so many tanks. And what the hell are you going to do with all the tanks [laughs] if you got all these other ones? But the Army ordered them, so they have to take them, so. That's what they did with them, a lot of them. But anyway—

Brooks: Can I—

Johnston: This lieutenant was—and then when we went over to look at them, here in this—the guy that was in charge of the camp, he had them, all them soldiers, take sledgehammers and bust the blocks so they weren't any good anyway. So, the lieutenant was, he could speak pretty good English, he was talking to our lieutenant and they were having a good talk and stuff like that, and hear comes the major. He comes strutting up there, Japanese major. Man, he really thought he was the cock of the walk. Because man, when those guys seen him coming, they all snapped to right now and they stood just stiff as a ramrod. And he walked up to that lieutenant and he had a little quirt. You know what a quirt is? A little wire leather thong, went and had a handle on it and had a—and he slapped that lieutenant across the face. Split his cheek wide open. Man, he was screaming and hollering at him because he didn't want him talking to that American soldier.

So, the lieutenant took that quirt and he slapped the major across the face with it. And boy, you should've seen those Japanese soldiers. [Laughs] They looked like they were just—they were so—thought that was so wonderful, you know? [Laughs] You could see it in their face, but they didn't dare say anything, you know? So anyway, I had that quirt. I brought it all the way home with me. And you know, I never knew what happened to it. And anyway, the major was, turned around and he strutted off back towards wherever he came from, and the lieutenant was standing

there with that whole mess, bandage. And a couple of Japanese soldiers come up there with big bandages and they, they helped him and so anyway, we left because we didn't want the damn trucks because [laughs] they destroyed them already! We didn't want them in the first place. So, that was my experience in [pause] where the hell were we? Korea!

[00:05:20]

Brooks: And just to back you up a little bit, when you were in Japan, you said you got there about two months before the end of the war? So were you preparing for combat or more—

Johnston: Yeah. We made a combat landing. We were just like, we were going into combat because we didn't know. The Japanese hadn't surrendered yet. They were going to but they hadn't signed. The big, the big Navy Brass and their big boats hadn't come into the Tokyo Harbor yet. We were quite a ways from Tokyo. We were way south in Osaka and Kobe. They were like Minneapolis and Saint Paul, right across the bay from one another. And we landed in Osaka. Another Division, I guess, landed at the other, by the other town. But anyway—

Brooks: And had the bombs been dropped by that point?

Johnston: The bombs had already been dropped. Yeah. Well, that was another thing. They took us on a trip down there. We saw what they'd done. We never went to—we only went to one. It was Nagasaki. That was the first one they dropped. Boy, they sure—you should've seen some of those people, the scars and the stuff they had in their face and it was horrible. But anyway [pause] if it was a little kid, yeah, but if it was the grownups, I thought it was good enough for you. [Laughs] But anyway, we did go to see them. It was horrible, though. There wasn't much left of the town. A few buildings, but they were all—they were just hollow. There wasn't anything there, so. And then they gave us R&R [rest and recuperation] for a week. They sent us up to a big castle in the mountains. We had bed—they had breakfast in bed and we had three meals, and they had the Japanese—you'd leave your shoes outside the door and they would polish them, and they would wash your clothes, and they'd make the bed, and it was—we were living the life of Riley. [Laughs] That was one week, and then when we got back to the—we moved into an old cavalry base. It was a former, belonged to all the [pause] it's where they kept all their horses there.

Brooks: Like a stable?

Johnston: Yeah. It was—they were, and it was a big stable but they had a big barracks. The barracks was 300 feet long and three stories high and it was

probably thirty feet wide. And we were, I was up on the third floor, and our whole battalion was in that one building, and we were up there. All of a sudden, they said, "It's on fire." Here, some guys were cooking in one end of the building, and a fire started. It was all wood, all old wood, and the Japanese had always used oil and stuff for whatever, to clean the floor, you know, and stuff, oil-soaked. And before you knew it, it went through the attic and it was all the way down, all the way down the other end of the barracks. And we were, I was about maybe three quarters of the way down. I grabbed my stuff and I got the hell out of there when the smoke was coming out the other end of the building and they were screaming to everybody, "Get out! Get out! Get out!" And so, I was going down. I got down to the second floor, and some guys were hauling their—we had little cots, like Army cots, with all their stuff on top. Well, the smoke was coming pretty bad, and so they abandoned them, and I fell over them on the second floor and I landed up on the first floor.

