

Interviewer: State your name for the record.

Johnson: Charles Edward Johnson.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Johnson: Jonesville Virginia

Interviewer: And what year was that?

Johnson: 1948

Interviewer: And your parent's names?

Johnson: Joe and Mary Johnson.

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Johnson: One older brother.

Interviewer: One older brother and how much older was he?

Johnson: Four and a half years.

Interviewer: Four and half years and where did you go to school?

Johnson: I went to elementary school in Virginia I then moved to Ohio where I went through junior high and high school.

Interviewer: Did you have a job during high school?

Johnson: Yes

Interviewer: What did you do?

Johnson: worked on a farm a dairy farm I took care of all that little green stuff.

Interviewer: What little green stuff?

Johnson: What came out of the rear end of the bovines' back side.

Interviewer: And how much did you get paid an hour do you remember?

Johnson: I think it was like forty cents an hour.

Interviewer: Forty cents an hour.

Johnson: That was before and after school and on weekends. During the summer I worked hay hayfields and during fall I helped harvest corn and I guess in fall we did corn.

Interviewer: And in high school where

Johnson: And also that was an issue when I was 12 or 13 because I couldn't get a work permit until age 15 and that was the law in Ohio at the time. Then I went to work in a gas station.

Interviewer: Okay and what was your brother doing since he was four years older?

Johnson: He went to high school and did basically what I did except when he graduated in 1962 he went to the University of Kentucky he ended up getting a degree in chemical engineering.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Johnson: Went to work for Amoco making nuy bomb.

Interviewer: Okay so your brother never made it to Vietnam?

Johnson: No he never went in the military.

Interviewer: So were you the only one in your family that's been in the military?

Johnson: No my father was in World War II.

Interviewer: What unit was he with?

Johnson: Ninth armor division.

Interviewer: So did you have a lot of war stories growing up?

Johnson: My dad never talked about the war. He did after I came back from Vietnam to a certain extent but he never really talked about it probably until in the last year before he died.

Interviewer: Did his background make you want to go into the military or?

Johnson: Well probably more positive because my folks were depression era people. I mean they grew up during the depression they were probably in their teens and when World War II started I had almost every eligible male was in the military on both my mom and dad's side.

Interviewer: Wow after high school what happened?

Johnson: I graduated from high school on June 4, 1966 and like June 7th I was in route by train to Fort Dix New Jersey to start basic training.

Interviewer: And did you know that was going to happen?

Johnson: Well in my case and also and also a reflection of that time you know we didn't have a lot of money and it was hard to keep my brother in school and he worked during summers and also he had part time jobs at school and my mom and dad supported what they could. But there was just no way that two of us could go to college at the same time and also back in those days in the mid-60s employers were very reluctant to hire you while you had the draft lingering over you. And so basically what happened was I just you know decided it was coming one way or the other might as well go and get it over with and also be able to use the GI Bill to go to school.

Interviewer: And was this your first time away from home on your train ride?

Johnson: No I had gone to visit my grandparents back in Tennessee for a couple of weeks at a time. I had been away from home you know for several weeks at time throughout my childhood go stay with my grandparents for a couple weeks in the summer.

Interviewer: Did you get to choose your own job or did the military?

Johnson: I chose it.

Interviewer: So without being drafted you were able to?

Johnson: I enlisted and I really didn't know what I wanted to do and the recruiter said go take the test on the I don't remember the name of the test anyway I scored above average and so I was I could actually probably could have gotten anything I wanted. I could have had electronic maintenance or mechanics or whatever. But I ended up choosing the army security agency.

Interviewer: Any particular reasons why?

Johnson: The mission.

Interviewer: The mission.

Johnson: It was kind of neat you know being the spook type and being involved in breaking codes and all that.

Interviewer: How long was your basic training?

Johnson: Back in those days it was like seven weeks.

Interviewer: Seven weeks how were the men that you trained with?

Johnson: Most of them were draftees. Most of them from New York most of them were from New York City from Washington you know metropolitan areas.

Interviewer: Were they angry at being drafted?

Johnson: Oh yes

Interviewer: And so there was a lot of tension with that whole realm of thinking?

Johnson: They just did not want to go in the military and I think they basically just you know if I desert they are going to track me down so I am just going to gut it out and do as little as possible. That was one of the biggest problems I had and in the fact in my platoon there was only one or two regular army and the rest were draftees and they just did the absolute minimum to get by.

