

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
CAROL A. JOHNSON

U.S. Navy- Ocean Systems Technician Analyst, Master-at-Arms, K9 Handler

2019

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**Johnson, Carol A.**, (1949– ). Oral History Interview, 2019.

Approximate length: 1 hour 36 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to the original recording.*

**Abstract:**

This oral history interview with Carol A. Johnson discusses her service with the Navy from 1981 to 2001 including her work tracking Soviet submarines and her work as a K9 handler.

Johnson grew up on a farm near Winnebago County. She discusses knowing she was a lesbian from a young age, the difficulties of living in a small town, and the positive influence of female role models in her family. Johnson outlines being discouraged from joining the military by her high school guidance counselor and later deciding to join the Navy at the age of thirty-two.

She enlisted in Oshkosh in 1981 as an Ocean Systems Technician-Analyst (OTA). A few days before she was leaving for basic training an anonymous letter was sent stating she was a lesbian and Johnson had to go out and get letters attesting to her character so she could join. Johnson describes humorous instances at boot camp in Orlando, Florida, including her arrival and an incident catching the flag. She discusses her advanced training in Norfolk, Virginia, and how Chief John Walker leaked details of the OTA program to the Soviets.

After training, Johnson was sent to Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland. She outlines tracking Soviet submarines coming from the Soviet Union, living conditions, the environment of secrecy and participating in intramural sports. Johnson deciding to re-class as a K9 handler, training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and being sent back to Iceland. During her second tour in Keflavik she describes a confrontation between her K9 unit and on-base security, and being investigated for homosexuality.

Johnson attended Master-at-Arms School at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and was then stationed at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan. Johnson discusses stories of wrangling drunken service members and the K9 unit becoming more integrated in security operations. She was then stationed at Miramar, California, where she managed the kennel. Johnson outlines training, security details at the airport and special events, dealing with pilots, and the Miramar Air Show. Then she was assigned to Naval Air Station North Island, California, where she was chief of police. She describes her security officer that did not like women and how he made the work environment very hostile and how she filed a complaint that led to his reassignment. She was then assigned to Concord Naval Weapons Station, California, where she worked as the chief of police, security officer and the legal officer, and she served there until her retirement in 2001.

She worked as a paralegal for a lawyer in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for twelve years and now lives in Appleton with her partner Kelli. Johnson works seasonally, volunteers, and is a member of American Legion Post 539. She reflects on the strong connections she made in the military and

why it is important for people to understand the history of discrimination and exclusion faced by women and homosexuals.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Carol A. Johnson enlisted in the Navy in 1981, attended basic training on Orlando, Florida, and was trained to be an Ocean Systems Technician- Analyst. She was stationed in Iceland and Norfolk, Virginia, before re-classing as a K9 Handler with the military police. After 20 years of service, she retired in 2001, volunteers in her community, and lives in Appleton, Wisconsin, with her partner and their two dogs.

**Archivist's 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, if possible.

Interviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2019.

Transcribed by Jeff Javid, 2019.

Reviewed and edited by Luke Sprague, 2019.

Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2019.

## Interview Transcript:

### [Beginning of OH2148.Johnson]

Halaska: All right. Today is February 18, 2019. This is an interview with Carol A. Johnson. She served with the Navy as an Ocean Systems Technician-Analyst [OTA] and Master-at-Arms, K9 specialty from 1985–2001. This interview is being conducted at the veteran's home. The interviewer is Rachelle Halaska and this interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. All right. Thank you very much for meeting with me.

Johnson: Sure.

Halaska: So first off we're just going to start off with where and when you were born?

Johnson: January 4, 1949, in Neenah, Wisconsin.

Halaska: Okay, and can you tell me a little bit about growing up in Neenah?

Johnson: Actually I grew up in Winneconne which is even smaller than Neenah. I didn't even grow up *in* Winneconne; I grew up on a farm six miles outside of Winneconne; went to Winneconne School, no, actually I started out in a one-room school in the country where it had eight grades in it and then we transferred into the city and went to the big school the rest of the time. So school was interesting. Winneconne is still there. I try to stay away from it as much as humanly possible. Growing up in a small town and knowing you're lesbian by the time you're like twelve, thirteen years old is not the most comforting thing in the world. I pretty much knew by the time I was in junior high that there was something different but had not quite figured out, didn't know the word for it yet. That took a lot of reading and such because there was *certainly* nobody you could go ask about it in a town of 1,286 people. [Laughs] And you know more kids—when the school was in session there were more people in the school than there was in the entire town [both laugh]. Because most of us were bussed in. Oh, busing. Anyway. But, we were kind of glad to get out of school. I had some really good influential people that, I don't know if they knew I was gay or not, but they were like distant cousins that took me, introduced me to things I probably I'd never would have known.

One of them was a very intelligent woman, went to the University of Wisconsin—to Madison, and I'd go down there and stay in the dorm with her; I was just a kid. I thought this was a big deal; and we'd go to football games. She was not the sports type, she was a 4.0 student in the honors class, that type of thing. And we'd always go to something artsy one night and then we'd go to the football game the next day. It was good for me, it really was. And her sister, who was older, took me on my first trip out of the state of Wisconsin so, you know, those were good

influences. They got me realizing I could leave, you know, I didn't have to stay here.

Let's see, who was in the service? My dad was in World War II in the Army. My uncle was in World War II. He was also in the Army. He served in the Pacific—didn't have a pleasant experience there. I had another uncle that was in the Navy. I'm not sure where he was; and my brother was in the Navy, just so he didn't have to go to Vietnam basically. That's pretty much the background. I didn't go in until I was thirty-two. I was a late bloomer. The reason being unemployment. I graduated from college.

I taught in Canada for a while. I taught and subbed in California—it was during a teacher glut and, you know, those things go in cycles, up and down. So it was a little hard to get a job and I worked some strange jobs. I worked in a factory assembling electronics panels. I worked for the prison system. I worked at Taycheedah [Correctional Institution; Fond du Lac, Wisconsin], the state prison for women with, you know—it wasn't, it was an interesting experience, let's put it that way. I worked for a cleaning company that went around and cleaned houses. And, finally, it was like, this is ridiculous, you know. I'm out of options. I got to do something. So I went back and I did originally what I wanted to do when I got out of high school, I—back then you were kind of programmed, either you were smart enough to go to college and you should go to college or you're an idiot and should go to a tech school. It's, you know, they pretty well separated people back then. It was just, it wasn't fair, you know, it wasn't; but it was the way it was done.

[00:05:02:16]

And I was supposed to go to college; and when I went into my guidance counselor's office and I said, "Well, you know, I'd really like to join the Navy." He kicked himself back in his chair—I'll never forget this—and crossed his legs and started pickin' the balls off his socks and he said, "Well, you know what they say about women who do those sorts of things. *Now*, let's talk about which college you're going to." [Laughs] Okay, that ended that discussion. So I did. I went to the University of South Florida [Tampa] the first year and anything to get out off here and then I came back because my mom got sick and graduated from [Wisconsin State University-] Oshkosh and then I spent one semester in graduate school at La Crosse, which was because I had a girlfriend up there [laughs] and nothing better to do. So, anyway, then we went on to the jobs and, like I say, ultimately, due to unemployment primarily, I enlisted at thirty-two and everybody thought I was crazy, but it was great. I did a little running up and down the road for, 'cause I was delayed entry for about two months I think, yeah, so I thought, well, I'll get in better shape. So and it was, I marked off a mile and I'd run down and run back. So actually I think it was an advantage when I got to boot camp because the head games they play at boot camp—some of these little girl, just out of high school or not too far out of it, wooh! [laughs]; I just had a really hard time dealing and it was like, really, grow up! [Laughs] So that's pretty much the background.

Halaska: Okay, tell me about where you went to—or tell me about enlistment and what job you chose [Johnson laughs] and then where you went to basic training.

Johnson: I enlisted in Oshkosh and my recruiter was, standard recruiter was a liar but that's okay. He was a nice guy. 'Cause I wanted to be in, first I wanted to go into, you know, medical corps, and he was, like— that's like, at that time it was like an eighteen-month waiting period delayed entry and I didn't want to be unemployed for eighteen months. So I said, "What else you got?" And I said, "Something in computers?" I wasn't really computer-literate but ehh? And he said, "I got this great job, it's called an OTA and it's, yeah, he said it's exactly like working with computers and being a radioman and I go, oh, hum, whatever. [Laughs] He lied like a rug. And so, okay. We're all signed up and ready to go and about three days, four days before I was supposed to hop on the bus and go to AAFES, I get this call from him that someone had written an anonymous letter to Milwaukee, because that's where I had to go to ship out from, that why the hell would you want some scuzzy lesbian like this is in your Navy? And it's like, okay, now you have to get like twelve people that will attest to your character that will write letters on your behalf and you have to take them down and meet with the commander of, [AAFES??], whatever she was, and it's like, I was just—[scoffs] first of all I said, "Okay, so now you're saying I have to *prove* my innocence. I said, "How do we go about doing this. I saw you down on the middle of Main Street and all is good," and he said, "No, I don't think my wife would appreciate that," but, [laughs] good, because I wouldn't either.