[00:10:03]

So anyway, I've—somebody come along and picked me up, and because I was dizzy, and got out and the whole thing was up in smoke and from one end to the other, it was totally gone. Totally gone. And it didn't take long. It was amazing how fast it went. Well, we lost all our stuff. I had some—I had a couple rifles, and I had a Samurai sword, and a pistol. Oh, I had some Japanese flags too. Everybody had flags, but I lost them all, and I lost them, all my clothes and stuff like that. So anyway, they were—they come along and they took us into this other barracks and we had to double up with another Outfit, another barracks the same size. And they were in there, and they were interviewing all of, every individual guy, and they come individually. And they come to me, and they said they were dropping the point system. Do you know what the point system is?

Brooks: Mm-hmm.

Johnston: They were dropping it so far each week, and if you had that amount of points, you could go home. So, I wanted to go home with the 7th, and they said, "You don't have enough points to go home with the sevens." They said, "You only got—I think it was sixty-five points you needed, seventy-five or something like that. It depends on like if, like you got so much for a combat entry badge, so much for each month you were overseas, and so much for a bronze star or a [pause] Presidential Unit Citation. And so, I didn't have quite enough because these guys had come from Kiska, Attu. They [laughs] had, they had a lot of points. I said, "Well, why don't you give me some of your points and so I go home with you?" [Brooks laughs]

You know, anyway they transferred me to another Division. I went to the

98th Division and they never, they were supposed to send my records to the 98th. They never did. I got all the way back to—then when I finally got enough points to go home, we got—come through the Golden Gate Bridge. We weren't—and you got to an Army camp there and it's, it was another little town by San Francisco. They woke us up at two o'clock in the morning and said, "Your train's here. You're going home." So, we got loaded up on this, another one of those old, I call them jitneys, [laughs] little old-fashioned railroad cars. The cars were pretty nice, though. They had big, high seats and they were, had pretty upholstery on them because they were old. They were using them for just putting them like in a museum. They took them out of the museum, plus the engines. Of course, the engines were still steam engines. They didn't have diesels.

And so we took off for—we had to—we went to [pause] where did we go? Saint Louis, Missouri, and then they [clears throat] we were held up in Saint Louis so we went to town and had a good time in town. So, and then we got a hold of a cab driver and he took us to this hotel and we had a good time in the hotel, and so when we got back, we missed the train. We missed the troop train. There was about six, seven of us. So we didn't know what to do, and so they took us to the airport and there was an Army transport plane flying to this base in Wisconsin, McCoy. Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. So, they took us there and they flew us there. We got there before the train did, so anyway. Here was my brother from, over from Germany. And we had a real good time. [Laughs] So.

[00:15:10]

Brooks: So he was at Camp McCoy, too?

Johnston: Yeah. He was being discharged. Well, he got discharged before me because he was there ahead of me. And he went home, and he says, "I'll tell them, though, you're all coming." [Laughter] So it was something, and they lost—they had a big fire in Saint Louis. I didn't find this out until later. I thought—they never gave me my papers. They gave me the papers from the 98th Division. And then when I got home, I didn't think anything about it because they said they'd send them to me. And I got home, and about a year later, I was—I went to the VA [Department of Veterans Affairs] and asked them, "Well, I didn't get my papers." He said, "Do you know what happened?" I said, "No." He said that, "Where we stored all your papers burned down." I said, "Well, everybody's?" He says, "Yes." Thousands and thousands of GIs lost everything. So, I never got any papers, never got any "where I was" or "what I did" or anything like that, so.

My son, Richard, he's a—he was a two-star general in the Air Force and he looked it up, looked it up all for me, and because he knew where I was

and stuff like that, and he told me what medals I should have and what our Division was awarded, like what do you call them? Presidential Unit Citation. That's not an individual medal. That's a unit citation. And he said, "Your battalion was given the bronze star." So I said, "Well, I got a bronze star." But [hits hand on table] I said to him, "Well, so what? I don't get no bronze star!" [Laughs] So anyway, he went and he got all that stuff. For me, and then we got a big medal from the Philippines—when the Philippines—we got the Philippines medal for taking them away from the Japs or whatever you call it. So, we got a big, big pretty medal over there from that, from the Philippines. So, that's what I had, so. I never got a Purple Heart because when I got blown out of the foxhole, you had to have blood. You had to have blood to get a Purple Heart and I never had any blood. So [laughs] I never got a Purple Heart.

Brooks: They just thought you were dead.

Johnston: Yeah, they thought I was dead. [Laughter]

Brooks: But no Purple Heart.

Johnston: If I'd have been dead, I'd have got a Purple Heart. [Laughter]

R. Johnston: You know, I can't imagine that you remember all this well. Do you know any other people that remember like what my husband does?

Brooks: Mm-hmm.

R. Johnston: I—it must've been a traumatic time in their life. And they don't forget.

Brooks: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, no. I've interviewed quite a few World War II veterans and a lot of them remember a lot.

