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Interview with
Lee E. Johnson
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: E. R. Milner
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Oral History Collection

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Mr. Milner: This is E. R. Milner interviewing Mr. Lee Johnson at Denton, Texas, on April 21, 1976. If you would, Mr. Johnson, start off by giving us some brief biographical information--where you were born, where you grew up--this kind of thing.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I was born at Turnersville on December 28, 1893, and went to school at Turnersville. I was the seventh child of a family of eight and had a sister younger than I am. At the present I have only a sister living, and she's older than I am. There were three boys and five girls in the family, and I was the third boy. The oldest child was a boy, then a girl, then a boy, girl and so forth.

Mr. Milner: You went to school in Turnersville?

Mr. Johnson: I went to school in Turnersville, and at the time I started, it was a two-teacher school, and thereon it became a four-teacher school. At the present time this school has been discontinued, and the students are taken by bus to Jonesboro, Texas. We didn't have any graduating exercises.

One of the things that occurred at that time--one of the customs at that time--was most of your boys and girls, why, went into the teaching profession because there was no other profession hardly they could go to. We just . . . many of them used it as a stepping stone. My older, and oldest, brother taught school, I believe, at three small schools. He studied law at the time and later got a license to practice law, became a county attorney, county judge at Coryell County, district attorney, and ran for district judge, but was defeated, and he discontinued running for office. He moved from Gatesville to Breckenridge where he passed away.

I had an older sister by the name of Pearl Johnson. She married a man named Frank Owens. She also taught school at Coryell County, and a married sister, Minnie, taught at Coryell County a number of years and also taught at Gatesville. She came to school in the summer-time at North Texas State Teachers College and got her bachelor's degree and masters degree and also a degree in library science. She taught at Gatesville and also taught at rural schools till they did away with her school. Then she took a job in the elementary school at Gatesville, Texas. After she got her degree at Denton, why, she was drawing a salary of \$1,200 at Gatesville, and she got a \$1,500 raise to go to Odessa, Texas.

Milner: Now this is your older sister?

Johnson: Younger sister.

Milner: Younger sister?

Johnson: Younger sister.

Milner: Since she and you both went to North Texas, was this a family tradition that the family came to North Texas or . . .

Johnson: Yes, my oldest brother came to school here in the summertime and got his . . . or took the examination and got a certificate. In those days, why, you had to take an examination to teach. He had gotten a first grade certificate by studying and taking the examination. I took the examination and got a second grade certificate. They used to issue second grade, first grade, and permanent certificates.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: So I got a second grade certificate to teach. And when I finished at Turnersville school, why, I applied and got a job teaching at Coryell Valley, Coryell County. It was a small school, and in these days they didn't pay much. If I remember right, my salary was \$40 a month.

Milner: (Laughter)

Johnson: I stayed at that place with Mr. Wolf and paid him ten dollars a month for room and board and horse

feed. I had a horse and rode home on Friday evening after school was out and rode back on Sunday after school was to begin and take up school again. I only had about twenty students. Their desks were long plank desks made of . . . hand-made, made by carpenters. The desks were usually about, oh, eight feet long. They were just made of plank and so forth.

Milner: By local . . .

Johnson: . . . by local carpenters, yes. They were just hand-made desks. They used sit on benches and so forth.

Milner: When you came to Denton, I believe you said you were here one year before you took your test. Was that pretty common . . . that you didn't have to take so many hours, but you had to pass the test?

Johnson; Well, when I came to Denton in 19 . . . in the summer, I believe, of 1913, and I came with the purpose of working for a first grade certificate. I had a second grade certificate that I had received by taking an examination in Gatesville. In those days they gave examinations, and anyone who wanted to teach, why, they would have to pass the examination. So I had a second grade certificate by examination. And my purpose coming to Denton was to get a first grade certificate. In the summer and after I got to Denton, I learned that if I had come the next year, I could not only get

a first grade certificate but could get a permanent certificate by taking one year of college work, which would permit me to teach in any high school in the State of Texas. So I decided to come to school. I had a horse and saddle, and I sold my horse and saddle and . . .

Milner: (Chuckle) That paid for your college education.

Johnson: It started, yes--a horse and saddle. I graduated the next year in 1914 after one year's work. I could come back in the next year if I wanted to and work for a two-year college work, but they gave me just one year of college work, which was transferred later down to the University of Texas, and they gave me credit for one year of college work down at the University of Texas. I went back home and taught school at Concord. It was a two-teacher school. I believe I got \$75 per month.

Milner: Big raise.

Johnson: I stayed at home and rode my horse about five miles each time to school and so forth. I taught at Concord one year, and the next year, why, I applied for Ireland school in Coryell County. Ireland at that time was a three-teacher school, and I taught the higher subjects. If I remember right, it was seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, I believe, was the subjects I taught.

I taught the following year, and I decided to go to the University of Texas because I realized that one was going to have to have a degree if he went very high in the teaching profession. They wanted me to come back and offered me the school back, but I was quite interested in them telling me that they could probably pay me more and that I needed to stay there longer and get more experience than I could by going anywhere else. But I wasn't interested in going anywhere else. I was going down to the University of Texas. I went down to the University and went to school on what I had been able to save up in teaching the two previous years.

In 1917 when the war broke out, I was a sophomore there in school, and I entered the service.