Interviewer: That's a bummer. How did your drill sergeants take it I mean how did they?

Johnson: They kind of gave the regular army guys a little slack. But you know I just my dad said and uncle said just go in there keep your mouth shut do what you're told and he said just get by and you know do the best you can. But after I got to AIT I was there with other people who had volunteered for the Army Security Agency so that was another whole different attitude towards the training.

Interviewer: And it was called AIT at that time?

Johnson: Advanced Individual Training had basic BCT Basic Combat Training and AIT Advanced Individual Training. I don't think it changed?

Interviewer 1: No it's not changed.

Interviewer 2: And how long was that training?

Johnson: Well the war time version the peace time version I think was 24 weeks and I think it was cut back to 16 to 17 weeks.

Interviewer: And what were you what was your typical day what would you do?

Johnson: Well I volunteered as a 98C which is a traffic analyst which is the analysis of foreign rate of communications. We got up fairly early I mean we got up at like a quarter to five. I think breakfast was like at 5:30 until 6:15 and we had the first formation I want to say around 6:45 then we marched about a mile to our classrooms. So they had asphalt tracks built I guess they were fairly wide they were probably 20 feet wide because you could have columns going both ways. And it took us probably about 20 minutes to march down there 20 to 25 minutes. I think and a course started like at 7:30 and we went to we had classes from like 7:30 until 11 or 11:15 and they had another mess hall close by for lunch rather than use the time you know wasting an hour you know basically marching back and forth for lunch. But they had a mess hall down there and it was just basic lunch then we were back in a classroom by I think at 12:45 and was there until like 5 for 5:30 and we marched back and we had super from like 6 to 7 or something like that.

Interviewer: And in the classroom you were just learning how to write codes and?

Johnson: In the signal intelligence the crypt analyst breaks the message internals the traffic analyst works on the message externals which is for man in war if just the quince signals are you familiar with quince signals?

Interviewer: No

Johnson: Quince signals is a sequence of three letter codes either Q or Z developed you know back oh gosh probably the 18902 I believe. And they were just abbreviations like QRK. QRK is how do you read

me CDK is I am closing station so they had these different QNC signals which are international used by friend and foe.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you were getting a crash course?

Johnson: Oh yes it was dumped on us and also at night we had mandatory study halls. We had to go back down there we went back down there on our own or if you had a car you could drive down. But there was a mandatory study hall from like 8 to 10.

Interviewer: Were you getting a sense of information overload?

Johnson: Oh yes this old brain was zonked by the end of the week. Also we had classes on Saturday had to meet on Saturdays too.

Interviewer: Did you wish had chosen a different MOS or job or were you enjoying it?

Johnson: Everybody back in those days was rushed no matter what you did the name of the game was to pump out as many people as possible with minimal qualification. I guess that's the only way you can put it.

Interviewer: And what did you do after AIT?

Johnson: I went to Fort Brag and while I was there went to jump school came back went to Turkey TDY for about five and half months. Then I came back to Brag and I got orders to go to Vietnam.

Interviewer: And how long were you there?

Johnson: Almost two years I got there like January 25, 1968 and I left like January 6th or 7th 1970. So I was there 23 months and 10 days or something like that.

Interviewer: So going from Brag to Turkey to Brag and then going to Vietnam. Once you were getting to Vietnam did you feel like you were properly trained to handle your task or do you?

Johnson: No

Interviewer: All that time and the military didn't train you properly?

Johnson: I mean I was capable of performing my special intelligence you know working with the but as far as the field training to go out in the field sit on a hilltop no.

Interviewer: Did you know that you weren't prepared to do that?

Johnson: Yes because people that had been there said they are just going to throw you out there. We got absolutely no tactical training what we learned basically from the grunts that we were on the hill with. And then other people who were there also gave you pointers like everything from just how to load you rough sack to fix your wet gear.

Interviewer: You didn't know how to do that?

Johnson: Well I mean you could put it together but to make it practical accessible comfortable so it doesn't hang up on it was just one of those little tricks of the trade. And you know how to set out claim wars an M60 I had never seem an M60 until I got to Vietnam. Didn't see an M16 because I went to basic with an M14 and in AIT we didn't have any weapons at all.

Interviewer: Did they ship by boat?

Johnson: No I went by airplane.

Interviewer: Went by airplane. What was your first day in Vietnam like?