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: Do they?

Brooks: So. Mm-hmm.

R. Johnston: Wasn't the [inaudible].

Johnston: We got, another thing that happened, we got—when we got to, we had, went to that hotel and we're all in [inaudible] and I told the cab driver that we had to be back at the train. It was going to leave. So anyway, we were all three sheets to the wind. This one guy from Ely, he was six [feet] three [inches] and he weighed 250 pounds.

[00:20:02]

He's a big [inaudible] woodcutter up here. That's what he did. He collapsed and he, well he [laughs] he was out of it from drinking, and his feet got caught underneath that front seat of that cab, and there was about four or five people that come over there to try to get him out of that. Couldn't get him out of the cab because he's a big man and they finally had to take the front seat out of the taxi cab [laughs] to get his feet out from underneath the—that's, that's why we missed the train. [Laughter] We were waiting to get him out of there, but that was so funny that that's why we missed it. That's why we missed the train.

Brooks: Yeah. So from Camp McCoy, then you were just discharged from there—

Johnston: Yeah, they—

Brooks: And headed back to Proctor?

Johnston: Yeah, they give you money to go home. I think we come home on the bus.

R. Johnston: Was Toby with you?

Johnston: No. Toby got home before me.

R. Johnston: Oh, before you.

Johnston: And I went overseas before him.

Brooks: This was your brother?

Johnston: He was twenty. Yeah. He was twenty when he was drafted, and then they dropped it to nineteen, and then they dropped it to eighteen, almost immediately. And he was down in Texas when I was doing basic training in California and I went overseas, and he was still in Texas. And I wrote him a letter, and he answered it. And I says, "How come you're still sitting there in Texas?" I said, "I'm overseas already. What the hell's the matter with you guys? We need help!" [Laughter] But I don't remember if he answered me or not. I never got much mail because they would—we were moving all the time and it was—well, I never wrote much, either. That's all.

Brooks: And one of your younger brothers went in during World War II as well?

Johnston: He went in late when the war was—he was two years younger than I was, so he went in and he got drafted in '45.

Brooks: Oh. That's right. That's right. You said that.

Johnston: So he never went overseas. He was the mechanic on light planes, like the artillery spotters used for flying over enemy lines and stuff like that. That's what he did, but he never went overseas, but he was in during the war. Yeah.

Brooks: Where was he stationed?

Johnston: In some place in Oklahoma?

R. Johnston: You talking about Wayne?

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: Okay.

Johnston: No, Bob.

R. Johnston: Oh, Bob.

Johnston: Yeah. Wayne went in later on and he fought in Korea. He fought in—he was in for twenty, twenty-two years. He fought in—

Brooks: Was he in Vietnam?

Johnston: Vietnam, yeah. But he was, by that time, he had gotten out of the Army. He said, "I want nothing to do with the Army," he [laughs] said, "because they just make a grunt out of me." So he said, "I got out of the Army and reenlisted in the Air Force." So then, he was a radio ground-air and he was flying in those AWAC [Airborne Early Warning and Control, AEW&C] planes? You ever hear of a AWAC?

Brooks: It sounds familiar.

Johnston: That's a big airplane with a big dome on the top. They called in fighters. They called in bombers when they got the order from the ground, ground-air. That's what Wayne was doing, from air to ground, and he would receive from ground to air, and he would pass on those orders. So, he wasn't really in Vietnam. He was in another country, flying out of that country on these AWACS planes. He said it was a—he said that they were way up, you know, and then [pause] so they flew over, they flew over Vietnam and stuff like that, so. And then he finally finished out and he got out of the service. He was married and he had, what'd he have? Three kids? Four kids?

R. Johnston: You talking about Wayne?

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: Oh, he had probably five.

Johnston: Well, anyway.

R. Johnston: He had [inaudible] kids.

Johnston: He was, just got out of the service and was doing a civilian job and fifty years old, and he fell over dead.

[00:25:06]

Brooks: Oh, wow.

Johnston: Fifty years old.

R. Johnston: I didn't know that Wayne was that young.

Johnston: Yeah, he was only fifty. So anyway, he's—and then my dad died shortly after that in '53. He was, he died in '53. He was fifty-five. He worked for the railroad all the time. So anyway—

Brooks: Did you think about staying in the service?

Johnston: [Laughs] Oh, hell no. No, no. No, no. Not after what they did to us. Nope. Never.

Brooks: So I take it you were happy to get out.

Johnston: Yeah. [Brooks laughs] Yeah, my oldest brother was—

R. Johnston: He [inaudible, overlapping speech].

Johnston: He's gone now, too, my oldest brother, but and I'm the only boy left out of five, and then my sister.