Milner: Do you remember offhand what the tuition was at the University of Texas when you enrolled in 1917?

Johnson: I just can't.

Milner: Do you recall what courses you were required to take when you went back to the University of Texas for your degree? Was it a liberal arts thing, or was everything concentrated in education?

Johnson: No, I might add here about Denton that when I came to Denton, why, I came by train. They had a railroad here.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: I came by train. I'll always remember the man that

solicited us to ride. He hollered, "Streetcar on the opposite side of the depot! CIA and Normal!" Well, the streetcar went to CIA, and, of course, now at the present time we don't have any CIA. It's name has changed. We don't have a Normal. But at that time we had the streetcar that went to CIA and just went around out at the CIA building and went out to Normal. In that time it went out to what's now the golf course. It went a long ways out there and went all around and picked up, of course, more students. In those days it was very common to ride the streetcar because people didn't have cars.

Milner: Was this an electric streetcar?

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: Or mule?

Johnson: Now the CIA was the College of Industrial Arts. Now it's TWU, isn't it?

Johnson: Yes. Later on, it became the Texas State College for Women, and then later on, the Texas Women's University.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: My wife went there when it was CIA. I taught out there when it was TSCW, and our youngest daughter graduated out there, took a bachelor and master of arts degree when it was TWU. So we have always been pretty well connected with it--Texas Women's University.

Down at the University of Texas, why, when the war broke out, why, I heard that there was a man on the campus getting students to enroll to go to Leon Springs to become officers in the army, but when I learned about it, I went down and they already had the quota full for the first Leon Springs training school. So I returned home, and after school was out, I enlisted in the National Guard there.

Milner: Before we get completely away from Denton, do you remember if the streetcars went around the square, or did they go down the main streets, or were they more or less concentrated toward the colleges at that time? Do you remember offhand?

Johnson: Well, we had north Locust Street, where they went out towards the college, and they turned now where the campus begins on this side of the TWU campus, edge of the campus, and came back on down to town. It just sort of made a circle out there. Out at North Texas, I think, if I remember right, it run out West Hickory and came back out that way. In each case they come sort of around the square.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: The best I can remember.

Milner: The square, I guess, has changed a great deal since those days. Aside from Evers [hardware], are there any

other stores there now that you recall being there when you were in school here. I know Evers was probably there, wasn't it?

Johnson: Oh, yes, they had a lot of those same stores there. They've torn them down. Where Kibler is, that used to be an old theater building.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: It was there on the corner. And I think there was different kinds of buildings. Some of them have been replaced, but some of those old buildings are still there.

Milner: It seems like I remember in the Sunday paper, maybe a week or two ago, where Kibler's is now was an opera house or a theater.

Johnson: Most of those old houses or places were still there. Of course, the square was . . . the courthouse was still there and had the yard, you know, and all like that.

Milner: Yes. You were talking when I interrupted you about when the war started and they had already filled their quota for the Leon Springs training camp and you returned home and enlisted in the National Guard. I believe you said earlier that Henry Sadler was the man who was forming this National Guard company.

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: And it was Company L of the 6th Texas Infantry?

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: What position did Mr. Sadler occupy in the community?

Johnson: He was . . . we used to call them . . . the station agent for the railroad. That's the job he had.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Now he may have had some training in the National Guard, but I don't know about it. But I know his job was there working for the railroad. He was a special agent, we used to call them.

Milner: But to your knowledge, he wasn't a Spanish-American War veteran or anything like that.

Johnson: No, I know he wasn't that.

Milner: Possibly National Guard duty. . .

Johnson: If he had any experience, it was probably in the National Guard. That's right. He was appointed by Ferguson.

Milner: Since he was appointed by Governor Ferguson, was he a big Ferguson supporter, or was this political patronage-type of appointment?

Johnson: Yes, it was. It was political patronage, rather than one of ability and so forth. It was more of a political thing.

Milner: Yes, sir. I believe you said his younger brother was the lieutenant of the company.

Johnson: It was his cousin.

Milner: Cousin? Oh, I'm sorry.

Johnson: C. C. Sadler was a cousin of his.

Milner: Were these men . . . did you regard them as competent officers?

Johnson: Well, they weren't trained military men at all. We were not prepared for the war. They didn't have officers. The reason they had Leon Springs was to give them training and so forth.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: We just weren't prepared for it at all, and they got busy, and I think they wanted to be officers, get a company up. I think that's what occurred.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: And I guess . . . I'm pretty sure it occurred all over the country--something along the same principle.

Milner: Oh, I'm sure it was. I believe you mentioned earlier that the country could not fulfill the quota for this company and that the Gatesville State School or Reformatory paroled thirteen young men to fill out the quota. How did the company feel about having these junior ex-convicts, if you will, as being members of the company?

Johnson: Well, I don't know. I just know how I felt about it. I thought it was alright because the boys could drill and we couldn't (chuckle).

Milner: (Chuckle) They had experience in marching?

Johnson: Yes, they had experience in marching, could keep in step. They were made corporals and sergeants and so forth, and so far as I know, didn't anybody resent it. We didn't resent it at all. Far as I know, we didn't.

Milner: One of the non-commissioned officers who later became a friend of yours was Sol Schley. I believe you mentioned that he was a first sergeant.

