

U. S. ARMY

VETERAN: JAMES W. JOHNSON
HIGHEST RANK/GRADE: TECHNICAL SERGEANT
INTERVIEWED BY: DORY BUSBY

James W. Johnson enlisted in the Army on December 19, 1939, because of the persuasion of a friend already in the service. He enlisted at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio at the age of eighteen and remained in the Army until September 1945.

Mr. Johnson was a member of several divisions during his military service. He was a member of N Company, Third Battalion; Second Infantry Division; Headquarters Company, Second Battalion; Second Infantry, Eighty-Eighth Division; Second Battalion, Headquarters 147th Glider Infantry; and the Eleventh Airborne Division.

He was stationed mainly in the South Pacific in places such as Manila, Leyte Island, and New Guinea. The highest rank he ever held in the service was technical sergeant, but he was also a sergeant major for awhile. The last group he was assigned to was the Eleventh Airborne Division, and he was a member of that division the longest period of time.

Mr. Johnson had mostly odd jobs before he enlisted in the service. He was not surprised with the often harsh military rules. He was in a family involved in the military and he knew what to expect. As a matter of fact, Mr. Johnson really surprised me. He was not homesick and he said it was not very difficult leaving his family. He felt as if he was taking on a great adventure. Mr. Johnson said he has never had a problem talking about his service time with anyone. He loved the service, and throughout our conversation he talked about the fun times. Many times he responded with, "Oh yeah. We had a good time."

James Johnson was very proud of his country during the war. He felt the draft was necessary because they needed the men but not always fair because it tore many families apart. He still speaks very highly of General MacArthur, but told me that he (MacArthur) was not Jesus, but almost walked on water anyway. The generals were very responsive to the needs of the men. The country felt what they were doing was right and morale of the country was high because of the propaganda put out by the United States government. He was especially proud when I asked him if there was much drug abuse in the service at that time, saying that he never saw any drugs at any time. They did, however, spend much of their money on whiskey and gambling.

Many times his men would steal. This was a great pastime because it was easy to steal without getting caught. Once his men were ordered to unload all incoming trucks. The men made a rule that each third truck was theirs and they would take whatever that particular truck held. He said they never had to go the mess hall because they unloaded as much food as they could keep and cooked it in their barracks. The problem was they never knew what they were unloading because it was always boxed up. Once they unloaded a truck full of watches! Another time they decided to steal the chaplains' jeeps. Their group ended up with twenty-seven jeeps which were worth stealing, because they had numbered passes on them which allowed the men to gas up the jeeps for free. In addition to free gas, the men had clearance to go anywhere they wanted when they were driving the chaplain's jeep.

Mr. Johnson also told of starvation. Once his men went for five days without food, but the Japanese were also starving. He said it was hard for him to kill another man until he saw what the starvation did to the Japanese people. The "Japs" would cut off the muscles in the arms, legs, and buttocks of dead American soldiers and use them for food. Brutality such as that gave the men an incentive to fight. To this day, Mr. Johnson thanks God that he has enough to eat. He said nobody could ever truly know what it is like to go hungry until they have been without food for days.

Even though rations were often slow in coming, he felt the equipment and rations were more than adequate for that period of time. He also believed the weapons certainly served their purpose. Once when his unit landed on a beach, they were raided by Japanese paratroopers. His friend, Frank, gunned down each and every Japanese paratrooper and then gunned down the plane. Because Frank saved so many lives, he was immediately given the rank of second lieutenant.

Mr. Johnson laughed throughout the interview. At one point he told of acquiring a monkey which could smell the Japanese as they were coming. He said that the monkey would throw a fit when the Japanese were near, and it gave the men time to prepare. The monkey finally had to be returned to the wild because he was giving away their position to the enemy.

U. S. ARMY AIR CORPS

After Mr. Farra completed his tour, he went back to the states on a ten day leave. He then began to train with B-29 bombers but before his training was completed, WWII ended. He finished his six months at instrument school in Bryan, Texas. During his tour in London, he received 400 combat hours.

After his enlistment was up, he returned to work at Humble Oil and Refining Co. (now Exxon) in Baytown. He enlisted in the reserves while working there and stayed in until 1963. He enjoyed it because he got to see how the Air Force progressed. His two weeks of active duty each year while in the reserves were like a vacation. He says he enjoyed the experiences and opportunities he received during this time.

I found Mr. Farra to be a very nice and interesting man. Talking to a WWII veteran makes it much easier to understand what happened to the soldiers during that war than reading about it in a book. It is something that not too many more people will be able to do. I considered it an honor and a privilege to have spent time with Mr. Farra and relived his experiences.