So I go off and I get these letters and I got 'em from my minister; I got 'em from the local sheriff; I got 'em from a detective on the police force—you know, these weren't just something weren't just chump changes off the street! They were some pretty influential people. And I trot on my motorcycle and go down toward Milwaukee with my little letters in my hand and I meet with this woman who's like, why are you even here? [Laughs] And I said, hey you called me, I didn't call you [laughs]. So that went swimmingly. Then I went down to Milwaukee; spent a night. Get in the bus. Take-off for Orlando because the boot camp is still in Orlando. There was a bunch of us on the plane going down there. It was an interesting group because we get on the bus. Down there. I don't even know what airport we landed in because we got there in the middle of the night. We didn't even get to the boot camp until about 3:00 a.m. And this one girl—I had never seen her—she was so drunk because she'd been drinkin' in the air plane she literally fell off the bus, they were real impressed with her. [Both laugh] Just like, oh God.

[00:10:00:11]

So we get in there; we throw out our little cards; you know I arrived, I'm not dead, I'm fine. Send them home. Turn in all the stuff they couldn't bring along but they did anyway. Show us our racks. Off we go. An hour later the trash can and

hits the floor [laughs]. We were off and running then! I think the biggest thing I remember about boot camp—other than how silly it was. I get their points. You know I always got their points. It was, I understood all of it. But their methods were a little strange sometimes—but the biggest thing I remember is in Orlando, it was in August and it rained *every day*. Just like in the South; about three o'clock every day and then we're all good to go. And we were walking back after getting our seabags because they took you to this building, give you a seabag, and then they proceed to fill it with every uniform you might ever want and with every shoe you might ever want and they top it off with a box, a box, mind you, of *laundry* detergent! Then they form you up and they march you to your barracks.

Well of course the deluge hit just as we're walking from the building, or “attempting to march us,” I should say, sailor’s can’t march, from the building to the barracks. And, of course, the door was locked when we got there. By the time we got *in* the barracks *everything* was soaked. The box had disintegrated [laughs]. It was a mess! So that, yeah, that's one thing I'll never forget. It was for me boot camp's always been one of those interesting experiences that you'd never forget but you would never voluntarily repeat as long as you live. I mean [laughs] you take a lot away from it, you get a lot out of it, but repeating it – no thank you. I think we had, they always have RCPOs, Recruit Company Commanders. I think I was our third one. We were like Private Benjamin in reality. It was just—not good. And they all got fired. I actually didn't get fired, which was amazing; but, yeah. The other two incidents I remember vividly from boot camp is they had this huge flag where we always had to go and exercise every morning. They called it the grinder but they had this humongous American flag out there just like they have at Perkins and you know you got it drilled into your head, you *do not* let that flag touch the ground!

So I'm out there for my one time that I have to go with the flag detail and I'm just like a catcher and, of course, the wind is blowing like crazy. And I'm thinking, Oh lord, this is not going to end well [laughs] and, sure enough, the girls get it down where I can catch it, but then the wind flaps. So I'm running to my left, I'm running to my right, I'm running forward, I'm running backward trying to catch this damn thing before it hits the ground. You know you're supposed to catch it nicely so that it extends and it's taut. I just grabbed the thing and hugged it [laughs] hoping no one would see this little nonsense. And they did [laughs] and I was out doing pushups on the Yard, yeah, but, yeah, that was pretty funny. I think I remember—there was stuff that was painful and agonizing and just seemed absolutely stupid at the time but, you know, there was most of it was, kind of, things I remember were funny. And then I went on to Norfolk because I had OTA school in Norfolk; and when we were waiting at the airport it was like: you're out of boot camp, they can't do anything to you so then drink like an idiot. I think I remember saluting the plane captain, I thought that was—he's got gold on; what can I say? [Laughs] And went through OTA school where it was cold. I think it was, yeah, I think it was going on, boot camp was what, eight weeks? August, September, October. It was getting into that fall period, so it was a little chilly;

and, you know, I enjoyed it because I traveled up to D.C. and did the whole sightseeing thing. My brother had some ex-girlfriends up there but you know, they hated him, but they liked me, so. I could go visit them and they'd show me around and it was a good time. You know, and then Williamsburg. I like to travel. I like to see what's around me. And from there I had to go West Coast 'cause I had to go—

Halaska: I am going to stop you for a second. So your, in your, during your training—

Johnson: Mm-hm.

**[00:15:00:20]**

Halaska: —what did they train you to do? What were some of the things that they trained you to do and what did you learn during that time period?

Johnson: Um, boot camp? Mostly military protocol. The ranks for the Navy, especially. History, maybe history a little bit, very little. They taught you teamwork, more than anything. They taught you that you are not you anymore. That you are them, now. And the ones that got that, quickly, didn't have as hard a time as the ones that didn't get it. And I think that was the biggest thing they do—try to instill in these camps—is this is an us this is not a me, thing; and if you don't get that you probably don't belong here, because somebody is going to teach you one time or another [laughs] sometime in your career. So that was good. OTA school was mostly just we—to do our job we had to recognize—nothing is, I signed that thing but it doesn't count anymore 'cause the rate's not there. We had to recognize submarines by their electronic signatures. That doesn't make any sense at all to anybody who doesn't see it. They track it on a piece of graph paper and at certain frequencies certain things show up. United States' system is so sensitive that they can tell you—and the Russians make very noisy submarines; they don't know how to cushion anything. It can tell you what kind of submarine it was and detect the captain talking, probably, if you had it on—they were that sensitive.

They were until [John Anthony] Walker [US Navy chief warrant officer and communication specialist who spied for Soviet Union from 1968 until 1985] spilled the beans. Anyway, we could never find our own unless they came up and let us know they were there. But they taught us where to look for the sub; what it all meant; what the ranges were. When the first day we walked in, they said you're going to learn seven thousand different numbers, and I went math is not my strong suit, this is not going to turn out well [laughs]. They don't want you to fail. They make you *think* they don't care, but they really don't want you—they've already invested too much money in you; so, as intense as it is, you have to be really, really, *really* stupid to fail [laughs]. But that was the majority of that. There was not a lot of marching, inspections and any of that stuff. It was, if anything else it was on confidentiality and, you know, secret, super secret [??] and how to deal with stuff like that. What the markings were, what to do with it; burn bags;



that sort of thing, but it was mostly the signatures, they called them; and the submarine, submarine parts, what it was a diesel or electrical or whatever. So then after that I had to go to the West Coast, *all* the way up to marijuana country north of San Francisco. I say that because I can't remember the name of the place [laughs].

Halaska: I just want to—you said until someone spilled the beans and made your job—can you explain just a little bit what you mean by that?

Johnson: Yes. It was a secret rating, we weren't supposed to talk about it; we had to sign the confidentiality agreement that, you know, if we ever did we could be imprisoned; and when I left, after I got out of the school I went to Iceland and I came back and I was in Norfolk. When I was in Norfolk at headquarters I worked in the analyst room and right next to it was the radio communications room. There was a man that worked in there, a Chief John Walker, and later on it was discovered that he and his son who was onboard one of the carriers and his other son and his wife were all involved in selling secrets to the Soviets and the secret was at rate of how we tracked their submarines. Yes, they're all in jail as we speak, I might add! [Laughs] But, yeah, he was right next door. I mean I would have probably handed him communications at times. And then when the book and the movie *The Hunt For the Red October* came out that was *exactly* what we did; and we even asked our commander that day, I remember it was like, how can he write this book when we're to sign a confidentiality agreement? And he looked at our signatures, he says, "Because the public thinks it's fiction." Okay, but—[laughs] *Okay*. But after that the rate went away because there was no secrecy to it anymore; he had, they had told the Russians exactly how we did everything. I don't know if they figured out how to cushion themselves a little better or not [both laugh].

[00:20:21:28]

Halaska: Were there many other women in your training?

Johnson: In that rate there were more, yeah. There were a few more because it was more—I'm sure they were told it was like office work, but, ah, and it *could* be because I went from, let me think, I did some analyst most of the time; and I did some maintenance part of the time, that was a secondary part of the rate. I was in training for a while. Just general training not training for that but training for, let's see, seven, what's that stupid thing? Well, you had to go to these trainings once a year to make sure you were behaving yourself and all that stuff—sexual harrassment training came along later, not at first; but things like that, that's for your training. I was on an inspection team for a while that traveled all over the world checking on—'cause we had as an OTA—there's these little stations all over the world that track these submarines so we had to go inspect them; that was a lot of fun.

Halaska: Okay. Okay. And, so you were talking about going to—

Johnson: It was a—

Halaska: Northern California.