Johnson: He was not a first sergeant. He was a line sergeant. Now our first sergeant was a fellow named Bertie Ford, but he hadn't had any military training either. Our top sergeant had never had any military training at all.

Milner: Now how did his appointment come about? Another political patronage thing?

Johnson: Yes, practically everything . . . yes. Well, he was selected by the captain, the officers there, in other words. In other words, we were a separate company completely and everything else.

Milner: This was a Coryell County company then.

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: And the political patronage worked downward from the governor, who appointed the company commander, and he appointed his officers and non-commissioned officers.

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: I see. I believe you mentioned that Sol Schley came back once from Waco rather intoxicated and had the men out drilling the troops at midnight or something like that. Could you share that story with us?

Johnson: Well, it took them some time. I think we got a company up . . . I went home . . . I came home at the end of May from the University of Texas, and they were trying to organize this company. I think we were sworn in to the National Guard on June 28, I think it was, when we went in. But during that time we all had to sort of stay at home or find our own place to live and so forth. And most of the boys . . . a lot of them were from right around Gatesville there, so Sol, when he went to Waco and had got his liquor and got drunk . . . why, he probably had two or three of the boys with him from his squad, and he called out some more, and they drilled around the courthouse in the moonlight (chuckle). That was before we was sworn in. In other words, we was trying to get our company up.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: After we got our company up, of course, we went down to Pecan Gap, and they kept us down there, so we didn't have that . . . that all happened before then.

Milner: What sort of training area was Pecan Gap?

Johnson: Well, Pecan Gap was just a place where they used to have . . . a long time ago they used to have a brush arbor meeting and services and so forth. Well, that's what was called more or less a tabernacle-- things like that. The ground was clean, and it was on the bank of Coryell Creek and had running water. It had lots of shade trees, and then they had some land that . . . well, I reckon a hundred or more acres adjacent to it that had been in grain, and we drilled on stubble land. In other words, it was a good place to drill and march and so forth. So there's where we spent the month before we got our clothes and so forth. We used our own clothes. It was sort of a motley group . . .

Milner: (Chuckle)

Johnson: We didn't have any uniforms.

Milner: Why was this particular spot selected? Did someone donate this land, or was it state land?

Johnson: No, it belonged to someone. I don't know who, but they just gave us permission and . . .

Milner: It was the patriotic thing to do.

Johnson: Yes, everything was patriotic. They was getting people to buy bonds and everything else.

Milner: He was doing his share for the war effort.

Johnson: Yes, as far as I know, it didn't cost a penny or anything because by then they had already harvested the crop.

Milner: Now this was long before Camp Hood or Fort Hood was built. Is that not correct?

Johnson: Camp Hood wasn't built until the Second World War.

Milner: Oh, I see. I see.

Johnson: Camp Hood was, oh, it was a good long time after that--in the forties, I think, if I remember right.

Milner: What was the extent of your training that you got at Pecan Gap?

Johnson: Mostly just drill, drill.

Milner: Close order drill?

Johnson: Close order drill.

Milner: I believe you said that you did or you did not receive uniforms while you were there?

Johnson: We didn't have our uniforms.

Milner: You didn't have uniforms. And you hadn't received weapons?

Johnson: No. Well, we had . . . I think we had . . . we weren't all issued weapons, but I think the ones that was on guard had weapons. But we weren't all issued weapons at all.

Milner: That brings up an interesting story you had shared with me earlier--about the fellow who was standing

guard and someone tried to come in, and he used his bayonet.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: Would you share that?

Johnson: All right. Well, they had on duty at the gate a boy that was instructed not to let anyone come in. And there weren't many cars in those days, and if they came in there would be personal parking. And so the boy was posted on the gate on Sunday afternoon and told not to let anyone come in. So a fellow came up and wanted to come in, and he was in his car. He hollered halt and told him to halt, and he didn't stop and he put his car in low gear. The boy was about seventeen years old. He thought he had to stop him. They had told him to stop him. So he stuck his bayonet in the radiator and stopped him.

Milner: (Chuckle) I can imagine it did, with the cooling system on the cars of that day.

Johnson: Yes, he stopped it. He stopped him. I don't know what it cost him to get his car fixed, but I know he was out a new radiator.

Milner: (Chuckle) One other kind of humorous thing that you mentioned while you were at Pecan Gap was that a lieutenant asked one of these paroled young men from

reform school to go to town and cash his check.

Johnson: Well, that occurred after we got to Fort Worth.

Milner: Oh, I see.

Johnson: That was after we got to Fort Worth. He was made more or less an orderly, we used to call them . . .

Milner: I see.

Johnson: He helped the lieutenant, didn't have to drill, just stayed around the camp, and did errands for the officers. They had a lot of confidence in him, and when we got to Fort Worth and combined with Company D of the 4th Texas, Lieutenant Burgess picked his fellow out to help in the office. He was a well-dressed boy, very courteous, had nice manners. He gave him his check one time to go down and get it cashed. He got on a motorcycle and never did come back.

Milner: (Chuckle) Just kept going?

Johnson: Never did hear of him. I don't know what became of him.

Milner: How did your company travel from Coryell County to Camp Bowie?

Johnson: I think we left . . . we went by train. I think we went back to Gatesville. Pecan Gap was about ten miles from Gatesville, and I just know we went back to Gatesville and took a train to McGregor. From McGregor, we took a train up to Fort Worth where we disembarked.