R. Johnston: But she can do anything a—

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: She's pretty—

Johnston: She should've been in the Army. She's tough. She was tough.

R. Johnston: She's, yeah. [inaudible, overlapping speech]

Johnston: She did a lot of softball playing, basketball playing, and she was a—she graduated from college and she was a—become head of the fied [??], all the fied grey [??] schools in Houston, Texas. She said, “I had schools I didn't even know we had.” All the girls and boys fied programs in the grade schools in the City of Houston. She had a hell of a good job. She was a teacher and they were in a school in downtown Houston, a high school. She was the only white person in that school. It was all colored, and she had, there was one big colored guy. He would watch out for her, you know, and stuff like that. He said they would go and they'd have parties and stuff like that. Everybody wanted, all the teachers would each get up and sing. [Laughs] The big colored guy got Ella to get up there and sing, and she's got a voice like I got, and she—and one teacher said, “Miss Byscher [sp??], you got a hole in your soul.” [Laughs] I never forgot that—

Brooks: Oh, wow. [Laughs]

Johnston: But that was so funny that, because she couldn't carry a tune. I couldn't carry a tune, but she was—

R. Johnston: She's a pretty—

Johnston: She tried. Yeah.

R. Johnston: And she's still alive. She's a tough gal.

Johnston: Yeah, she was up here the other day.

Brooks: Yeah. Well, I want to kind of make sure we finish up with your experience. Was there anything particularly memorable about your homecoming?

Johnston: You know, in those days, they just gave you money to go home. You go home, and I was working on the railroad when I was a sophomore. So, I was working for two years on the railroad before I got drafted. I was still going to high school. And they—so you just went home and you got, you had a—what the hell do they call it? They give you so much money each week. I forget what they call it. There was something—

Brooks: It's like five-and-twenty or something like that.

Johnston: Yeah, something. It was thirty-five, forty or something like that, something like that. Anyway, I can't remember but it was something like

that. You got, they paid you so much a week. I was already working and so it was—did a lot of drinking in those times.

Brooks: Any parties?

Johnston: Oh, yeah. All kinds of parties.

Brooks: Did they throw you any parties?

Johnston: Yeah. We took my dad. We dressed him up in his World War I Navy uniform and we put all our medals on him. We took him downtown [laughs] down in Duluth into some of those taverns, and man, everybody in there wanted to buy him a drink for that. “If you can fight in the war, I can buy a drink!” [Laughter] We had to carry him home. My mother was really mad. I said, “Well, it only happened once in a while.”

R. Johnston: Is there a napkin there, Lyle? I need to blow my nose.

Johnston: Nope. Nope.

R. Johnston: No napkin. But that’s all right. You don’t have to get up.

Johnston: Well, there’s all kinds of napkins right behind you.

Brooks: I can pause.

Johnston: That was about all.

Brooks: You said they invited you down to the church?

Johnston: Yeah. They had a—we had a—and they introduced us and stuff like that, and they, then they had a meal for us down in the basement, and that was about it. You know, there was, “Well, you came home from the Army. So what?” [Laughter]

[00:30:05]

R. Johnston: It was—

Brooks: Did you—

Johnston: That was it. There was no celebration or anything, no parade. We never had no parade, so. But I was happy to be part of the parade when the Korean vets came home, so. I was in the rifle squad in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] in Cloquet.

Brooks: So did anybody ask you about your experiences or did you talk much about what had happened?

Johnston: No, they just—if you tried to talk to somebody, “Well hell, this is what I did.” You know? [Laughs] So, what the hell.

Brooks: With other veterans?

Johnston: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway, they were—some of them were bragging about what they did and stuff like that, so.

Brooks: What about with civilians? Did you ever talk to your family or anybody?

Johnston: My brother and I talked some but not a great deal. I wish I would’ve talked to him more because he went through a lot. I mean, he says to me, “Oh, you infantry guys went through a hell of a lot more than we did,” but the way he talked and stuff, what they wrote up about their, what they did, they—he was—he went through a lot, so. I wish I could’ve written it down. I tried to get my—his daughter is the only left and she’s got his discharge papers, and I keep asking her to send those discharge papers because I’d like to put them in here.

R. Johnston: I think—

Johnston: Even if he’s from Texas, you know?