Johnson: Northern California there was a follow-on school there with—I really don't know why they even had it, but it was a lot of fun [laughs]; and we did the same thing we did in Norfolk. Nothing really spectacularly advanced; it was supposed to be an advanced school, follow-on school, but it was more—our instructor took us out every weekend camping and we'd go to the big breakfast places [laughs]; but most of the kids that were in my class from Norfolk, well, they're not there, so; and then we went to our respective duty stations after that you know. And I did say I went to Iceland, the first time, then.

Halaska: What was the base out at Iceland?

Johnson: Naval Air Station Keflavik, or NAFKEF is what I was at, Naval Facility Keflavik. It was also—the only airport in Iceland *at that time* was on the base. It isn't anymore. The base doesn't even exist anymore, so it's gone; but at that time Naval Air Facility Iceland.

Halaska: Can you tell me about your first duty station and what it was like being there and living there?

Johnson: It was interesting. There was some interesting concept because you're above the equator. It was the first, there's six months of darkness, six months of daylight; or semi-darkness, semi-daylight. We, our actual duty building was out, they bussed us out to it. It was about five miles out on the end of the island because Murmansk is where most of the Russian submarines came out. And if Iceland is here, and Murmansk is here and they'd have to come around this way. And that's where we'd pick 'em up. And if the Bear [Russian aircraft; Tupelo Tu-95] aircraft came out, it would always be called Bear aircraft, we could catch them too coming around that horn and I, we worked the standard eight on—I don't even know what the rotation was. But if it snowed and you got stuff out there, you got stuff out there, so you learned to have a little bag hidden away someplace with the extra underwear and candy bars and—[laughs]. I don't think that ever happened. But, yes, it was interesting and, again, we couldn't tell anybody what we did. They were always like, Whaddya do out there? [Laughs]. Nothing. And we had a communications center out there where every night at midnight the codes were changed, our codes, for ours and that person had a pistol and they were told they were, you know, they got one shot at anybody comin' in and the second shot was for them—so. And the interesting part was there was also a small little isle in that island even north of us at the very tip of Iceland; you could actually—I'm going to sound like Sara Palin here [Republican vice-presidential candidate in 2008] but mine is true—you could actually see Russia from this spot, and we had a little outpost up there where one of us got sent out there for thirty days at a time.

[00:25:07:01]

Halaska: Just one of you?

Johnson: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause that's all we needed. They had the sister, if you will, station to our communication station; and they needed one person in there at all times so at midnight you keep track of all these—you walk around once an hour and make sure all the little dials aren't in the red. I have no idea what those things were for, but I didn't need to know. All I needed to know is every night at midnight I had to pull out this little book, take out this piece of paper [clears throat], take out the old one out the new onw in put the old one in a blender with some water and destroy it—because those were the American codes for the submarines. communication code. Some months up there yes with some Icelandic people and I think there were a couple Americans up there for some reason, I have no idea [laughs] why; but I read a lot of books while I was up there, 'cause you're on, well, yeah, there are two of us up there at at a time because you had twelve on, twelve off.

That's what it was and there wasn't a lot of drinking and partying going on [laughs]. I think that was the one time I had trouble with a near-sexual assault because some Icelandic clown thought, you know, American women were his for the asking. Wrong. [Laughs] So that, yeah, that—he went away. Never really resulted in anything. I told, I can't remember who I was up there with but I remember I told him about it and I never had any trouble with that guy after that. [Laughs] So we were very tight. But, ah, the big thing I remember about going up there was when the plane—it was a small rotor plane—and fortunately I was sitting next to the chaplain and as we were coming down I looked down and saw gravel runway and here are these Icelandics out there chasing sheep off the runway. Yeah, and I'm thinking, Okay, this is not a good sign [laughs]. But it was fine; as long as we didn't hit a sheep we were good. [Halaska laughs] Sheep have the run of Iceland, by the way. Everywhere. They're like people in Japan if you kill it, you have to pay for *it* and all of it's potential offspring. [Clears throat] So that was my month up there. As far as socially, you know it's funny. I never had any trouble finding people; I never had any trouble finding other lesbians; and, you know, I don't know how that happened, but it just did. I never had trouble *that* tour with anything like that. Spent a lot of time playing sports; softball, basketball—

Halaska: In Iceland?

Johnson: Yeah. They had a huge, they had a lot of recreational activities to keep people from going to work to bar to work to bar to work to bar; and I actually worked in the club for a while but not this tour. And, yeah, I played a lot of intramural sports; took advantage of a lot of the college courses that were up there even though I had a degree it was just time to take something that just seemed

interesting. And so whenever somebody wants me to list the colleges I went to I say, "You don't want me to do that." [Laughs] Then I came back and I was in Norfolk, like I said, at headquarters on the inspection team, that was the fun part because we got to go to Brawdy, Wales [a US Navy base next to a former Royal Air Force satellite station]; we got to go to Newfoundland, ah, where else? I didn't get to go to Bermuda—I was not happy about that. [Laughs] But Brawdy was fun, Newfoundland was fun. Yeah, up there they're a very small place and we partied hardied with those people. Of course, I had to—

Halaska: Where?

Johnson: In Newfoundland.

Halaska: Okay.

Johnson: Gandy, Gander? Gander, Newfoundland. And that was the first time anybody had even mentioned sexuality to me. I had this old drunken [laughs]—this guy was a drunk; he had no place to talk—but after we were partying wildly with people up there when we finished the inspection, I don't know I was in the laundry or something and he was in there and he said, "You know, maybe you do need to take it easy a little bit and be a little bit more discreet." And I'm, like, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "Aw, never mind," and he left. [Laughs] Cause, yeah, there had been this very nice-looking young lady up there that night and, well, hmm, I guess we were being too friendly for his taste. [Halaska laughs] But, yeah, that was the extent of that conversation. And it was in Norfolk it was the same thing.

**[00:30:02:16]**

I played softball, I don't think I played basketball in Norfolk. Played softball; went to school—I actually got to go to Old Dominion for a while. Traveled a lot—back and forth to D.C. and Williamsburg [Virginia] and I never went south for some reason, um, because I was going with a young lady there then and her aunt and her husband lived up by D.C. So we'd go up and visit them a lot. I had a dog. I had gotten into, well, before I ever went in the Navy, I was into the dog show world, yeah, and I had a Samoyed and we'd take trips on the weekends and put him in shows and stuff, you know. That was a lot of fun. But it was just like living a normal life. And Virginia Beach, I liked Virginia Beach. I like being on the beach. So after that that's where I reenlisted. So from '81 to about I think it was about '85 I was the OTA; and then '85–2001 I was the cop; so I was, he said, "What will it take me to keep you?" and I said, "How much money you got?" [laughs] Because that's when they were still giving bonuses and stuff. And I knew I didn't want to continue being an OTA because that was just boring and watching a bunch of lines all day. And I said, "Well, I want something that's a little more active too." And he said, "Well, do you like dogs?" [Laughs] And I said, "Well, yeah, why?" And he said, "Well, twenty-thousand dollar bonus if you want to be

an MA; and I can get you into dog school right away and it was like, okay. Fine, fine, fine. Give me the papers. Where do I sign? Sign, sign, sign [Laughs] And he actually kept his word, I was amazed [Halaska laughs]—but he was a career counsellor, he wasn't a recruiter. So I went down to—where did I go first? Oh, yeah, I went to Lackland Air Force Base [Texas] for dog training school and it's really not dog training school because they don't train you to train the dog they train you to handle the dog. The dog already knows what it's supposed to do; so they're training you to *handle* the dog, know what to look for and keep the dog well-trained. Of course they don't tell you how you're supposed to do that. But [laughs] such is the Navy. And then it was off to Iceland again. That was fun!

And had a partner up there. The guy had been in dog school with me; he graduated like two weeks ahead of me. He was an idiot. So we get up there and it's really funny because you don't—the concept of canine and security they really, nobody had really ever matched them up. We were like our own little island and if they needed us they'd call; but canines have certain requirements. The dogs, proficiency has to be kept up, the drug dog ninety percent proficiency, so you do a lot of training; you're also required to do so many inspections a month—so many barracks, so many cars, so many this, so many that; and you're not supposed to tell anybody you're coming so doing the officers' barracks was always a thrill; and you never knew what you were going to run into when you'd knock on the door and said, "Dog inspection!" It was always kind of funny [laughs]. But I had a good dog up there. And we did a lot of the publicity stuff. He was a good old black Lab[rador] and we could dress him up in a trenchcoat and he looked like McGruff the crime-fighting dog; and he was very gentle so he didn't ever bite anybody, because they weren't cross-trained, they were just drug dogs.