Milner: Do you remember any extraordinary events on that journey?

Johnson: No, not any at all. All I know is it was raining.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: It had been dry all the time when we was down at Pecan Gap. We was very fortunate. We stayed down there during the month of July, and it didn't rain at all. It was awful hot and dry, but it didn't rain, so we didn't have a problem of rain at all, which would be quite a problem when you consider men out with no place to go.

Milner: (Chuckle) No tents?

Johnson: No tents, no place to go. It could be quite a problem.

Milner: When you arrived in Fort Worth, there wasn't a track that went directly to Camp Bowie, I presume. You went to the regular depot in Fort Worth . . .

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: . . . and traveled from . . .

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: . . . the depot. How did you get from the depot to Camp Bowie?

Johnson: Well, I think we just walked, marched.

Milner: Just marched. What were your . . .

Johnson: It wasn't very far . . . it wasn't too far from the depot to Camp Bowie. I guess it was about a mile or two miles.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: It was a little better than a mile. It wasn't very far.

Milner: Now I believe you mentioned that you recall Camp Bowie being where Casa Manana is now . . .

Johnson: Yes, that's right.

Milner: . . .near Will Rogers Colosseum.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: So that's really very close to downtown.

Johnson: Yes, it was right close to downtown, and all out north of that was prairie land. There was no houses there, just open land, prairie.

Milner: When did you arrive? At night? Or was it during the day?

Johnson: We arrived at, oh, I think it was late in the afternoon, about four or five o'clock. It wasn't much of a ride on a train.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: Making good connections was the problem there.

Milner: What were your first impressions of Camp Bowie? Do you remember seeing it as you came up the hill? It is kind of on a hilly area, isn't it?

Johnson: Yes, well, I just know we had some tents there. I don't really remember much about it.

Milner: I see. One of the biographers of the 36th Division, a man named Ben Hur Chastaine, who was a captain from Oklahoma, mentioned that the topographical conditions were very dusty. What do you recall about the conditions? Do you remember the conditions?

Johnson: Well, it was dusty, but it wasn't as dusty as down at Coryell County (laughter).

Milner: (Laughter)

Johnson: You take drilling on stubble field . . .

Milner: Yes?

Johnson: . . . that's been cultivated . . . this land up at Camp Bowie was mostly grazing land, pasture land, which was probably dusty, but when you drill on plowed land just day after day, it gets awful dusty.

Milner: (Chuckle) I bet it does. I understand from Captain Chastaine's book that the water system was incomplete in the first few weeks that Camp Bowie was in operation. Were you in the area of the camp that had no water or do you remember there being a water supply?

Johnson: No, I think we had plenty of water.

Milner: You had plenty of water?

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: When did your company receive uniforms?

Johnson: Oh, we got uniforms soon after we arrived. I think it was the next few days that we were issued uniforms.

Milner: Did they fit very well.

Johnson: No, most of the uniforms didn't fit. I'll always remember one thing. A bunch of us standing together, and some soldiers came by and said, "There is a bunch of rookies!" We wondered why they called us rookies when we had on uniforms.

Milner: (Chuckle) Maybe it was because they didn't fit too well, right?

Johnson: They could tell by looking at us that we weren't old soldiers.

Milner: Now did you receive the campaign hat and this type of thing.

Johnson: Yes, we had a hat. There's our company up there. Did you ever see it? (indicating a company picture).

Milner: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

Johnson: There's the kind of hats and uniforms we wore.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: _____.

Milner: From what I have been able to understand, only the National Guard troopers who had been on Mexican border patrol had rifles about this time. When did the Army issue your company rifles?

Johnson: If I remember right, we didn't have rifles till we got to Fort Worth, and they issued rifles to us there.

Milner: Was this pretty soon after you . . .

Johnson: Yes, I think it was.

Milner: . . . came to Fort Worth?

Johnson: Far as I remember, it was.

Milner: How did the officers begin the training at Fort Worth? What was the chronological order of what they started you on?

Johnson: Drilling again.

Milner: They started you back at drilling?

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: And was this close order drill?

Johnson: Close order drill.

Milner: In squad formation?

Johnson: In squad and platoon drills and so forth.

Milner: Were you involved in many parades?

Johnson: No.

Milner: This didn't occur at that time?

Johnson: I think we made one . . . what do you call these . . . we had a sham battle at one time, was all.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: I think we made one trip to assemble in battle formation.

Milner: Right. This is going back to Pecan Gap, but maybe it will apply also to Camp Bowie. You mentioned earlier that the reform school boys were very experienced in drilling. Were there any men in your

company that just absolutely could not learn close order drill? I know in my company when I was in basic training, there were fellows that just absolutely could never learn their left foot from their right. Did you have any people in yours that . . .

Johnson: I think maybe we may have had one or two. I don't remember now. Most all the boys were . . . well, we were volunteers that wanted to go to the service.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: We had one boy, we learned later, that was only fourteen years old.

Milner: (Chuckle)

Johnson: At that time everybody wanted to go to the service. They wanted to fight.

Milner: Now this brings up an interesting point. What method was used to check on people's age. If they said they were seventeen or eighteen, was any research done to see if they were lying about that?