Johnson: I landed in ___ well I went through Oakland to Travis Air Force Base then took a commercial jet from Travis Air Force Base and I think we refueled at Johnston Island or something like that. Then we flew to the Philippines refueled again and went into Saigon. And I got there and we went to 509th radio research group which was the brigade site that controlled all the army security agency units in Vietnam. And we stayed there usually we stayed there you know 5 to 7 days. And I got there like the 25th of January and Tet of 68 started like the 30th or 31st. Then I was given an M14 went out to a bunker and pulled bunker guard for.

Interviewer: On your first day?

Johnson: No this was the first after about six days.

Interviewer: Oh so the first six days.

Johnson: The first days I was there was basically in processing. They basically took you to a transient barracks and they let you recover from jet lag. They basically kept you busy until the normal night time then they wanted you to be back on the local clock I guess you could say. So then we went to in processing you know go through the medical records checks security clearance checks personnel assign you to a unit then await transportation to that unit. Sometimes it took you know another week or so.

Interviewer: So what were your personal thoughts of reaching Vietnam I mean?

Johnson: I was there.

Interviewer: You were there were you thinking it's hot it's terrible?

Johnson: It's hot it's muggy it's miserable.

Interviewer: But you were there to do a job.

Johnson: Yeah just put in your time.

Interviewer: You said you were going to be assigned to a unit did you know any of the other guys that were going with you?

Johnson: I went over as an individual.

Interviewer: Really

Johnson: I was just given orders given a reporting date to Oakland. Then when I got there and did the initial processing which was very minimal I think really the only thing was they just verified who you were and checked your shot record and you went and got your shots if you were missing any. I already had all of that done before I left Fort Bragg so.

Interviewer: So at that time you were in the 265th you were affiliated with the 265th?

Johnson: Well I was assigned to the 265th.

Interviewer: And you were going to be attached to were you considered an attachment?

Johnson: Well I was assigned to the 265th but the 265th was attached to the 101st airborne. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Uh huh and so you said that was your assignment in Vietnam?

Johnson: Uh huh

Interviewer: And what happened when you got to the unit?

Johnson: Well that's another story. See Tet of 68 started like the 30th of January or something like that after I had been in country a week. Then I went out there and all of that was kind of through out of kilter because the 101st was still closing in from coming in from Campbell. And they were out at Benwy and I was at Saigon Proper which is probably 25 or 30 miles and during Tet of 68 nothing was moving. So basically I just sat there for another week doing guard duty. I stayed out we stayed out there on the bunker line permanently did not come back in. Eventually they'd bring meals out to us literally you know they'd bring out a hot breakfast they'd bring out sandwiches or sea rations then we'd have a hot meal at night. And a lot was going on there was stuff passing over me but we didn't see any action where was at.

Interviewer: But you weren't performing your job?

Johnson: I was being on guard duty that was all I was doing. I was in a bunker with three or four other people.

Interviewer: Were you disappointed I mean this isn't.

Johnson: I had actually no idea what was going on. I was basically at that point in time we knew that a major attack was underway as far as what the scope of it was. I was an E4 down there with an M14 with some guys that had absolutely and they had a lieutenant who came around and told us what he knew which was also very little. He you know I don't think they knew the scope of what it was initially.

Interviewer: Did you even realize what you were pulling guard on? I mean did your out in no man's land just hardly any contact. I mean when I was out doing that I was like what in the world are we out here for?

Johnson: Well we knew we were there to prevent enemy infiltrators coming through I mean it was very simple our function was simple. If they came into our line of sight we engaged them I mean that was all there was to it. This stuff ain't rocket science I mean.

Interviewer: That's all the orders they gave you if somebody's coming that's not friendly shoot them.

Johnson: They said if they come through and they are armed feel free to engage. We were given basically you know free fire.

Interviewer: Do you know who you were with the unit?

Johnson: Oh I was still with 509th radio research group. See the 509th radio research group had control over all army security agencies in Vietnam it was kind of weird set up because we actually worked for the director of the National Security Agency. And it was a the Army Security Agency was a separate command but they had the control over us and they just put us out to perform the direct support unit function to a maneuver unit. That was a real need because of the fact we intercepted the tactical voice and Morris communications so we had to be closer because of the power of the transmitters. Whereas the fixed units like the fixed operational companies and the field stations which were battalion sized units took care of all the strategic communications which was basically Morris and _____ type.