R. Johnston: I think Toby’s picture is behind you, he and Margaret. They’re both gone now.

Johnston: Yeah. Well, they’re both gone, so. Anyway, I sure wish I’d have got in time for Toby to—because what he was doing, they really played it up big, you know. The Battle of the Bulge, the Remagen Bridge. They made movies out of them, you know? They didn’t make any movies about mine. [Laughs] They made movies with the Marines, but not—the Marines, that’s what I always used to say. Marines had two guys fighting and a photographer and a guy talking about him [laughs] behind him. So, they get kind of ticked off when you tell them that, but we never had anybody talk about what we did. It’s just—

Brooks: And you said you joined the VFW?

Johnston: Yeah, in Cloquet. I was on the honor guard and then when I went to—when I went to work for the paper mill in Cloquet. I didn’t want to work for the railroad anymore, and I went to work for the paper company in Cloquet. It was a hell of a good job. I walked in there one day and the guy says, “Don’t you play AA ball in Duluth, softball?” I said, “Yeah” and he

was—I don't know what he did at that time, what he was in that paper mill. He told the guy that was doing the hiring, "Hire that guy." [Laughs] So I got a job. I never took a physical or anything. I just, and I said, "Well, I don't have any shoes and I don't have any gloves." So they looked up in the catalogue and they picked out a glove, and they picked out a pair of shoes, and they sent them up on the four o'clock bus. This guy says, "Go down to the ballpark at six o'clock. We've got a game." [R. Johnston laughs] That was it. [Laughs] So I went down there and played, and then I went back and I said, "Well, I've got to go back to work." "Ah, you don't have to go back to work." So, they went up to the tavern on the corner, had a few beers and stuff like that, and snacks and stuff like that. We had a special tavern where all the ball players went. It was actually the garage. It wasn't in the tavern. They had your name up there on little pamphlets up there, and had a pool table there, had a pool—if you had a pool cue, they kept it and put your name on it and stuff like that. [Laughs]

R. Johnston: Boy, those were the days.

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: Me and my five kids.

Johnston: Yeah. No, I didn't have five kids at that time.

R. Johnston: I did the best I could, and I'm not an athlete, but he married me anyway.

Johnston: I did. I didn't have five kids [inaudible].

Brooks: And you went to college?

[00:35:00]

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: Did you use the GI Bill?

Johnston: For two years. Yeah. Yeah, but I didn't last very long.

R. Johnston: And I'm mad because he didn't finish.

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: But, you know.

Johnston: I got out. And so I was always—I coached little league hockey for, in Cloquet, for eighteen years. I coached my kids in basketball, and I

should've been a [laughs] I should've gotten to be a coach, but anyway. It was fun. I enjoyed that. My wife used to go and watch the football, or the hockey games. We had a nice—Cloquet had a beautiful—

R. Johnston: It was a nice one.

Johnston: We built a hockey arena. We built it by hand. We took all the ore dock's big beams in from Superior. They donated to us. We took them all down, hauled them to Cloquet, and that was the big beams you'd put on the outside. And we put—we had a little Zamboni. You know what they are? Like a little—and then we had a little trailer with a tank on it and we'd drive around making ice. And when we'd get through with the Zamboni, then we'd open the big doors at the end. They called it “the barn” and that would—all the cold air would come in. You'd sit in there, watch a hockey game, you'd freeze. [Laughter] That cold air would freeze that ice immediately. So anyway, we had lots of hockey teams, all of Cloquet, and they were doing so well. We had two kids I had coached, ended up on the Dallas Stars. And another boy that was on the Dallas Stars, but he went to Europe instead because he was small and the big guys were knocking him over. But he was, at one time, he was the all-time leading score for the University of Minnesota. That's how good he was. Corey Millen was his name.

R. Johnston: I'll never forget those guys. [Laughs]

Johnston: And the other boy, the other boy I had, was the Hobey Baker Award when he was a senior. He was going to UMD and playing hockey. That was the highest award you could get in college hockey. And then he went to Dallas and he won the National Hockey League that year! That they were both there. The other one was a boy that was drafted out of high school, went to Canada, played high school hockey in Canada, and when he'd come back, he went to the Dallas Stars. So Cory—Plant [sp??] was the other boy's name. And his—ah, shit. Anyway, they were both on that team when they won the National Hockey League. And the next year, they traded this one boy to the Jersey Devils, and they won the National Hockey League, the New Jersey Devils, and he was the leading score for the New Jersey Devils in the playoffs!

R. Johnston: I still remember all that excitement. [Laughs]

Johnston: Yeah. So then, he was drafted. He was already drafted, you know, and so he went in the National Hockey League and—

R. Johnston: We sure had a lot of excitement. [Laughs]

Johnston: Yeah. Yeah, it was. So, they did so well that the National Hockey League

gave their, the hockey association in Cloquet, \$500,000. And they built a hockey arena adjacent to this one, and they used a—they had a Zamboni by that time because you had natural ice. They drove between the two things, and that was a beautiful place. It was warm [laughs] and you know, it was really, really, really nice.