But he would sit there and he would let children paw on him for awhile, and you could always tell when he was done 'cause he just kind of sat down and like, okay, I'm over this, take me home [laughs]. We occasionally did the, we always did the air—when the flights came in, like I said, the airport was then on base so when the flights came in everybody had to put their luggage down and they had to do their luggage inspection. Other than that they really didn't, well they weren't trained for attack work, patrol work, sensing work, anything like that; so up there they *really* didn't need to integrate us into a patrol section, you know, to actually be officers.

[00:35:03:26]

And then one fine day, and this guy I worked with. He was something else. He was more interested in furthering his own career than he was in the job that we were supposed to be doing. So he was always off goin' to school or doin' this or doin' that and I'd always be coverin' for him; and we really didn't know what we were doing. We really didn't. I mean, they take you to Lackland, teach you how to handle the dog, what to look for; and then they send you out. They say the dog's supposed to maintain ninety percent proficiency but they don't tell you how you're

supposed to do that [laughs]! You get there and there's little drug aids in varying sizes. Okay, you put one out, dog finds it, off we go; and I guess there were all kinds of reports we were supposed to be sending in and stuff, which we never did because, oh, we didn't know about it! And then we got sort of buttin' heads with the security officer and stuff because he didn't want us goin' out doin' all these inspections; and so we weren't meeting our quota of inspections. And my intelligence partner calls, it wasn't even in writing so it could go up the chain of command.

We, basically, we I say because, *yeah*, I was there—he called the inspection team back in San Antonio to complain that our security officer, our command, wasn't cooperating with our effort, in fact styming our effort. Well we in effect skipped six steps in the chain of command. He skipped. I'll tell you what—when they bounced back down those six steps it wasn't pretty. We got relieved for about six months. Yeah. Until the inspection team could get up there and educate everybody. But in the interim, I got sent to investigations. That was fun. I learned something new and participated in a lot of new and unique things; and he went to school in community college, education [laughs]. Oh, god, he got called up on captain's mast on the whole business but, yeah, he didn't end well, let's put it that way.

Halaska: You said you went to inspections. What was inspections?

Johnson: We were supposed to go to barracks and do vehicle check points and we weren't, we didn't have to give prior notice to go into a barracks. You know, that would defeat the entire purpose. We just went in; and they started complainin' about it and he said, well you can't do that anymore. And it's like, that's what we have to do. So instead of documenting, documenting, documenting, and waiting for the inspection team to come *up* and take it, this is our *problem*. So he picks up the phone [laughs]. So we were in effect being unable to do our job, and we were going to fail inspection because we couldn't do our job. So he got all paranoid about that and called him up and said, hey, this is what's going on and it got ugly after that [laughs]. And I didn't know he had done it until I am sitting in the security officer's office going, "What the hell have you done?" [laughs] but it was, it was a character-enhancing experience but it was one of those things where if you take enough, take, it was not a fun experience but if you take the opportunity—I'd never worked in investigations otherwise, you know, and—

Halaska: Oh yeah, mm-hm.

Johnson: —and that's where I got sent for punishment as it were; and so I got to work in that and we always had an annual drill of, invasion, if you will, drill with the Marines because there was a detachment of Marines up there and, man, that thing was, I tell you what, that thing was intense 'cause it was like seventy-two hours worth of hit-and-run and can you figure out where they're going to be and did this place get attacked and I actually got to—but my best friend up there was a chief

and she and I developed the entire scenario that year, and then we got to run around and see who was doing what to whom and if they were doing it right or if they got killed or whatever. That was the only time I ever stayed up for seventy-two hours [laughs] where am I know?

**[00:40:01:01]**

Yeah it was an opportunity to learn things that I wouldn't have gotten to do otherwise. But then it was out of there and back to—where did I go then—oh, then they sent me to Master-at-Arms School [laughs]. A little backwards, but whatever works for ya. In Fort McClellan, Alabama [Anniston].

Halaska: Okay, and what year was that?

Johnson: I would have to look at my shadow box, to be perfectly honest with you.

Halaska: Okay.

Johnson: I dont know.

Halaska: Yep.

Johnson: I don't do dates real well. That was for, yeah, Master-at-Arms School. I think it was, I don't even remember how long it was. Maybe a couple of months. And there we got to do all the shooting and the crime scene investigation and all the fun stuff. It was great. I really enjoyed it [laughs]. So you really learned how to be a cop—that's why I watch shows like *NCIS* [American television series, 2003–] and stuff...ehhh...these people are crazy. Oh yeah, that's why I should revert back to that, I don't, I forgot about that. I don't know how I could forget about that. When I was in Iceland the second time, it was another round of basketball–softball–racquetball this time, and that was the one time I was investigated by *NCIS* [Naval Criminal Investigative Service], *NIS* as they were known then. Oh yeah, that was fun. Some girl lived across the hall but—like I say, basketball, softball, not only involved ways we coached the team, and I did discover early on in my career that some of these younger ladies usually have an interest in older women. I don't know what that was about, but, anyway, I had people in and out of my room all the time at all hours of the day and night, it didn't matter, for whatever reason, and some very, you know, minor reasons [laughs]. No reason at all, we're just hangin' out.

But this woman across the hall, who was also in security, because—up there what they did in the barracks was security like had these first-floor one end of the barracks. Girls and the guys were all mixed up; the guys have the girls are in one room, the guys are in the next room, girls are in the next room—most of the time [laughs]. You never wanted to do a surprise inspection on a security guard because you didn't know who you would find in whose room; but we're adults,

come on. She lived across the hall and she—I found all this out later—she decided she wanted to be an NCIS agent but she was going to do them a big favor and turn somebody in. Well, because of all the in and out, revolving door, and Marcy was my best friend was still, she hadn't made chief yet, she was still in the room too, just before she made chief, and so she had people in there now all the time too. So next thing we know I'm getting called into NCIS. Well these guys are idiots and I knew enough by then to know what I did and didn't have to do for them and this guy called me in and he said, he was asking questions and stuff and it's like, "I don't know what you're talkin' about," you know, "Where did you get this?" "Well, I can't reveal who my source is" Obviously your source isn't any good.

And he says, "Well, can we come and search your room?" And I knew this point was comin' up and I never had anything in my room anyway, and Marcy had just moved over to the chief's barracks and we went through that place with a fine-tooth comb just to make—hell, if I had had a picture of my mother they would have probably, you know, made something out of it. She had everything over in the chief's barracks [laughs]. So I said, "No, you can't." I said, "I have the right to have a command representative in my room when you do that and I want the security officer there." He was a good guy. He really was. And so they called him up and they, "He says he can't come for two days," and I said, "Oh, gee. I guess we're not going to be able to do it then till day after tomorrow." And he says, "Well, what have you got to hide?" And I said, "I don't have anything to hide but I don't," I said, "I know," I flat out told him, "I know you assholes. You could find anything and make something out of it. And you're not going to do that to me."

And he just looked at me and he said, "You've been a cop too long. Get out of here." Okay. Didn't have to ask me twice. And we were just about to leave to go to—where'd we go—Brawdy, Wales, for a softball tournament; it was that area's softball tournament and Iceland hadn't lost it in years. We weren't going to lose it this year. And of course my girlfriend played second base, what could I say [laughs] So, one of the, the security officer calls me in and he says—this one guy that was just tight with everybody; security was a very tight-knit little community. In fact this girl that *did* this—we also had these plastic things on our door for people to leave messages on—he was getting some of the stuff.

**[00:45:10:15]**

I finally told the guys to stop. And he called me in and he says, "We're going to send—I can't remember the kid's name but he was one of the detectives with security; he was one of the investigators along with him. And it's like, oh, cool! [Laughs] He says, "Yeah, he'll let you know if NCIS is with you or not." If they're following along too. And I says, "Oh, okay. Fine." So off we went on our merry little way and he at one point, he did say that they were there and then he said later that he hadn't seen them in a long time. He did say apparently they had just left because we went—we fly into London and then we take the train to Brawdy;



play the tournament—which we won, yes [Halaska laughs]; and then we had like two, three days before the flight back because it's a military hop. So we had a choice. We could either stay at the base at Brawdy and play cards and get drunk with the Brits or we could go into London and do our thing as long as we were back by the time the plane left. So a bunch of us just, we're out of here! [Johnson laughs] And that was fun. We just got a hostel in London and we all slept on floors and mattresses and cushions. That was a good time; but that was the last I ever heard from those guys. They've never, oh, and then after I left I swung down, I went to Japan. That same security officer also went to Japan.

First thing he did when he got there he called me in and he says, "I just wanted to let you know that your NCIS record is clear. He said, "I took a look at it before I left. There is nothing there." I said, "Okay. *Thank You!* [Laughs] So it's like everybody, I don't know, I never had any trouble; I think it was because as long as you do your job. I never saw anybody intentionally go out of their way too. If there's always got to be one or two bad apples, but they really don't seem to accomplish much when they're kind of on the outside looking in and this protective barrier gets formed as long as you do your job and take care of your people. I don't know [laughs]. So I went to Japan; that was fun, that was different, that was interesting. I was a dog handler there. Made first class there—E-6 [Petty Officer, 1st Class]. There is where we finally convinced security that the dog handlers should be part of patrol section. Well we should be out driving around too. So we were. So that was fun. And that's how I ended up in both whorehouses on the Honch in one night; because one sailor punched a wall so we had to go in and haul his stupid butt out and promise to pay the madam that he would reimburse her for the wall.