Johnson: I don't think so.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: They took their word.

Milner: They took their word.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: If they were big enough to carry the gun, they were big enough?

Johnson: He was trying to get a company together to go over-seas.

Milner: (Chuckle)

Johnson: We was trying to get a company together.

Milner: I understand that most of the men, well, almost all the men, lived in these eight-man tents, the pyramid-type tents. I don't see any in your picture. What were these like? Did they have wooden floors or dirt floors or . . .

Johnson: Well, most of them had wooden floors. I think they had wooden floors. They could have had dirt floors. I don't recall. I just don't recall.

Milner: Now the arrangement of the tent was four cots on each side, with an aisle down the center, I take it?

Johnson: Well, you had a stove in the center.

Milner: Oh, you had a stove in the center?

Johnson: Stove was in the center, and a pipe went up through the top. In other words, you had heat.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: So we had the stove. Now you said there was eight people to each tent?

Milner: That's what Captain Chastaine said in his book, but then I wanted to get your view on that. He could have easily been completely . . .

Johnson: I think they had tents of different sizes, but I think most tents just had four in there, if I remember right.

Milner: Four men to a tent?

Johnson: Yes. Now I may be wrong on that. I don't recall, in other words. I just don't recall.

Milner: Now looking at the picture up there, I can see some wooden buildings in the background. Were these some of the main buildings of the camp? I guess these were indicative of the rest of the camp, weren't they?

Johnson: Well, you see, these were more or less barracks where they had the cooking and the . . .

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: . . . mess part. It was all mostly permanent buildings for such things as headquarters, we'd say, for doctors or for the boys to go there for sick call.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: Also, it was used for cooking. Everybody stayed in tents, so I think . . . I think maybe the latrine . . . where they had the latrine, I think they were more or less wooden buildings, too.

Milner: Yes, sir. Do you recall any masonry-type construction, or was everything, all your permanent-type buildings. . . were they of frame construction?

Johnson: All frame.

Milner: All frame.

Johnson: All frame buildings.

Milner: I read in the Fort Worth paper that fire destroyed two hospital buildings in the late fall of 1917. Do you remember these fires, or do you have any recollection of fires on the post?

Johnson: No.

Milner: Possibly it was away from your area. When were you issued blankets or bedrolls and this type of thing? Were you issued those on arrival, or do you remember having to use your civilian blankets for some time?

Johnson: Well, as far as I remember, they issued those to us as soon as we got there.

Milner: What type of cots do you remember having. Were they metal cots of these folding canvas?

Johnson: Folding canvas.

Milner: Folding canvas.

Johnson: All of them was folding canvas cots.

Milner: How would you classify the conditions in the tents. Would you say they were comfortable, tolerable, or unbearable?

Johnson: Well, the way I think they were comfortable, considering we had been sleeping on the ground (chuckle).

Milner: Everything's relative, isn't it?

Johnson: I think we considered it very comfortable, considering sleeping on the ground.

Milner: I remember some of the tents I slept in were of the semi-permanent-type that had screening on the side, and you could roll the tents up. Were any part of these tents . . . was it possible to roll any of these up so that the breeze could get in in the summer?

Johnson: I don't recall that.

Milner: According to Captain Chastaine, the hot water system was not installed until well into the winter. How did the boys stand the showers up in that late fall and the cold weather?

Johnson: I don't recall.

Milner: I guess they were a tough breed of men then? You mentioned earlier about Captain Sadler being replaced. I understand that regular Army officers frequently replaced the National Guard officers who had no previous military experience. What did the men think of this action?

Johnson: As far as I know they didn't . . . it was all right because they wanted to be trained.

Milner: They were looking for the best officers they could find.

Johnson: Yes. As far as I know, there was no complaint at all.

Milner: Did you say that all of the officers were replaced, including Sol Schley?

Johnson: Well, Sol . . . see, he was in the . . . you have two different kinds of officers--commissioned officers are non-commissioned officers. Non-commissioned officers are those that . . . well, they draw considerable less pay. I think then they got about forty dollars a month, and lieutenants all got a hundred or better--something like that. So all the non-commissioned officers stayed with the company. They were what were called enlisted men, so they all stayed together, and the officers were the ones who gave the orders, and they're the ones that was replaced.

Milner: Now when these officers were replaced, what did the Army do with them?

Johnson: They sent them to school.

Milner: They sent them to school to become experienced officers? Do you remember what the reactions of the Texans and Oklahomans were when they lost their state designations and were merged into this United States Army as the 36th Division? What were their feelings then?

Johnson: I don't think it made any difference.

Milner: It wasn't of any great importance to them?

Johnson: No. Now you take the difference between the enlisted men and the officers. Officers may have had a different

viewpoint from what the enlisted men had. Enlisted men didn't express his views very well (chuckle).

Milner: At this point you were still an enlisted man?

Johnson: Oh, yes.

Milner: You, I believe, were a private, then a corporal, then a sergeant, and later went to officer's school. When did you begin to achieve rank? Was this soon after arrival?

Johnson: Well, you mean when I was in the National Guard?

Milner: Well, did you become corporal and sergeant while you were still part of the Texas National Guard, or was this after you were mustered into federal service?