Interviewer: So y'all were pulling guard one day and then they come up and say you're moving to the front or?

Johnson: Well what happened was I was out there on guard duty I had been assigned to the 265th and the second brigade of the 101st was moving up north in the _____ area. And they decided since I still couldn't get out to _____ which was 25 or 30 miles away 20 or 30 miles that they needed an escort for a courier that was going up so they had a captain I believe that was taking up a box and he needed some escort. You know to perform security and help move you know whatever it was my gut feeling was it was a signal for a captain and it was under escort and it was probably a _____ or some type of crypto material that was being taken up there. So anyway I just got up there and he said well we'll assign you to the 2nd platoon which was supporting the 2nd brigade. You just go up there and stay at Fubi at the 8th radio research field station and when things get settled down you just go out and join the platoon. And that's eventually what happened it took about until the end of February before I joined the 2nd platoon. I just stayed there at the aid field station I went to work in the traffic analyst section TA section there until I joined the 2nd platoon.

Interviewer: And then once you got to the 2nd platoon you started doing?

Johnson: Basically at that point in time I was a radio operator I was sent out with another guy to monitor airborne directional finding depth and give it to the S2 of the 2nd brigade.

Interviewer: And did you were there infantry men with you guys?

Johnson: Yeah they were out there it was tactical CP so there was some headquarters people around and also I think there was a security platoon that was made up of the walking wounded and the injured people on profiles or whatever who basically could form a fixed you know _____ duty type.

Interviewer: Were you considered to be in a safe zone pulled away or were you right on the thick of things and you got attacked?

Johnson: Well while I was there during that time we there was some mortars nearby nothing directly on us. But you know you could see rockets going over and mortars and you could hear exchanges of fire but it was nothing in our area nothing no bullets or anything came into our area. Nothing was really close I mean it was probably 1000 yards at least away from us.

Interviewer: How was communication when you were out there?

Johnson: Radar communication?

Interviewer: Letter like from home or anything like that?

Johnson: I probably did not get any letters until I had been in country well first of all when I first got to Vietnam I believe I probably wrote my folks and told them I was in country and I was waiting to go to my unit. When I got there and got my address I'll let you know but everything was fine and probably I probably did not when I got my address through the platoon I went and I'm sure I sent them a letter. And I don't recall exactly how long it wasn't really immediate I mean it was probably end of March before I got my first letter because you know the mail was held up because of the Tet offensive. And I probably you know didn't get my first letter until March I would guess.

Interviewer: And what about radio communications how were they?

Johnson: Depending on the distance the PRs well since we were monitoring airborne or aircraft communication was usually pretty good with line of sight. But we were in a building we were up on like a third floor I believe so we were up you know three stories which would be 50 feet or so. So we had and also the distance we were communicating with wasn't that far. So it was probably pretty good so we stayed there for three weeks or so I would imagine.

Interviewer: When we talked last night a little bit about the quality of the equipment could you expound on that?

Johnson: Well we were reusing vacuum technology that was used in World War II. The PRD1 which was a portable radio directional finder was vacuum tube technology and originally was developed by the navy in the early 40s for use on ships. And also they were used on land too by the old I think our forerunner was called the signal intelligence service SIS or SIU signal intelligence unit. But it was heavy it was old and it was fairly reliable we also had a receiver called the R390 which was also World War II vacuum tube technology.

Interviewer: Was this supposed to be portable I mean were you supposed to be carrying or was this?

Johnson: Well we carried it around in boxes we did not carry it we carried it out to a fixed sight on a helicopter and oh in containers shipping containers designed for the equipment and it was made out of wood it was heavy. And also you either had to use a lot of batteries

Interviewer: So not generated operated?

Johnson: Well you could use it with a generator too it had a little converter but then you had to lug the

generator out there it was a 1.5 and it was it was kind of pain to operate but you could get it done. It was something that once you got out there by the time you dug your hole and dug in your generator. What you had to do was you had to put sand bags around the height of it then you had to put gaps in the sand bags you know run a log or a board or a plank from the 105 case or something so that the air could be sucked up and help cool. If you did not do that you would burn up your generators.

Interviewer: Was this because of the heat from Vietnam?

Johnson: Well the heat the humidity was 100% well usually it was 100% plus it was very difficult. When you were out there you had to change the oil in those things about every ten hours because of the heat.