Halaska: [Laughs]

Johnson: And [laughs] what was the other one for? I can't remember what the other one was for.

Halaska: And this was the Honch?

Johnson: They call it the honch. H-O-N-C-H, I think, but it's the main—it's one block off the base, outside the main gate, and it's nothing but bars [sound effects] and the Seventh Fleet is at Yokosuka, because they're in Yokosuka, Japan, so we had all kinds of—even though we had a three-story club on base which always provided us with, you know, enough entertainment for one night [laughs] because there was always somebody being stupid out in the town. We would prefer to get them before the Japanese police got them [laughs], so that was fun. I never had any life-threatening issues. I had a lot of drunken sailors. [Sighs] They could say some really stupid things when they were drunk. We busted one Marine one night because there was a detachment of Marines there; and on Mount Fuji there was also a Marine Corps base Mount Fuji and they would come to Yokosuka for liberty. Well, we got this one guy in there one night; and he was

such a happy little soul. I never had a grumpy Marine. But we called Gunny [a staff non-commissioned officer] at two o'clock in the morning, mind you, to come get his happy little Marine, and we were sitting in the back with him and Gunny walked in and he looked at him and the kid looked at Gunny and he said, "Hey, bud, how ya doin'!" Oh God [Laughs] And the other officer and I that were sittin' there we went for a cup of coffee right about then because all we heard was a very loud, "Don't you ever fuckin' call me bud; I am not your bud" and we were out of there.

[00:50:01:20]

You deal with him, we're gone. So it was entertaining in that way but we never had anything really serious, nobody ever killed anybody. That happened before I got there; and we never had any serious rape cases—that happened after I left. So we did the dogs; I had a really nice German Shepherd and I just loved that dog.

Halaska: What was the German Shepherd's name?

Johnson: Temmi.

Halaska: Timmy?

Johnson: T-E-M-M-I. When I got her I thought this is not going to work because she'd had a Japanese handler before that and he taught her commands in Japanese and I thought, that's not going to work for beans, but he only taught her little trick things in Japanese like "shake right," "shake left." Things you don't *need* [both laugh]. And, yeah, I made first class there; and—

Halaska: What was the dog trained to find? You said the—

Johnson: The dog, let's see, drugs—oh, heroin, cocaine, hash and marijuana. And I actually had one dog in Miramar [California] when I came back from Iceland, or Japan, that I actually found steroids. God only knows why; the guy must have touched, he must have handled something else or touched the packaging, he would transfer it because they had definitely not train—they maybe nowadays, I don't know, but they're not trained to sniff [laughs] steroids. Drug dogs; bomb dogs; C-4 [a plastic explosive]; det cords [detonating cord]; TNT and dynamite. Yeah. And blasting caps—they can hit a blasting caps, and black powder, 'cause they hit on my master chief's locker one time because you had his pistol in it [laughs]. And attack, and search. So that's what we trained them on. But in Japan it was mostly bomb dogs, attack dogs. No, we didn't have a bomb dog, we had an attack dog and guard dog. Yeah. She was my girl. Yeah.

Halaska: And that was, Temmi?

Johnson: Yeah, she was my girl. Yeah.

Halaska: Was she a—

Johnson: German Shepherd.

Halaska: Guard dog—

Johnson: Yeah.

Halaska: —or bomb d—

Johnson: No, she was a patrol dog.

Halaska: Patrol dog.

Johnson: Pure patrol dog. She was my killer dog. [both laugh] She was so cute. Every time we'd have to respond to a call—because the way the unit was set-up, she had a little space in the back; there was wire and the suspect sat back here but she had space between that fencing and the front seat. Well, we had a little platform between the seats that was carpeted so she could put her feet on it and not slide all over the place; and every time those lights and sirens went on she'd be up there and rockin' with the unit [laughs]! She knew we were going somewhere. But she was a good girl. And, she died shortly after I left, yeah, that happened to a lot of 'em. But, as a dog handler *you* moved and the dog stays, you know, it's not like civilian police that take their dogs with them, because the command needs certain types of dogs so they can't be coming along with their handler because they may not be the right type they need. But from Japan then I went to Miramar. Spent five glorious years at Miramar. Miramar's air shows [largest military air show in US], oh my God [laughs]!

Halaska: And where is Miramar again?

Johnson: San Diego.

Halaska: San Diego. Okay. [Pause] And what'd you do there?

Johnson: Well, I had planned on going to law school because I had taken the LSAT [law school admission test] in Japan and passed them and I thought, Well there's this nice law school right not too far from Miramar and I could just enroll there. When I got to Miramar that wasn't going to be the case 'cause they just needed too much work; and it was this seven-dog kennel. The guy that had been in charge of it, he was absolutely, could not understand why I wanted to ride patrol with the dogs; he was one of these guys that wanted to sit in the kennel and wait to be called for something that needed a dog and it's going[makes sound] you know, well, we're not gonna do that anymore. So it was a good thing he left when I got there; so we came in patrol sections that we really should be out there and it was amazing

because you know you need volunteers to help you *train*, especially to put the big dog suit on and run and get bit and knocked down and stuff. And once we were working with them it was a lot easier to get volunteers because they thought it was pretty cool. Not cool. The first time it happened is not cool. [laughs] Not cool at all. That rottweiler took me down.

[00:55:12:27]

Yeah, they put this big suit on you, and they say, go stand over there. Put your arm down; let him grab your arm; and whatever way he goes you just go with him. And then they let their dog loose and it's like holy shit [laughs] What's going on here? "Put the arm down, put the arm down, put the arm down!" Latches onto the arm and starts going roundy, roundy, roundy and I start going roundy with him and my boots caught in a gopher hole. Down I went and here I am eye to eye with this dog [laughs]. Thinking, Oh crap, keep my arm up, keep my arm up [laughs]! And the instructor comes in, *runnin'* down there. Grabs him by the collar [laughs]. Gee that was fun. Can we do it again?

At Miramar we had all types—the drug dogs, bomb dogs, and the attack dogs; some of them were cross-trained. You can do drug—you can do patrol drug, you can do patrol bomb, but you can't do bomb and drug because the response is to sit, because if they're a drug dog they can't tear up somebody's property; especially if they're wrong, they get really testy when you screw-up their thousand dollar stereo system. And if they're a bomb dog you certainly don't want 'em scratching at it, so the response is supposed to be just simply to sit; and if they were bomb-drug trained you wouldn't know why they were sitting [laughs] because they can't tell you so it's either patrol-bomb or patrol-drug; and I had—one of my teams went out and worked with the San Diego Drug Task Force and they went to the airport, they did harbor, hit the harbor, would take 'em to post offices and Fed-Ex stations.

I have pictures somewhere, I can't find it, of her and the dog with there's just this *pile* of marijuana that they had found; I think it was at port authority they had found it coming in. And that was working out really well until she came out of the airport one night and found death threats on the vehicle. And, again, NCIS gets involved because they have some of, they're almost as big of boobs as the Secret Service. She ended up being sent to Fallon, Nevada, for six months, her and the dog, because they couldn't figure out where those death threats were coming from and they actually started blaming *her* for writing them at one point and you know it's like, you know, if she was not happy with this duty I would maybe give it some credence, but she was enjoying the daylights out of it [laughs]!

She was finding stuff. She didn't have to be on base. It was great! So to blame her was just ludicrous. So the only thing they could think of to get her out of danger was to get her out of the area for six months. And there were a few bomb threats we had to go through. I had bomb dogs; and one of those went up for the fiftieth

anniversary of the USO on protective detail up there. One of my other dogs ended up out—this is not even a good statement—he went to the Army/Navy game one year and searched that and then he went to Atlanta for the Olympics [July–August 1996]; you all know what happened. He wasn't on duty then [laughs].

Halaska: Okay. What happened at the—?

Johnson: Atlanta bombing.

Halaska: Oh, okay.

Johnson: Yeah, they had a bomb go off in Atlanta at the Olympics but it wasn't my dog [both laugh]. So that was a lot of fun. We did institute tracking; there had never been a tracking program in the military before for military working dogs and we went to some seminar. I thought, Why not give it a try? Right? It might work. Teach the dogs. What the heck. So we instituted that. It was a lot of fun and then at the end of Miramar—oh, and those air shows were just ridiculous; millions of people on base, for a concert. I mean I got to see Garth Brooks when he had just come out, after he had just won entertainer of the year for the first time! Nobody knew who he was and there was all kinds of 'em on there, but. And then Tailhook happened and that was mostly Miramar sailors, or—

Halaska: What's that?