R. Johnston: You know, it doesn't even seem that all this happened, but I remember.
[Laughs]

Johnston: Huh? But anyway, that other place, it was so cold in there. We had natural ice there because we made it, and it was—then they got—they bought and had put in ice maker in the old one, too.

[00:40:06]

They had, it was called, they used like a salt brine and they had—then we had to put the pipes all the way around and little things coming out on each one of the pipes and the vent pipes, little tiny pipes all the way from this one, all the way across the rink to that one over there. And then they would, they had a special outfit come up from Minneapolis and we had to put these pipes down and we had to put little platforms to hold them up, all the dirt, so the ice would be underneath and on top. It was the most amazing thing.

They had an outfit come up from Minneapolis and they had these three—they were big and they had motors on them, and they had blades, blades on them. They would go around and turn, and they would go around, and these three things, when they flooded the rink, by that time, they had a beautiful Zamboni and it was a big one. I rode it. I drove it a couple of times, a few times, and to put ice down. And when they got the new, all the stuff down for—and these things would come out there and they would put ice on, and these things would go around and never run into each other. Nobody was on them. They would go with a, I suppose they had seeing eyes on them and stuff like that. They went all the way around the rink, all three of them, and never run into each other. They were sitting up there all by themselves just going around. Never seen anything like it in my life. And that's how they made the ice.

R. Johnston: Oh, that was a hundred years old. [Laughter]

Johnston: Yeah. It was. I'd never seen anything like that, and I don't think I'll ever see it again, but that was absolutely amazing. That was in the—they put that in the new building, so.

Brooks: Well, I just have—I have a few more questions about your service.

Johnston: Oh, okay. Okay.

Brooks: Just before we wrap up. So, did you join any other organizations besides the VFW?

Johnston: Well, I joined a legion but then it was—I kind of got away from them, and I still go to the legion up in—my oldest son was, he tried to join a VFW but he couldn't. See, he was a doctor and he had a MASH [mobile army surgical hospital] unit. Do you know what a MASH unit is? He had a MASH unit in Mondovi. He had doctors and nurses all in his unit. During the Desert Storm, they activated him and they sent him to Germany. And they set up there, in a regular Army hospital, they set up their MASH unit and they were taking casualties from Desert Storm. And guess who was flying in casualties? My third son was flying that—he quit flying the F-15 Eagle, so he was flying that three-motored airplane. You know what I'm talking about? It had a big motor in the middle on the top and two on the wings. And he was flying casualties from Desert Storm to Germany, and my son was—

R. Johnston: That's really something.

Johnston: My son would take care of them and they would, in their hospital. So then, the boy that was in—was a pilot, then after that, he was escorting fighters from the U.S. to Desert Storm because they couldn't get across without being refueled. So he would refuel them in mid-ocean. So, he had quite a—

R. Johnston: We had a lot of excitement.

Johnston: Had quite a life. He rescued a lot of people down in Africa when that country—we had a lot of people come to this country from that—that ended up in Minneapolis and Saint Paul from, what's the name of that country in Africa? Because they were overrunning it. The faction, they were killing everybody.

Brooks: Somalia?

Johnston: Hmm?

Brooks: Somalia?

Johnston: Yeah, Somalia. Yeah. They were from Somalia. And he was getting American citizens out of there. He was landing and American citizens, they wouldn't let him go to school here because they had—well, I hate to say it, but they were letting minorities go to school over and above the Americans because they had to have so many minorities in the school.

[00:45:24]

And so these, a lot of these guys were going to foreign schools, and a lot of them were going in Africa, Britain, France, Germany. They were all going to college over there because they couldn't get in here. Do you believe that? Did you know about that?

Brooks: Are you talking about schools like—

Johnston: Colleges. We're talking about colleges.

Brooks: Not military schools.

Johnston: No. No, colleges.

Brooks: Just regular universities.

Johnston: Yeah, just—they were going for their college degrees or to be a teacher, or whatever. But it's true, and that was—

Brooks: And how many of your children were in the service?

Johnston: My children? Two.

Brooks: Two of them?

Johnston: Three!

Brooks: Three of them?

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: Three, all boys?

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: Three of your sons?

Johnston: Yeah.

Brooks: How did you feel about them being in the military?

Johnston: Oh, actually that was all right. That was good for them. [Laughter]
Because one boy that was—when he was going to college, he finished his sophomore year, he was accepted into advanced nursing at St. Scholastica.