Johnson: Well, I think it was after I was mustered into the federal service.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: But you take then at that time in the company, well, there was very few of us that had any college education at all--any education at all. In fact, if I remember, Sol Schley and myself and Buddy Ford--that's the top sergeant--we'd all had some college training. I think Ford had had maybe two years. Schley had two years and I'd had two years. We'd all had about . . . and I'd had a little more experience. I'd taught school three years, so I had a little more.

Milner: Right.

Johnson: You take a group that's uneducated and hadn't gone off to school--country boys--why, you're bound to go _____.

Milner: Yes, sir.

Johnson: No matter how _____ it's the same with anybody with no education and hadn't finished high school. So people with an education in those days was considered. . .

Milner: The elite, I guess.

Johnson: They were considered above average. Well, you had a better chance to go up.

Milner: I've read in Captain Chastaine's book that the two leading commanders of the 36th Division, a General Greble, and his exec, Colonel Williams, traveled to France in the late fall of 1917 and returned in December. The training radically changed when they returned from France. What type of training underwent this transformation at that time? Do you recall any drastic change in that?

Johnson: Well, I think that they quit drilling us so much. But we were pretty well drilled, I think. They must have found out that . . . one of the criticisms that they had of us not going overseas any sooner was that we had inexperienced officers and overtrained men.

Milner: (Chuckle)

Johnson: So we was overtrained. In other words, you can just drill a fellow down. I know when I went to Camp Pike, Arkansas, I was assigned to a bunch of boys from New York. They just had a lot more pep and step and everything else than we had. All those boys up there had us beat. They were just on the ball, faster and everything else. I reckon it was just because of us being trained down South. I don't know. We were just slow compared with them. They'd pick their feet up and drill snappy and everything else. They was just snappy. Just like I've seen these boys drilling out there now drilling at North Texas. In their drill they're more snappy than we were. But we were not. We were not.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: I think that may have been one of the things . . . they came back and told us that we probably should have been taught more military and bayonet fighting and things like that, rather than what we were doing--drilling.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: See, that all occurred a long time ago, you remember.

Milner: Yes, sir, I realize that.

Johnson: That was fifty-nine years ago. I never gave much

thought to it after that. It's just one of those things in a person's life that I felt was like a couple years wasted. That was all it was.

Milner: I understand that several British and French officers also came over there and worked and were instrumental in training the 36th Division. What do you remember about foreign officers coming in?

Johnson: Well, all I remember is one or two. They called the British sergeant-majors. That meant the same thing as enlisted men. They taught us how to fight with a bayonet and gave us more specific instructions, and then they had the course made out in which we had to "go over the top," they called it, and see how fast we could "go over the top," with our guns and so forth. We had training like that because they had been having trench warfare.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: They give us instructions how to get out of the trenches and go forward as fast as you could . . .

Milner: Now these foreign officers were combat veterans, I guess.

Johnson: Yes, they were combat veterans.

Milner: How effective were the American gas masks?

Johnson: Well, I don't know. I never did use one. But they issued gas masks, and we was trained to put them

on and off and so forth, but I don't know how effective they were. I know we were given training in how . . . but I never did have to use mine.

Milner: I see. I understand that snow fell several times during the winter of 1917. How did the tents endure the snow? It didn't pile up on the roof or create any problem of collapsing or anything like that?

Johnson: No.

Milner: How did the snow affect your training? Did you continue . . .

Johnson: No, when we . . . usually, the snow was just two or three days.

Milner: I see.

Johnson: It didn't. . .

Milner: The sun would come out, and it would melt right quick.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: I understand that you marched, or some of the troops marched, on extended hikes out to Lake Worth and places like that. Do you recall making those extended hikes?

Johnson: Just about one or two was all I remember making.

Milner: Where did you go when you went? Do you remember off-hand?

Johnson: No, I don't.

Milner: In May of 1918, according to Captain Chastaine, eleven men were killed in a training accident in some of the sham battles you were talking about when a mortar

exploded. Were you in the area . . . do you remember

. . .

Johnson: I remember the incident occurring. I think it was the 143rd Infantry. I was in the 144th. I was told it occurred, but I didn't know any of the details. I just know it occurred.

Milner: It wasn't involving any of your friends or anything like that?

Johnson: No.

Milner: We mentioned parading a little earlier. I would like to get back to that for one specific thing. I believe it was on April 11, 1918, if my information is correct, that the entire division paraded for the governors of Texas and Oklahoma. What do you recall about that? Do you remember . . . does that date . . . I wasn't sure if that date was significant or correct.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: The Fort Worth Star-Telegram and the old papers that I have researched mentioned that welfare associations set up reading rooms and social entertainment centers for the enlisted men at Camp Bowie. Did you make use of these, or do you recall what types of entertainment did they include?

Johnson: I don't remember any entertainment at all in the way of what I would call entertainment. I think they

had places there for writing--paper--and things if you wanted to write someone, but as far as I know, there was no entertainment at Camp Bowie.

Milner: Nothing that made a lasting impression on you.

Johnson: I don't remember a thing on the post.

Milner: The Army stopped the trench warfare training, I believe, about May, 1918, and started the battalion training in the area. Do you recall the specifics about this change in training late on in May, 1918, when they got away from the trench warfare?

Johnson: Well, no. I just . . . all I remember, we thought we was being trained on further. I don't remember anything (chuckle). I don't remember.