Johnson: Where they went to Las Vegas—the Air Force, the Navy pilots, and they had all the sexual harassment charges in Las Vegas come up on 'em; and that was mostly Miramar pilots, 'cause that was where Topgun was, was at Miramar, and they all thought they were all that and some of stuff .

**[01:00:05:24]**

Every Wednesday night was open night at the officers' club for the ladies in the community, commonly known as whore night at the officers' club [laughs]. We always liked to do the officers' barracks on Thursday morning. But we'd have people come in. There was one car came in one night; these two girls come in and it's like—they have open containers in the car; fortunatety the investigator was down there with me. Open containers in the car, drunk as snot, driving into the base and he says, "You know you can't come in here." "Do you know who we work for?" No, not really. I could care less personally. He says, "No, Ma'am, who do you work for?" "Really for Congressman Duncan Hunter" [Republican, California, 1981–2009]—he's the old man not the one that's out there now—and he says, "Well, maybe we should call your boss to come and get you because you're really in no condition [laughs] to be driving." But we got a lot of that do-you-know-who-I-am stuff because of those pilots and, you know, wives and stuff. They thought they were all that great. But it was fun. It was fun. And after that happened we do the air show and, like I said, a million people is not an

exaggeration, over two days. And finally I got high enough rank—I was a chief by then—I got the golf cart so I could drive around the tarmac; and these two girls come runnin' up to me and they say, where do we find, we were told that there's a place or a tent you can go to put your name in to win a date with a Blue Angel [US Navy's aerial acrobatics squadron] pilot."

This is right after Tailhook. Okay, see that red-top tent *way* down at the end of the tarmac [laughs] and its like ninety degrees on the tarmac and they went tootling off enough towards the tent. There was no—but it was fun. [Both laugh] At the end of the day we'd always meet in the parking lot. Our security officer had cold beverages and stuff for us and we'd always swap stupid question-of-the-day stories like, you know, where do I see the submarines [laughs]. And I got to see the stealth come in for the first time. We were out training the dog and all of a sudden this big shadow went over us and I was like holy... this thing really is quiet isn't it [Laughs] Yeah. So, and wheredid I go after? Miramar, then I went to, oh crap, ah, not North Island but the, oh, crap this is ridiculous. I am going to have to go look at my things. I'm getting older, can you tell? [Pause] San Clemente Island. Okay. There it is. I knew it was there someplace. San Clemente Island, which is part of North Island Naval Air Station in San Diego but it's an island off. Formerly used as target practice, now used as SEAL [US Navy special operations force] training. IUD [EOD], they have part of the island and you never know what they're going to blowup; they pretty much stay to themselves.

But, yeah, it's a security base; they use it for target practice; there's a lot of research and development civilians out there. I was the chief of police out there. Everything—I was even the Command Master Chief [petty officer; CMDCM] for a while because we ran out of one so I got to go to command master school—something she never did! [Laughs] But that was where I think I had the most problem and it was a sexist—sexual harassment is a bad term for it 'cause it had nothing to do with sex. My security officer from North Island, there is no way to describe what an asshole he was. There just isn't. He was, I don't know what he had; he didn't like women, A. He didn't like, oddly enough, black women, because he was black; and he barely liked black *men*. [Laughs] I mean, he was just, he didn't like anybody, I don't know, but he particularly took a dislike to me for some reason. I don't know. I have no idea why. He had a way of—so it wasn't a sexual thing but it was an untenable working environment thing more than anything; and it was because I was a woman; and he had me relieved from out there but could never explain why. Never for the life of me could I get an answer as to why.

[01:05:10:26]

He would bring—he put me in pass and decal, which is probably a very prominent area where everybody comes in for their vehicle passes and stuff; you don't have a chief out there working on the counter, it's not like that; but there I was, smiling and joking. We'd have these Friday meetings and I'd have to go to

these Friday meetings where he'd tell everybody, with other chiefs, what a horrible person I was and then he'd say, "I need to see you after the meeting," and he had a chair outside his office in the hallway where I would sit for at least an hour or two before he came back; in full view of everybody walking by—hi, how you doing [laughs]—it was just a humiliation tactic. And finally one fine day, he said in the meeting, he said, "Well, I think I'm going to have a number of chiefs get together and decide if you should remain a Master-at-Arms or not." And I'm like, no, what, kangaroo court, I don't think that exists. And he said that, "Unless you voluntarily resign," and I'm like, Have you lost your mind? I didn't say that but I should have. "No," that's all I said. I'm not going to dignify his stupidity one second longer; because *everybody* in the room every time this happened was just totally uncomfortable, you could tell.

So I left there; I walked over to the legal officer and I explained to her what all had been going on and I said, "What should I do?" She said, "File a complaint, *immediately*." Because we still hadn't answered the bottom-line question is why was all this happening? I'd never had a counseling sheet. *Never*. Not even a *verbal* [laughs]; so it's like [clears throat], why, what's going on? So I filed my little complaint and she said, "But the catch is once you write it and it's completed, typed up, *you* have to take it over and give it to him yourself." I thought, oh that's funny. I don't like this idea at all. So I waited until he went to lunch; ran in, threw it on his desk and left. He didn't say I had to hand it to him; he just said I had to give it to him. So I did. But, I mean, there were things like I had written some of my folks up for award and once this was all over they found those award recommendations at the bottom of his drawer—he never even entertained them. Finally what happened was the commanding officer called me in—of the base—and he said, "Chief sit down." And so we were sittin' on the couch. I could tell this was not going to be ass reaming of any kind 'cause he said, "Have a seat on the couch. We need to talk about this. What's going on?"

So I again explained to him what was going on. I said, "I have no idea why this is happening. I have yet to get"—and this is goin' on over a period of months—I said, "I have yet to get an answer why. I don't know what I did. I've done everything he asked me to do no matter how unreasonable it was, but I don't know. I just don't know." And he said, "Ok." And he said, "You never had any kind of disciplinary action?" "No." "Okay" So off I went. Next thing I knew this guy's getting reassigned to a ship [laughs] and I had my job back [Halaska laughs] so, you know, it was like I had to go through all that just to get rid of that asshole. That was fine; as long as I was rid of him. But I think it even pissed him off because one of my guys—we had to fly back and forth to San Clemente Island every week; we'd fly out there, work week, we'd fly back in, unless we had weekend duty; and I think one of my guys came in on a weekend, or on Friday, they'd stop by and say hi and I think that just pissed him off that they were still loyal to me [laughs]; 'cause he was trying to alienate everybody. But that was probably the worst experience I had.

After that I went up to Concord, Naval, Weapons Station Concord; it has a colorful history, a World War II history. That was very nice. They used to bring in all the munitions ships during World War II and that was one of the jobs black sailors had, besides being cooks, was to load the munitions onboard ship; and at one point, I don't remember the year [July 17, 1944], they had a humongous explosion and a number of ships blew up, the city [Port Chicago] across the way blew up. It was just massive. And a number of black sailors, obviously were killed. The next day they—the ones who were in the barracks sleepin'—were ordered back to duty and they refused to go.

[01:10:09:01]

There were seven of them and they were court-martialed for dereliction of duty. And, actually, while I was there—who was it—President Clinton, I believe, waived or whatever they do, cleared their record so that they were honorably dis—but there was only one of 'em still alive, and but their record was cleared. But, yeah, it was an interesting history and San Francisco, Oakland were right there. Like I say, everywhere I was I traveled, I tried to travel, even when I was at school in Texas. San Antonio. I love San Antonio the city, I wouldn't want to live in Texas, but I love the city. There were places in the outlying areas that were just interesting that we used to go to, Bratwurst Festivals [laughs] but in the Bay area, heck, you just hop on BART, you know, Bay Area Rapid Transit and there was one not too far from my house. Just walk down there, hop on, go to San Francisco. Go to Oakland. I used to go to a lot of the Oakland, Cal girls basketball games. I went to Stanford. Remember the year the United States first won the World Cup? Against—yeah, ninety-something, '90 [1999?]; Mia Hamm and all those folks played. Yes, I was there [laughs] because that was played at Stanford.

Well, the final game was played at Pasadena but the semifinals against Brazil were played at Stanford. And I was working part-time for a lawyer; because I had gone to paralegal school 'cause I knew I was going to retire so I thought, um, let's prepare; and when I was in Concord I was the Chief of Police, the Security Officer, and a Legal Officer. Now if that's not a conflict-of-interest I don't know what is. But [laughs] they were a little short-handed. Had 240 guys working for me in security and I think the whole time I was a master-at-arms I had maybe three women working for me and so it wasn't unusual; but they started closing the base so the guys dwindled but their responsibilities didn't, in fact they expanded because the Army took over the shipping part of it and we still had to provide security for *them*. So it was really? You know [sighs]. So that was a bit of a challenge trying to juggle all that; but, ah, yeah, it was interesting out there. Had a good time. Didn't get into it with too many people [laughs]. And as a legal officer I almost had to go to Sing Sing one time—the *prison*—because the chaplain always took the legal officer to go visit prisoners, and we had guy a Navy person, I don't know when he got in there but was in there for child abuse. And it's like, I really don't want to go [laughs]. But fortunately the chaplain canceled his visit so I didn't have to go.