That's a really good school for nurses. So, he became a nurse and he enlisted in the Army and they paid for his last two years of college, and gave him a job, and paid him money to stay home and go to school. This was during the Vietnam. They were so short of nurses that they were doing that. So when he graduated, they sent him to Texas and that two, work was wounded—no, not in Texas.

R. Johnston: From the mental—

Johnston: No. They sent him into mental wards. Do you know that there was men from World War II in that psych unit in Texas? And there was some of them so bad that he could not go in to their, where they were locked up. They were locked up. Unless there was three of them, because they were so dangerous. Did you know that?

Brooks: I'm not surprised.

Johnston: There's the old soldiers who were there from World War II. They were so bad, they couldn't discharge them.

R. Johnston: How sad when you think about life.

Johnston: Back, there was kids there that they put right in the front line. When they shot off all those atomic bombs in—

Brooks: New Mexico?

Johnston: Yeah, in—was it New M—I thought it was Arizona. Well, one of the places. And one was my brother's brother-in-law and it affected his mind. He was in there for years, and years, and they couldn't get him out. And finally, when my brother was—he was a big shot on that Southern Pacific Railroad and he finally talked him into—see, they could go and visit him, but they couldn't do anything for him. Only his mother could. She could—they would—she would buy things for him. People would donate money, but they could only—she's the only one that could spend the money. These are true stories. And so, when she passed away, then my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, she became the caretaker, and she fought, and she fought, and she fought, and she finally got them to discharge him and they put him in a nursing home where they lived in Texas. So she could, didn't have to travel, she was in the same town where they were. But he went blind and he was so infected by that atomic blast that he died real young. So anyway, it's hard to believe that. And my son was taking care of some of those people down in Texas at Fort Sam Houston. So.

Brooks: Do you think—

R. Johnston: Tom has—

Johnston: Yeah. Yeah, go ahead.

Brooks: Do you think that you suffered any of those psychological effects from your time?

Johnston: My folks thought I did. [Laughter]

Brooks: Would you agree?

Johnston: Well, I don't have any flashbacks, no.

R. Johnston: You can ask me. [Laughs]

[00:50:00]

Johnston: I did at first because of that being—

R. Johnston: He gets explosive once in a while.

Johnston: Blowed up in the foxhole.

Brooks: Wait, sorry. If you can, just for the recording, it's hard when you both talk at the same time, so.

R. Johnston: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

Brooks: No, that's okay. So, go ahead.

Johnston: But I did have a few on that, but that was when I was still in the service.

Brooks: From the foxhole?

Johnston: Yeah. I, sometimes I'd wake up and when we were in Japan, the barracks, and wake up screaming and the sergeant come over there and shake me. He said, "Come on, Johnston. It's over now. Forget about it." So, I'd wake up and look at him, blink my eyes, and [laughs] blink my eyes and go back to sleep. So, there was a few occasions where—that was, to me, that was the worst thing that happened to me, was—

R. Johnston: You're a lucky guy.

Johnston: Yeah. I survived. [clears throat] So.

Brooks: Was there anything, anything we didn't cover, or any kind of reflections

that you want to share with us about your time?

Johnston: Gee. Well, I think if this country ever went to war, if the total country went to war again, and if they had me, I think I'd go again. I mean, even after what we went through, not only me, all the other guys that did the same thing I did, so.

R. Johnston: It's scary. All the time.

Johnston: It was [pause] I was kind of perturbed when we were seeing all them Japs, I still call them Japs, come over here. And bugged the automakers. Oh, look out.

Brooks: That's okay. I'll pet him. [Johnston laughs] It's fine.

Johnston: Well, we just want to learn how. They went back home and built, and used our patents, and there was no compensation whatsoever of the patents that these people had on those cars. I still hate them for doing that and pretty soon, well they were making better cars than we were at the time, but they're catching up to them now. The cars they have today are a lot better. I never would buy a Jap car. Never thought to buy a Jap car. And so, but it just pissed me off that they come over here and took over everything, and then they built a plant here, and everything like that, and—oh, we don't want to, we don't want to do anything. We don't want to take over—that's exactly what they did. They went right back home and started to build cars, and it was our fault because so many automobile makers said, "Well, this is the car [laughs] that the people want. This is what we built twenty years ago and people wanted it." It isn't just that people wanted it, it's all they could get! You know? So anyway, they had it coming to them, the automobile makers, by not keeping up with the times, so. But they are now. I've got a new car sitting out in the garage there that I don't even drive. [Laughter] I don't know, because the dog won't get in it. He can't get in it. It's too high. So anyway, I drive it once in a while, but I had to spend some money because if we go to these homes, like they're talking about that one up here in Chippewa Falls? I went up there and looked at it, but you know what? My wife can't go. Did you know that? They would put her in another room if they had another room.