Interviewer: How long did the batteries last?

Johnson: Not very long.

Interviewer: Not very long so how many batteries did you have to lug?

Johnson: Like for a PRC77 and a KY38 it took three batteries you know would it be 8300 or whatever the battery was I mean they were probably 12x4x4 or something like that. They were fairly heavy and you could only operate them for about 10 to 12 hours so we had to carry plenty of batteries. Now that was just to communicate and secure with platoon headquarters and the equipment we used we used those old batteries the ones like you used in the heavy flashlights you know the carry handles the Rayovac you know.

Interviewer: The square.

Johnson: Yeah they were kind of.

Interviewer: Rectangle

Johnson: Yeah stood vertically and I forget what they were but they are still used in those big flashlights. And we'd have to take a case of them out there and these weren't even magnesium batteries these were just old alkaline batteries.

Interviewer: Alkaline batteries

Johnson: Yeah they just didn't last long. And the R390 we I think the battery pack took eight and as a receiver only I think they might have lasted 6 or 8 hours.

Interviewer: No rechargeable?

Johnson: No as a matter of fact we had to make sure we destroyed them because the NVA you could actually recharge the batteries but for the U.S. it wasn't practical. And so we just get an entrenching tool put them down open them up spread dirt and just so that the NVA couldn't come back in and gather them up and recharge them.

Interviewer: So you're at this base camp then you got assigned to the 2nd platoon once you got assigned to the 2nd platoon were you out doing missions?

Johnson: Well initially what happened now you've got to remember this was Tet of 68 everything was in limbo. They just moved up there the 2nd brigade got to the area around Fubi and it was up there on the western south western of ___ we were trying to help the Marines by preventing the enemy from infiltrating _____. And the first cad was on the north side of the river and they got hung up there too so there was gaps that the enemy were getting through just because of the terrain and space and everybody was spread out and everybody wanted infantry help.

Interviewer: Did you miscommunication from one unit to the next?

Johnson: Not really we had we knew what was going on and we had communication. It was just the fact that was just too much ground for too few people.

Interviewer: So you just didn't have enough man power?

Johnson: No

Interviewer: Were you intercepting anything from the enemy?

Johnson: At that time I was not doing intercept working with intercept all I was doing me and another guy was monitoring airborne regiment finding that and passing that information on to the brigade S2.

Interviewer: Now you said at one point you had direct access to NSA right National Security?

Johnson: Well not direct access we were under operational control of the national security agency because we were a service cryptal agency.

Interviewer: And how did the information get to them?

Johnson: What we did was it was a two way you know special intelligence which is intelligence generated from foreign radio communications.

Interviewer: SI

Johnson: Special intelligence and so we had the 101st was actually out of that link. What we did was we took the information that was coming down from the special intelligence channels. And we basically monitored this flow selected information that was applicable to the 2nd brigade are of operation and also the adjacent areas because the commander always wants to know what's going on not only in his area but what's going on in the adjacent areas. And so we basically filtered a lot of the stuff out but that was done at a platoon headquarters which was probably at that time 10 miles away.

Interviewer: And how long were you in Vietnam?

Johnson: I spend 23 months and ten days or something like that. I got there January 15th 68 and left like January 6th or 7th of 70 so it was almost three years or two years.

Interviewer: Was that the length of your tour or was it extended?

Johnson: No I extended past my DROS date that's the date eligible for return from overseas or something like that. And I had orders to go back to Fort Hood Texas to the 202nd ASA Company supporting the 2nd armor division. Which was a notoriously hellacious assignment because you know the 2nd armor division wasn't doing anything and all you did was pull details. Go down to the motor pool wash tracks then after 180 days back in the states you went back to Vietnam. If you had like 6 months left so I just went ahead and extended for 11 months I guess. I was supposed to actually get out December 15, 1969 but I got stuck out in the field during the monsoons and could not make it back.

Interviewer: Now did you stay I mean for the whole time you were there did you stay in a relatively the same area?

Johnson: No

Interviewer: Did you keep moving?

Johnson: Well it was the same general area we were in the we were in _____ in Vietnam which known as high ____ court. It was basically north of ____ between ____ and _____ and from the south China Sea out to the ____ ocean boarder. But it was the same general area we probably operated within 50 miles radius of ____ I guess to give you a reference.

Interviewer: You're having a reunion with your 265th did you work with some of these guys that are here with you?