But, and that's where I retired from; and we had a massive, I had a massive retirement party—she should have had one; it would have been closure for her [talking about her partner Kelli Carroll, OH2147]. But a bunch of my relatives came out from here; a bunch of my friends from here came out; one of the guys that worked for me or with me in Iceland he drove out from Illinois; my brother was there, he lived in southern California; my mainspeaker came up from New Mexico, she was a Air Force colonel that I had met in Iceland [laughs] yeah it was pretty good. And then we had this—and my uncle, the World War II veteran, he was actually part of the Bataan Death March; but he didn't talk about it; well, he's gone now but he didn't talk about it much; and that was just after the World War II Memorial [Washington, DC] was being built so I had put his name in. I had the certificate and the pin and the whole business and I presented that to him at my retirement. There wasn't a dry eye in the house [both laugh] It was great. But, yeah, and then we had a big party afterwards and it was *really* interesting because the old folks, young folks; black, white, Latino; gay, straight; Jewish—we had everything at that party, and everybody is getting along just like they'd known each other forever. The only problem we had was a couple of my guys wanted to take my cousin's kids into town and show 'em San Francisco. Well, the girls were like sixteen, fifteen, and thirteen. Mamas weren't going for that [both laugh]. So it was pretty good. We didn't have too much drama over that. The moms handled it so gracefully it wasn't even funny.

Halaska: [Halaska laughs] And what year was this?

Johnson: Hmm?

Halaska: What year was this?

Johnson: 2001.

Halaska: 2001.

Johnson: June. June 8, 2001.

**[01:15:01:25]**

That was the day I retired; and my official retirement date was September eleventh, or September 1, 2001. I came home from work and I had a mailman stop by and hand me my retirement papers; and I went back to work, and I called my detail and I said, "Now how do I get them taken back. They're going to need bomb dogs over there [laughs]. He wouldn't do it. Of course, he happened to be that lame ass partner I had in Iceland [laughs]. And that pretty much summed it up. So. If there's anything else I mentioned that I forgot about, so be it. But it was fun. I didn't lack for companionship, um, but didn't get in any trouble either even though I should have a couple of times I think. [Laughs] Managed to dodge that

pretty well. But like I say, the protective cocoon plus I never felt lonely on holidays; I mean there was always somebody that had a party, either the Master Chief or—I know when I was in Japan the girl I was seein' was Mormon—don't ask me why—but she knew some people there, the chief journalist and his wife. They had six adopted kids and they just opened their house to everybody. You know, if you were on duty, just stop by, grab yourself a plate when you had time [laughs].

So you never felt lonely. I think the only holiday that I ever felt a little depressed no matter where I was was the Fourth of July, because it just didn't seem right; and to this day, on the Fourth of July, it's kind of, hm-mm, you know [laughs] but, yeah, it just seemed weird.

Halaska: Um-hm. So what did you do after you got out?

Johnson: After I got out, or I should say, I should revert a little bit too. Once I left Miramar, at my rate, rank, there were no more dogs billets. I would have been taking a demotion no matter what I did. That's why I was Chief of Police and all that happy stuff. After I got out, what did I do? I went to work for a lawyer. [Laughs] Which, yeah, I finished paralegal school and I worked for a family law attorney out in Pleasanton, California; for the last eighteen months of my career I worked there afternoons and at night from like three to nine. It was a treat, then I came back here and I worked for a lawyer in Oshkosh for about twelve years and then he got sent to prison [laughs]; he's out now, though.

Halaska: Okay.

Johnson: It was a tax thing. And I stopped working for him for obvious reasons. And then, I don't know, I just loafed awhile, and then I actually started workin'—this is my second year at Menard's—for just the season because winter dives me crazy, being inside; I'm one of Seasonal Affect Disorder people and after awhile it's like, I have to kill something here [laughs] and I did a lot of volunteer work. A lot of vol—I have tried and I encourage people that are going to retire to have a plan B. I seen people go crazy not having one and my brother is a prime example. They just kind of [makes noise], you know, I don't know what to do with myself—but I think I've tried every but, and you know, it's not like you try volunteer thing if you don't like it or if you get weary after a while, move on! You know, you don't have to stay. But I've done Habitat [for Humanity]; I've worked with the PAC for a while, Performing Arts Center as a volunteer. I'm on, the vice-president of the Oshkosh Humane Society Board of Directors; I managed the pet therapy program there for eight years. Well, you probably saw the picture of the Shelti. He is the love of my life. She is on the mantle. So we did pet therapy. *He* is the started the pet therapy, so we're back into it. But Kelli [her partner] says, "you're not doing it *every* night like when we first met. [Laughs] So I have to pick some couple of months to go to. We're in the [American] Legion now. I like that; but, yeah, just a lot of different things to stay active and stay engaged. You know you can't just

shut yourself off; and working during the winter months now is fine, you know, because I go in and—I always said it's the first job where I could go in, I could do what I was supposed to, and leave, and not have to worry about *anything*. Not have to care what's not done, what is done. I'm done—out of here! You know, I put stuff on shelves. [Laughs]

[01:20:03:26]

But yeah, it's just a matter of keeping busy; and I quit during the summer because we like to travel in the RV, the yard needs tending, stuff like that.

Halaska: What—so you started wanting to go into law—

Johnson: Yeah.

Halaska: —things when you were in—What made you want to pursue that, I mean what made you want to kind of work at that, for the family law?

Johnson: I just always found it interesting.

Halaska: Okay.

Johnson: Yeah. I just, it just fascinates me; one of those things [laughs]. Yeah, we'll sit here and watch these shows and she'll be like, They can't do that. Why do do these people keep talking to em'? 'Cause they're stupid? [laughs] Why? They don't have to. But, yeah, it's just one of those things that's always fascinated me, and, I don't know, I'm much more of a, I'm not a real creative person. I don't know. It's not—what is it—the right side of the brain is the artsy side? Or is it the left side? Whichever. It doesn't work [laughs]. I'm more the—I read everything. She always laughs at me. 'Cause I *do*. I read *everything*. Give me an ad I'll read it. I don't care [laughs]. I guess habit. So I'm much more the literary type and, you know, law books and, yeah, I get that stuff. And I never ended up going to law school because there just wasn't time and I don't even know what kind of law it would have been because I know I would have been a lousy courtroom attorney because I can't stand it when people lie to me and I just—the temper would have not, I don't have a real bad temper but it wouldn't have worked out well [laughs]. It would have frustrated me so badly. So it would have had to be something—*family* law was pretty good. She didn't have to go to court very often but you did deal with some really hostile people in that. I mean, and she was up in Silicon Valley there where they had a lot of money and, yeah [laughs]. And the guy here was a personal injury attorney. An ambulance chaser basically. People are always interesting when they're at their worst; and that's either when you're a cop, you work in a hospital, or you're a lawyer. You never see them when they're at their best [laughs].

Halaska: Um-hm. Let me see. So, okay, so you do work for the American Legion, or you volunteer at the American Legion.

Johnson: No, we just belong to the American Legion; yeah, it's the, there's only two all-female American Legion posts in the state; and one is in Green Bay and one is in Milwaukee and we're in the one in Green Bay. I seem to be getting in deeper and deeper every day. [Laughs] Women, some women just don't work and play well with others [laughs].

Halaska: And then do you get any veterans benefits or have you accessed any of your veterans benefits, or utilized the VA?

Johnson: I am with the VA as a backup because when I started to get at the age sixty-two, sixty-five, that age, I thought [makes sound] you never know how things are going to go with medical coverage so I might as well be—'cause you have to be, you know, once a year if you go to the VA then you're in their system, you have to stay in their system. I didn't do it for ten years. I finally hooked up with it because I had such a bad experience at the VA in Milwaukee when I had my exit physical. Those people are idiots. Anyway. I [laughs] I just said screw it; I'm not dealing with them. And one, I don't know, ten years later I went, I was in Oshkosh and I went to see the service officer, the Winnebago County Service Officer in Oshkosh, about something, maybe gettin' registered with them, I don't know, and he was just the nicest guy in the world. He took all the pain and agony out of it. He said your percentage should be upgraded; this is what you need to do. And he picks up the phone and he gets all this stuff taken care of, when they were treating me like a jerk! It's like [laughs] what's going on here! So I do have that. I go once a year. Most of my medical stuff is done on the outside though 'cause I have the Tricare for life which is good; Medicare, which is there.