Milner: I believe you mentioned that on Christmas eve, 1917, that your tent caught fire, and you and your tent mates had to run to another tent through the snow. Could you share some of that?

Johnson: Well, all I know is that . . . see, the pipe went up through the ceiling, up through the top. It was sort of a pyramid, and they had quite a bit of fuel in it. It got up there and so close to the tent and got on fire, and so everybody hollered "fire", and we had to get out of there. With the burning up there over your head, well, you just need to get out.

Milner: You need to leave, don't you?

Johnson: You just need to get out.

Milner: What was the fuel that you burned in those stoves?

Johnson: I believe we burned coal. I think that's what it was.

Milner: Now you were in the tent and barefooted, confined at Christmas, because you had the mumps, I believe you said.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: Were the mumps very prevalent at this time? Were there quite a few people who were restricted with them?

Johnson: Yes, there were quite a few of them.

Milner: Well, now the measles and the flu epidemic that came through, they came later.

Johnson: They came later, yes. They came the next year.

Milner: The mumps was around Christmas, 1917?

Johnson: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Milner: You mentioned that officers would transfer the troublesome men to units that were being sent overseas.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: Was this pretty common practice?

Johnson: I think it just occurred one time.

Milner: Oh, I see.

Johnson: I think they just . . . see, we kept over there for a good long time. Undoubtedly, someone was complaining about . . . the officers undoubtedly complained because they hadn't been sent overseas. The men was wanting

to go, and they made up the 42nd Division by taking troops from all over the camp. They called on ours for a certain number of men, and they took out the troublesome ones.

Milner: (Chuckle).

Johnson: That's how we got rid of them.

Milner: After you entered officers training school, you were transferred, I believe, to Camp Pike, Arkansas. How did the training at the 4th Officers Training School differ from what you had received at Camp Bowie?

Johnson: Well, if I remember, there wasn't much difference. It was about the same, about the same.

Milner: More close order drill?

Johnson: Yes, it was mostly the same. As I remember, it was not much difference.

Milner: Another thing that you mentioned earlier to me was that the officers would wash out a candidate for the slightest infraction of the rules. What were some of the infractions that some of the men were washed out over?

Johnson: Well, maybe the uniform wasn't well-groomed, things like that. And they'd ask questions, and if you didn't answer them right away, why, they'd make notations. They'd see what kind of impressions different ones would make with different officers. Different officers

would interview different ones. It seemed like what kind of impression you got . . . from different candidates and so forth.

Milner: This leads up to, of course, something you mentioned earlier--about the day you felt you should be washed out. Would you share that with us?

Johnson: Well, I don't know. Some days you have good days, and some days you have bad days. That's just the old saying. So on this particular day, why, it looked like everything went wrong, and some of the boys had been called out and sent back to the camp. Well, on this particular day, why, I was late getting in line. I don't remember why I was late. I usually was on time, but I was late that particular morning. They asked my name. I told them, "Cadet Johnson, Lee E., sir." Later on, why, they inspected the group, and I think my collar was unbuttoned. I guess the reason why was because I was late. Just those things occurred. They asked my name, and I told them. Later on, we were drilling, and I don't know how come it, but I dropped my gun. It made a terrible racket.

Milner: (Chuckle)

Johnson: It was a platoon drill, and someone hollered, or the captain hollered, "Who was that who dropped their gun?" I hollered back at him just as loud, "Cadet

Johnson, Lee E., sir!" So you could hear some of the boys mumbling, "Well, he's going back to camp." Well, I felt so, too. I felt discouraged and I . . . I don't know. I just felt like I was going to be sent back.

So when it was over, I went up to the captain, snapped my . . . gave him a salute, and said, "Cadet Johnson, Lee E., would like to speak to the captain." He said, "Go ahead." And I told him that I didn't think that I had the ability to make a good officer and I'd like to go to my camp. He just said, "Go to your barracks." So I went. I went in and stuck my head in. Some of the boys . . . they was all getting ready for lunch. Some old boy hollered out, "Cadet Johnson, Lee E., sir!" That's all they was to it.

Milner: But you weren't washed out.

Johnson: No, I wasn't washed out. I think what they thought was that I was wanting to be sent back to my camp because they had got orders the previous day to send us overseas. And they hadn't got out yet. It hadn't got to the men. The officers probably knew it.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: And they thought probably I had heard and wanted to go back to my camp and go overseas with them.

Milner: Now that was at Camp Bowie? You were still at Camp Bowie at this point?

Johnson: That's right. The boys at Camp Bowie left from there to go overseas. The men . . . the division did.

Milner: Right.

Johnson: And then my company that was being trained for officers was sent to Camp Pike, Arkansas.

Milner: How did you travel from Camp Bowie to Camp Pike?

Johnson: Train.

Milner: Train again? Do you remember anything extraordinary?

Johnson: Well, I believe we went through Texarkana, and there was the first time I remember anybody giving us coffee and things to drink. We hadn't had anything like that at all. It was just regular food, so forth.

Milner: From Camp Pike you went to the embarkation point for going overseas. Where was your . . . what was your embarkation point?

Johnson: Hoboken, New Jersey.

Milner: Hoboken, New Jersey.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: And you went over on an Army transport ship?

Johnson: Yes, transport ship. British cattle boat.

Milner: Oh, it was a British cattle boat?