Johnson: Yes there's like five guys of the I think there's about 23 that showed up. Five of them I was with at one time or another.

Interviewer: And the comradely of the unit is that why you wanted to stay and not go get attached to Fort Hood's unit.

Johnson: Oh yeah now first of all remember we were the Screem Eagles man you couldn't beat them no. We were probably you know we were in the best unit in Vietnam and also we were appreciated. I eventually went ended up with the 3rd brigade. But I stayed with the 2nd platoon up until probably May of 68 that's when the rest of the division came or to brigades came north the 1st and the 2nd came north. The 3rd brigade stayed down around ____ which is north of Saigon probably 75 miles until September 68. And when the company came up I was selected to go to the company to be the institutional memory for the North Vietnamese units working in that are because while I was down at the 8th field station for two or three weeks I worked in a traffic analyst section. So I knew the NVA units that were operating in the ____ area. When they came up there I was familiar with these units so I helped break the other people in and got familiar with the units that was basically one of the reasons I was sent to the company operations platoon.

Interviewer: Last night some of the guys were joking about your war wounds.

Johnson: Yeah

Interviewer: Did you get how many Purple Hearts?

Johnson: I got wounded twice.

Interviewer 1: You got wounded twice.

Interviewer 2: How if you don't mind me asking?

Johnson: The first one we were out in the ___ Valley in the middle of June in 1969 we were over ran by ___ they threw a satchel charge in the bunker. I was had my head bounce off a beam I had some glass and gravel and shrapmetal get imbedded back in my neck. I've still got places back here that haven't healed since then. And just little lesions types and they just have never healed because of the embedded gravel, dirt, and it just you know the only thing I can do is wash it down with soap and water and let it dry out. If I let my hair get long back there it gets worse.

Interviewer: So how did you get taken care of?

Johnson: Well I was medevac'd out. And I went out to I went to a hospital in Fubi and because of the I had a concussion and also I had excessive ringing in my ears. And the hospital I went to was a surgical hospital and I think they dealt mostly with severe wounds and I needed to see an ENT specialist because I couldn't hear. So they sent me out to a hospital ship the USS Sanctuary. I was out there for about five or six days I guess.

Interviewer: And how did you think the medical treatment was?

Johnson: Very good I mean I can't complain I mean you know you get overrun and you have there was other people there that was in a lot worse shape than I was. I was probably one of the last ones to go even though I had a concussion I had you know I wasn't I was still conscious. But there was other people there that were in a lot worse shape. I went out on the last medevac that went out that morning. So but they had the helicopters stacked up coming in to take out the wounded. Then once I got there they looked at me and there were people still ahead of me and I had to wait basically they just stuck me in the hospital was kind of just tin roof tow by four and they had like a holding area out there. And I was on a stretcher and the nurses and doctors were in there doing surgery on other people. I was out there with other people but they had a medic there who was going around and just you know talking to you do you need this or whatever. But it was just a matter of priority and I wasn't complaining because were in worse shape than I was I wasn't complaining.

Interviewer: And you said last night that you received two Purple Hearts is that correct?

Johnson: Uh huh

Interviewer: Is that one of the reasons or what did you receive them for?

Johnson: I was got the first one for the concussion and I went back out probably a week later and I was out on guard duty and with another guy names Phil Wade. And we were being probed we were facing south on Fire Based ___ Guard and they started getting probed over on the eastside. So everybody went to work and you know we started seeing movement seeing sappers down there because they were sappers because the only thing they wore was a loin cloth. Somebody had spotted them and they had a flare ship up you know just a hewey that dumped out flares out of the cargo bay and they were up fairly high. And also they had artillery and mortar flares going off and Phil saw a gook throw a grenade towards us. I was on the left side he was on the right the grenade came from the right front of our position. And he I was up and he pulled me down and my hand went out over the sand bag and I got

grenade flack on the hand, face, and shoulder. I've still got scares here, here, here, here and what happened was this scare right here that runs an inch and a half a piece of shrapmetal nicked at the vein. And so I was I didn't even know I got wounded probably for a couple hours and then I started feeling kind of woozy and I told Phil to check me I said I'm not feeling good. And he started feeling around and he felt the blood and says you're bleeding. I had probably as the doctor said I had to grip the pistol grip the M16 probably slowed the bleeding. But I had other pieces up in my cheek and right shoulder that they couldn't get out. They said you will do more damage trying to pick it out than you do unless it really bothers me. And al so the tops of our camouflage covers were just shredded.