What else? So I did use the VA loan once, a long time ago, and that bit me in the ass. [Whispers: I don't know what happened there.] But I'll never do that again. Yeah, I still don't even understand it but that was like so many years ago it's not even worth going into. But they tell me I am ineligible because I never paid the loan back and it's like, you know, my credit rating is in the eight hundreds. You want to explain to me how that happens? [Laughs]

**[01:25:00:00]**

Oh, we got reported to them. Well, it would have been nice if—I found out about it *sixteen years* after the fact when I tried to buy a house in Colorado 'cause I went and worked out there for a while. I love Colorado. And it was like, I tracked it all the way back to Norfolk, which is where I had the house originally and the VA and the bank screwed something up royally. I don't know what it was but it wasn't even worth—it had happened so long ago and I knew I wasn't going to do it again so I didn't care. As long as it doesn't affect my credit rating [laughs]! So I tried that, that was it. Other than that I *really* am not eligible for anything that I know

of, because my percentage is only forty, it's not, forty-nine point something and it classifies you as fifty. I'm just below that [laughs] but my knees are getting to the point where *maybe* we should go down and have that re-evaluated again [laughs]. But—

Halaska: Um-hm. Have you stayed in contact with people from the military?

Johnson: No.

Halaska: Not really. Okay.

Johnson: One guy I hear from every now and then. I probably won't hear from him anymore, though, 'cause he just moved to Thailand. God only knows... And that's about it. No. Oh wait. The colonel that gave my speech for me for my retirement she's in Ohio, yeah, I still talk to her every so often; and there's a friend of mine, actually I met her in graduate school but she's out in North Carolina *now*, but she was in the Air Force as well, and it was funny because I hadn't seen her in *ages* and then one, when I was in Norfolk the first time, I was still an OTA, I was walking into the Exchange one day to get a uniform item and she comes walkin' out and we hadn't seen each other since that one semester in graduate school and after that I went to Canada and then I went to California and I mean it was *years*; and it was one of those friendships where it's like, you know, I probably saw you yesterday. Even though it had been years. And her and her partner are out in North Carolina now; they're originally from Milwaukee but. So probably, yeah those are the only three I can think of—the rest of them have all scattered to the wind but you kind of get used to that. Kind of get used to that.

I'm not really, you know, I don't need...family background—you know, my mom and dad both died fairly young, so I was twenty-one when my mom died and thirty-one [laughs] when my dad died so I kinda got used to taking care of myself. So, connections, military connections are extremely *intense* while they're going on; you know, even just friendships and acquaintances, they're like, [sound], while you're there but then everybody starts going away they're nice memories—for the most part [laughs].

Halaska: When did you meet your partner?

Johnson: Her?

Halaska: Yeah.

Johnson: 2012 oddly enough, yeah; and we were both stationed in San Diego for a long, long time; never, we don't even know any—we know one person in common [Halaska laughs] and I met that one person *once*, at a party. Ah, I had heard about her reputation *many* times, but I certainly didn't know her, but that is the only person we can find that we have in common and we never ran into each other

even though we probably frequented the same places *all* the time [laughs], but we met on Match. Yeah, that was it, in 2012. I was trolling and she happened to be, I noticed the Senior Chief thing, and, you know, I was actually not looking for anything other than somebody to do something with—we had basketball games; hiking; going places; movies; whatever. Just a friend basically, that's all I wanted. 'Cause I had really gotten used to being alone, I kind of liked it. [Laughs] And most of my friends were drunks. You know their entire social atmosphere revolved around one bar in Oshkosh and everybody's drinking partird. I really was not interested in that anymore. I had gotten a DUI not too long ago. It was the first one I ever got and probably shouldn't have been the first one I ever got but it was, and I just couldn't do that anymore. You know, uh-uh-uh, didn't want to do that anymore.

So I was just looking for somebody to do things with, and I happened to see the Senior Chief so I just said, "Hey, shipmate. How are you doing?" and it just—we chatted online for quite awhile and then we—I have to say I was at the Performing Arts Center down here one day, on a Sunday as I recall, for a performance and we decided to meet up after tha, there's a little coffee shop right down down from it, I said, "Yeah, I'll meet you there." So I get runnin' down there, and I'm waitin', and waitin', and waitin', and waiting [both laugh] and I'm standing there—my, ok, little, go back now, my brother has been married five times and I hadn't seen his last wife in about three years and I'm standing at the counter getting a hot chocolate, actually, waiting for Kelli to show up and all of a sudden I hear, "Oh Carol. How are ya doing?" I thought, Oh, God, no [laughs]. Please, no.

**[01:30:39:11]**

And I turn around and sure enough there is Dale's ex-wife, and I'm thinking, Why now? [laughs] So she's all excited to see me, and she was like—we got along okay, and I get my hot chocolate and she decides to sit *down* with me and I'm thinkin', This is not going to look good because she's a very nice-looking blond and my brother has good taste. Most of the time. But I'm thinking, this is not going to look good. And she finally shows up like twenty minutes late because she got lost and doesn't know how to use a GPS. She does now. But it was kind of funny the way we met. And then we just sat there and we started talking to each other about the service. And Pam left, thank God. [laughs] But, yeah, we hit it off pretty well and it just, we did! We went to basketball games; we went to movies, and we seemed to have kind of the same taste in movies, you know, historical type things; drama things; we just went to Green Book we like that. Sporting events; hiking; camping, stuff like that—things she never really did before, you know, she just wanted, was looking for somebody who was active I guess. Golf, stuff like that. So and then it just went from there [laughs]. Here we are today. Almost seven years later.

Halaska: So, looking back at your military service what surprised you, like, what didn't you expect about your experience?

Johnson: I didn't expect there to be that tight of a connection with people. I really didn't. Considering people moved around so much, and that was a pleasant surprise, that's for sure. That people got so tight so fast and really looked out for each other, you know, that was nice.

Halaska: Hm-mm. And then, also, why was it important for you to do an oral history interview that not only talked about your military service but also acknowledged your sexual orientation in the history as well?

Johnson: 'Cause I think it's important—I've read an awful lot of books about gays in the military, starting back in World War II and even before that and everything they've gone through. Stonewall [Stonewall Riots sparked by the June 28, 1969 anti-gay police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York City] which wasn't necessarily attached to military, but it was gay history and it was just something that needs to be continued; young people need to know where they came from; they need to know what happened first. I don't care what venue you're in. If you're in the world of sports—women's sports especially—they need to know it was never, not always this easy. And they need to recognize that because if they *don't*, it's going to go back to the way it was. They start getting lackadaisical and, yeah, it's going to go back to the way it was. So they need to recognize their history. They don't necessarily need to recognize *me*, but they need to recognize their history, and if I'm part of that that's fine.

I think the other part if it is I never realized how proud my *family* was of *me* as a person—I came out to them when I was thirty-five. I was sittin' in Norfolk in my house one day and thinkin, You know, this is ridiculous. I'm thirty-five years old. Why am I still hidin' this? And I picked up—I was thinking I was hiding it I should say [Halaska laughs]. I picked up the phone and I called my cousin, who I know, one cousin who I know is the biggest blabbermouth in the family [both laugh] and I told her and I said "Ann, by the way you can tell anybody you want to. Yeah." And she's like surprised didn't drop the phone but she said, "Oh, we were wondering what took you so long." [both laugh] And it was funny because we went for my fiftieth class reunion here last summer and she went with me and even there it came up and it was like my classmates, the people that were my good friends in high school then just looked at me and said, "This is supposed to be some kind of surprise? You think we didn't know? What?" [Johnson laughs] Like, okay, whatever. But now I think it's serious. It's important that kids remember where they came from. That it wasn't always this easy. I mean I read a lot of that stuff—I never realized; I guess I never thought about it. And that's the biggest downfall. You just don't think about it, much less realize how bad it was for some of those folks.

So Robbie, my colonel, came from the Air Force, she gave my speech. My God, she fought getting mustered out for, two years? They had like thirty charges against her, all of which were bogus, and she fought it. Fought it, fought it, fought it. This was early in her Air Force career. So she didn't have a pleasant time of it either. She'd be one to talk to but I'm not sure she'd talk about it [laughs]. So, no, I just think kids need to know where they come from. And that it's not impossible. I mean, I went through *before* "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" [US military policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians; effective February 28, 1994–September 20, 2011] and then "Don't Ask/Don't Tell/Don't Pursue"—I mean I thought it was very liberating when I was in San Diego and I watched at a gay pride parade right after "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" passed and one of my guys drove by in an open-top car and yelled, "Hey, Chief Johnson," and I didn't have to duck and look around to see who was listening, you know, because it didn't matter. Yeah, it was very liberating.

Halaska: Mm-hm. All right. Is there anything else that you want to add?

Johnson: Uh-uh.

Halaska: No?

Johnson: [Laughs]

Halaska: All right. Thank you very much.

Johnson: I talked that much? Oh God! [laughs]

**[End of Interview]**