Johnson: Yes. In other words, it was used for that purpose. The officers . . . the ones who operated the ship, the ones who commanded the ship, were British officers.

It had British cooks, and I reckon they got most of the food, meats, from Australia because that was mutton, and I think that we'd never been used to eating mutton. In other words, we'd been used to eating beef, and the boys all complained of the food. As an officer in charge of some men, why, I went down and ate with them. It was plenty mutton . . . and the potatoes . . . they fed us mutton and potatoes. That's what they had. The officers as a whole had very good meals. We ate separately after I got my commission. We ate separately and had good food and everything, but the men was the ones that complained. They didn't like the mutton at all. . .

Milner: (Chuckle) But the officers were served more beef and less mutton.

Johnson: Yes. We were served better beef. Everything was better. There's a big difference in being an enlisted man and being an officer. There's just a big difference between them.

Milner: That was still true when I was in in the early fifties. It hasn't changed a bit.

Johnson: Well, there's just all the difference between them.

Milner: Yes. There still is, I'm sure. Do you remember the name of the ship that you traveled on?

Johnson: Corona.

Milner: Corona? Did you go directly from Hoboken to France, or did you go by way of England?

Johnson: No, we went to Brest. We landed at Brest. I'll always remember . . . we unloaded at Brest. We had a lot of street urchins, little old boys, coming along, and they'd beg us for things. "Give me some chewing gum." I remember one boy said, "Give me one cigarette for my sister." He kept saying, "Give me one cigarette for my sister." And they didn't give it to him, so he said, "Son-of-a-bitch!"

Milner: (Chuckle) That's the first thing they learn, I guess.

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: That was your first impressions of France, I guess?

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: Did you find this to be pretty uniform throughout France or was this just at the port cities?

Johnson: Well, I wasn't associated with any other places hardly.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: This was there at Brest where the troops unloaded, and these kids were there.

Milner: You spent most of your time in and around Brest?

Johnson: No, we went to . . . we didn't stay there very long. We went to Saint-Amand. And that's where we were relieved of our command, and we was sent to a training place to train troops. The men was sent on up to

. . . a lot of the boys didn't have any training at all. They just went up on the firing line.

Milner: Well, now what division were you a part of at this time? Were you still attached to the 36th?

Johnson: No, it was the 41st.

Milner: 41st.

Johnson: Yes, I was assigned to the 41st Division. The boys . . . I don't know where they went. I just know they went on up to camp . . .

Milner: Went on up into the line?

Johnson: Went up into the line. That was in October.

Milner: That was when the western offensive was really in full swing, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes, yes, that was when things . . . and the casualties . . . when they lost men, they needed men to replace them. They just sent these on up there. They were not trained. They were just not trained.

Milner: Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when you got word that the war was over?

Johnson: Well, no. I just know that we got word that the war was over and everybody was celebrating, especially the French. They were just wild.

Milner: (Chuckle) Were any of your troops or were you allowed to go to Paris?

Johnson: Yes, while I was at Saint-Nazairre, I got to make a trip to Paris.

Milner: From Saint-Nazairre?

Johnson: Yes.

Milner: What did you do in Paris for entertainment?

Johnson: Well, you could look around. We went to the Louvre and places like that. . . but Coblenz . . . see the cathedrals and things. I guess there was always tours and trips to make.

Milner: When did you return home?

Johnson: I returned the latter part of August. I sailed the latter part of July, 1919. I was discharged on August 5, 1919, just two years after I was sworn in.

Milner: Two years exactly?

Johnson: Two years to the day.

Milner: Now that was two years from the time you were mustered into federal service?

Johnson: That's right.

Milner: How was the return voyage any different from the voyage going over? Do you remember?

Johnson: We had a better troopship and made it in less time.

Milner: Was this an American ship you came back on, or was it again an English ship?

Johnson: I don't remember. I think it was called the Kroonland. I think it was . . . I don't know what ship it was. I think it was an American ship.

Milner: Where were you discharged?

Johnson: At San Antonio, Kelly Field.

Milner: Kelly Field. What difficulty did you experience in adjusting to civilian life?

Johnson: Not any at all.

Milner: None at all.

Johnson: I was begining school as a sophomore . . . went back as a junior two years later (chuckle).

Milner: Did you go ahead, then, and go straight through?

Johnson: Yes. The next two years I went on to school.

Milner: Was there any sort of assistance like the World War II GI Bill?

Johnson: Well, no, there wasn't any at all. By the way, the American Legion got this GI Bill through. The American Legion wrote the order and everything under the GI Bill. No, all we got was a \$60 bonus, and there was a lot of objection to that.

Milner: Yes.

Johnson: That's all we got. Sixty dollars was all we got.

Milner: Small thanks, isn't it?

Johnson: That's all we got.

Milner: Were you able to save any while you were in to help any for your education?

Johnson: Yes, I was able to save. I worked while I was going to school down at the University of Texas.

Milner: You went ahead with your education degree toward a teacher's certificate? Or did you change to business at this time?

Johnson: Well, like other kids out of the service, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think it was like that about everywhere. So I got to associating with some boys, and they said, "Why don't you major in accounting?" So I took my degree in bachelor of business administration. I got out and couldn't get a job.

Milner: Mr. Johnson, I want to thank you for letting us interview you.