Interviewer: That was only a week later after you got?

Johnson: Yeah the as a matter of fact I went and dug out my Purple Heart orders one was for the 14th of June 69 and the other one was dated June 22nd. So I came back out it was either the first or the second night back out I got wounded again. And I ended up going down to a convalescent center down in _____ and while I was down there the sappers attacked and they threw a satchel charge in the other end of the ward I was in. I don't think anybody was injured there and this ward probably had 30 beds on each side and so when I got there the only open bed was on probably the west end because they basically run east to west. And the west end was full of the Americal division guys a couple of Marines and the other end of the ward was 101st guys. So and a vacancy opened up in the 101st I went down moved my stuff down to the friendly territory. These were all guys from the 327. They were the 1st brigade and there was some action down around _____ or someplace like that. But they were all from the 1st brigade and I asked them and they said who are you with? And I said well I'm with you know with radio research unit with the 3rd brigade. Oh yeah we got those guys from the 1st brigade and they started calling off names and I heard the name but I didn't know them. And one of the things about being in the 265th you could be in the same company for a year and never run into the same people just because you were spread out so far. Because when the brigade was consolidated up in I-Core in the fall of 68 I mean the division ran from the _____ Pass just north of _____ up almost from _____ and then from the South China Sea up the _____ boarder and I think that's roughly 50 miles wide by about 110 miles long something in that area. So that's a big chunk of real estate you have to cover.

Interviewer: So they patched you up again and you got sent again?

Johnson: I went back out well actually I was probably basically gone except for those two days out from like June until the end of July so I was gone for about six weeks. And I got a lot of grief about this was before the days of the Love Boat. So yeah going out on the South Pacific cruise and end up spending a month on the beach down in Camron Bay. And that's what we did we went down there and they put us out in the salt water because the salt water cleans out wounds. And I was told twice a day to go out to and put my hand in the water. But it would when you come back in the scab even though I had stitches in here the scabs would be all gone. And you come back in and they had nurses they had a nurse assigned to each ward or they had a senior medic either one. And so they would you know you were prescribed they would actually tell you you've got to go out to the beech this morning so you need to come back in and they'd clean out the wound with saline solution and spray it down with this iodine mixture. Not spray it but they'd pour this iodine mixture into the injury a jar a brownish looking stuff. And then you'd go back have lunch and then okay Johnson you've got to go out go in the water again I want you to stay in the water for at least a half hour and then come back in.

Interviewer: So were you thinking I should get wounded more often?

Johnson: No I had pretty cheap wounds as they go. I probably met the absolute minimum to get a Purple Heart.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Johnson: Well I'm alive so I mean it was the risk I took and I came out with just minimal injuries.

Interviewer: Were those two wounds the toughest part of Vietnam or what would you consider the toughest part?

Johnson: The toughest part was actually just the goal was for us to go out for two weeks at a time come back and work for a week in the operations. But a lot of times that got extended you know two weeks turned into three, three weeks turned into four. So it wasn't uncommon for us to stay out there for three or four weeks at a time.

Interviewer: When I was in the military some of the guys said the toughest thing was the nights.

Johnson: Well see we worked doing out intercepts at night because that's when the North Vietnamese transmitted because of ____ spirits. So we were up most of the nights doing our special intelligence operations. And we'd kind of come back in and sleep during the day and we'd kind of relieve the grunts from guard duty in the afternoon you know. And then about the time the sun would go down we'd get set up again. We still monitored they did transmit some during the day but most of was done at night.

Interviewer: So because you were so busy during the night you didn't have that loneliness of pulling guard the mind playing tricks?

Johnson: When we were out on Burgess Garden just to back and back up when we were out on Burges Garden in the summer of 69 the whole brigade moved out to the ____ Valley. Normally we were out on a OP or an LZ or fire base of maybe five or six people so that was kind of unusual for us to be pulling guard duty. But because we had people there the threat was high and what the platoon sergeant did was he worked with the headquarters company 3rd brigade first sergeant and would kind of relieve those guys. What he would do is after we'd take a break and also during that time there was a lot of radio traffic during the day also because of the presence and the pressure we were putting on the NVA in the ____ Valley. Which was also kind of another exception so we had 24 hours operations and so a lot of times we didn't have a fixed schedule you kind of worked until you got tired your mind went on you or something because this is pretty tedious you're out there trying to figure all this stuff out without going into a great deal of classified material. But we were out there trying to break the codes and also analyse the traffic the chatter between the operators and coordinate fixes from the airborne regimental fighting platforms from the Air Force and the Army. Army had the 130th aviation company and the Air Force had the 69th security squadron. They flew the EC47s so.