Brooks: If they have another room. Yeah, it's a pretty small facility, I think.

Johnston: Yeah. What kind of crap is that?

Brooks: I think that's a pretty small one. I don't think they have a lot of space.

Johnston: Well, we were up there. It looked pretty big to me.

Brooks: Yeah, I—

Johnston: There's more hallways than there is rooms!

R. Johnston: They don't take everyone [??].

Johnston: And that's the problem. They build all hallways. So anyway, we went up there and looked at it, but that's—and you can't have a dog. You can't have a cat. What would I—I mean, am I supposed to kill him because—so we've been looking around. We found another one. What's the name of it?

R. Johnston: By the mall.

Johnston: What?

R. Johnston: By the mall.

Johnston: Up above the mall here—

R. Johnston: We've been there three or four times.

[00:55:00]

Johnston: In Eau Claire. It's built on the hillside. It's beautiful up there. It's a great big one. It runs from the Cooper Road [??] all the way over to all them little Billingsworth [??], or they had—

R. Johnston: And it takes animals.

Johnston: Yeah, they took animals.

Brooks: And how long have you been in Wisconsin?

Johnston: About five years, I guess.

R. Johnston: Oh, it seems longer than that.

Johnston: We lived in Arkansas. I didn't tell you about Arkansas.

Brooks: No.

Johnston: It's the greatest country. We had a beautiful home, a three-bedroom house, double garage, and it had a workroom underneath the house, had a two-way fireplace, and a beautiful—she had a beautiful china closet. It had a screened-in deck with a hot tub.

Brooks: Nice.

Johnston: And taxes were \$350. The license for my car was \$4.50.

Brooks: Wow.

Johnston: And I belonged to the legion and we had a—not the legion, the VFW there. We had a VFW honor guard that traveled all over the state. We went to all the big shot doings. When they were having a big thing at the state, we were down there, if they had a big thing going someplace, and they would pick us up by airplane and take us. It was absolutely amazing. I mean, oh.

R. Johnston: There was so much love there.

Johnston: Yeah.

R. Johnston: Because we were all pretty much the same age.

Johnston: Yeah. A lot of them were about the same age.

R. Johnston: But now they're—

Johnston: We traveled. We did so much and we did a lot of military training roles [??] and stuff like that, but it was—it was really, really nice. I thought it was.

R. Johnston: Oh, yeah. We had such a good time with young and old people.

Johnston: Oh, yeah. She did too. She did too.

Brooks: Well, anything else that you want to add while we're still recording or should I go ahead and turn this off? This is you, a picture of you in Arkansas?

Johnston: Yeah, and that's that two-way fireplace right alongside of us, right here.

R. Johnston: Am I there?

Johnston: And that was our uniforms.

R. Johnston: Nope, I'm not there.

Brooks: Not in this.

R. Johnston: That's their uniforms.

Johnston: They really dressed us to the nines.

Brooks: Yep, yep, you're all dressed up.

Johnston: Yeah. So anyway, that's—

Brooks: All right. Well, anything you want me to add before we turn the recorder off? Any last words about your military service, or—

Johnston: No.

Brooks: Think we covered everything?

Johnston: I had a—we had some rough times, some bad times, and—

R. Johnston: Yeah, I went to work. [Laughs]

Johnston: Lost some good people, and—

R. Johnston: Five kids.

Johnston: That ain't got to do with the military service.

R. Johnston: No, no. Okay.

Johnston: And anyway, that was—we had some bad times, bad times when [pause] we didn't have anything to eat, K rations. We didn't have much ammunition because they took everything and left. Mr. Bull Halsey. [Said in a deep voice, laughs] As soon as I say his name, I could spit on him if I could find him. But anyway, that was—that was—it was bad because we didn't have nothing and the Japs keep coming over at night, you know? And—

Brooks: Was there anything in particular that got you through the experience?

Johnston: Well, good buddies. Good buddies. I had some good friends, lots of good friends, but we had—I had a couple that hung out throughout the whole war, and they were good guys. They're dead now.

R. Johnston: Tom Holland [sp??].

Johnston: Yeah. Well, he's gone. He'd come back, was never injured in the service. Come back, was riding a horse, fell off of it, and broke his back.

Brooks: Oh, no.

Johnston: So then, he became a schoolteacher in Vidor, Texas. [Laughs] And he was a nice guy. In fact, I named my older son after him, Tom. Thomas, yeah. Tom. His name was Tom Holland. Nice guy. Couldn't be any better.

Brooks: All right. Well, I'll go ahead and turn this off now if we're done.

Johnston: Okay.

Brooks: All right.

[End of OH2060.Johnston_user_file 2] [End of Interview]