Interviewer: How well were you guys decoding the messages?

Johnson: Well let's just say we were proficient.

Interviewer: So you knew what was going on?

Johnson: Pretty much we weren't 100% but close enough.

Interviewer: And did you have to deal with ___ at all with the grunts?

Johnson: No we had very little contact with the _____. We did have some _____ translators but they were usually with the linguist they kind of stayed they kind of kept them away from our area where we were at because we were dealing with sensitive material.

Interviewer: Were you able to go on any R&R or what did they do for your moral?

Johnson: Well I was scheduled for R&R multiple times however the operational necessity took precedence over my pleasures. So I ended up in two years taking one R&R.

Interviewer: So how did you keep your moral up yourself I mean it has to be kind of disappointing when you don't get R&R.

Johnson: Well you have to remember that we were short the special intelligence people were short all throughout the Vietnam War. You were always busy you were contributing a product that was desired by the brigade you supported.

Interviewer: So you felt needed?

Johnson: Oh yeah I mean you look at the information you gave and you saw the action that the brigade took on the information you gave so it was obvious even for me as a _____ enlisted man that we were doing something positive.

Interviewer: And that's how you think all the 265th felt?

Johnson: Yeah we were pretty much I guess appreciated so it was real tight we were all pretty tight with our units. And even though we rotated through quite a few people and but we felt a bond that we were making a contribution.

Interviewer: When you left Vietnam you came back to where'd you come?

Johnson: Ohio

Interviewer: Ohio and you were out of the military?

Johnson: Yes I still had two years of the inactive reserve.

Interviewer: And then how long were you out for?

Johnson: I was out from January 70 and went back in July of 74.

Interviewer: And you went in as an officer?

Johnson: Well I went back in as an enlisted.

Interviewer: You did okay.

Johnson: Because I had to apply for OCS after I got in so I went to the 82nd airborne. Well after I went back in at that time prior service could only go into the combat arms. So I went to field artillery became a gun bunny _____ then I went to the 82nd airplane division and while I was there I applied for OCS and was accepted and went to OCS and I think I started in April of 75 and I graduated in October of 75. And then from there I went directly to ranger school directly from OCS which was good because I was in excellent physical shape. Going from the 82nd OCS to ranger school was a good progression physically because coming out of one of the requirements we had to graduate from OCS was we had to complete an 8 mile run after coming back from a river crossing where they got us all out there on a rope bridge and cut the rope bridge and put us in the river. We had to swim out then we had to run back in wet boots and we had to make the run in like 75 minutes or something like that. It was a fairly leisurely pace it wasn't a fast pace but you had to complete that run. And it was

Interviewer: Prepared you for ranger school.

Johnson: Oh yeah it was pretty interesting. We had in OCS we had I think 240 started and 96 graduated I believe something like that. Then I went to ranger school and 180 started and I think 56 of us graduated. But I went through in the winter I started ranger school in October and I graduated February 1st or something like that or late January early February of 76. Then I went to a field artillery officer basic course at Fort Seal from there five months.

Interviewer: So you were in the artillery?

Johnson: Uh huh

Interviewer: And you did all your time in artillery?

Johnson: All my commission time was in field artillery except for my last assignment which I was a budget officer which was a comptroller slot.

Interviewer: Did you miss the 265th was it that kind of job or?

Johnson: Actually I had considered going back into military intelligence was my alternate specialty (tape one ended and tape two began). So I put down maintenance quartermaster and one other and they assigned me to comptroller because I had a business degree. (A man came in, there it is)

Interviewer: Are these your pictures?

Johnson: Yes

Interviewer: I was going to ask you do you feel there is anything that we've missed?

Johnson: No you did pretty well fairly well put this way there is some items you'd probably like to know that I'm not going to tell you because it's my view in the area of intelligence special operations too much is being said. And the public doesn't need to know everything and the only thing the public needs to know is that special intelligence special operations is out there for their benefit so.

Tape ended