

**Library of Congress transcript of recorded interview**  
**(Typos in original transcript)**

## **Interview with Vaughn A. Johnson [4/23/2001]**

**Tom Swope:**

This is the oral history of World War II Veteran Vaughn E. Johnson. Mr. Johnson served in the U.S. Army's 103rd Division, 409<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Headquarters Company. He served in the European Theater and his highest rank was sergeant. I'm Tom Swope, and we recorded this at Mr. Johnson's home in Perry, Ohio with his wife present on April 23rd, 2001. Mr. Johnson's age at the time of this recording was 81.

**Tom Swope:**

Let's go back before the war. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Oh, yes. Sure, I remember Pearl Harbor. December 7th, '41, wasn't that? But before the war now, we were -- I was working as a \_\_\_\_\_ before the war and I was classified 3A as a \_\_\_\_\_ and become engaged. My wife, Marilyn, and we planned on being married, had a set date for April the 5th, Easter Sunday, 1942. But in the meantime, I had gotten a job at the Industrial Rayon plant in Painesville. So -- and it wasn't very long after that that I was reclassified as an 1A instead of a 3A. Well -- and I also got a draft notice to report to the Painesville Post Office to be drafted to be entered into the service. Well, this is after we were married. We were married on April the 5th, '42 and six weeks later, May the 13th, I had to go to the service. That was -- that was a rough situation at the time, naturally. Newly married. But we met the service people at the Painesville Post Office, traveled from the Painesville -- from there to Cleveland terminal tower for exam -- physical examinations. From there to Camp Perry, Ohio for basic training or preparation for basic training -- shots, clothing, et cetera. Was in Camp Perry for about three days and we headed for Camp Walters, Texas by train. I don't know how long that was. Two or three days traveling to Gainesville, Texas, where we set up basic training. Well, I guess I was fortunate enough, don't know why, but I got selected for communications. So I went through basic training in communications with the radio and the -- what's the dit dot?

**Tom Swope:**

Morse code?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Morse code. Learned Morse code. So after basic training, of course we went through -- I was still here in the States for 30 months, 30 months. And was stationed in about nine different camps. I think the main reason that I was stationed here for 30 months is because I applied for officer training school and because -- and I didn't make officer training school, but I think that's the reason I was here for 30 months, because other units that I was in had already shipped out and I was moved to a new unit ended up with 103rd. Well, I don't recall exactly what day it was. October 1944 is when we shipped out of New York to the European Theater. Took 14 days going across. Big convoy of ships. We went past the rock of Gibraltar in the Mediterranean sea and landed in Marseille France, the belly of France.

**Tom Swope:**

What is the ship you were on?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

The Monticello.

**Tom Swope:**

The Monticello. And what can you tell me about the storm that you guys had?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Well, I think there's about four days, four days we put up with that terrific storm. And you talk about seasickness. Naturally, we didn't have our sea legs. But the storm wasn't so bad necessarily, but we were all very ill. When you're seasick, when it really hits you, you could care less whether you live or die. You know, but we made it. We made it. And there was 55-gallon drums on board ship filled up with vomit. And as soon as the storm was over after the four days, the sea was calm and you just felt like a new man, completely new man. No more sickness. Not even really no aftereffects of it. So that was a great pleasure when those waves stopped flowing over the deck. You had to button your hatches, button down all the hatches at the time. Couldn't eat. They said -- they said, "Well, go to the cafeteria." I don't think they called it a cafeteria on boat at that time. The mess hall. "And try to eat something." No way. You just -- all you had to do was smell that -- smell that kitchen and you were off again, you know. So that was really the -- the gist of the boat ride.

**Tom Swope:**

And then back to Marseille.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

And then back to Marseille. Of course, they had already bombed Marseille. There was already ships sunk in the harbor. Some way or another, we maneuvered around those ships and docked, probably around 4:00 in the afternoon. Nice weather. Docked and took our field packs and headed up the hill, up into the hills off Marseille north. Going north, of course. Found an area up on a small mountain, small \_\_\_\_\_. Found an area up there where we bivouacked. Pitched pup tents. Gathered all our buddies in pup tents and dug in. And I suppose we were there three or four days, preparation. Nothing particular to do. No commands. No -- no orders at this point, from the men's standpoint. So as time went on and on and eventually -- we eventually got moved out of the camp and it wasn't actually a battle yet. We had to approach the area that in further preparation for battle, which I -- of course, I don't recall what they were. Those towns -- you wouldn't know those towns, any of the names of the towns, and I wouldn't remember them. Only by looking at the map here you see -- you recognize these towns we hit, the cities we hit after -- after awhile. But weather-wise, it wasn't too bad. Didn't seem like November. Starting in the month of December is when we started to get cold weather and uncomfortable. But we managed. We always had -- I don't recall ever suffering from any hunger or from any cold. We had clothing that kept us real comfortable. Then the thing that we did -- didn't notice to begin with before we got into battle was the B25 bombers. You know, they were shuttling back and forth from Africa to England, back and forth dropping bombs ahead of the battlefield. And that was -- that was great. I mean, we just loved to see those big birds up there in the sky just as far as you could see, B25 bombers. And they -- naturally, you know what that did. That drove the Germans back, kept them back, kept them back. We didn't have to face them too much. Of course, we were in R and R also. Out of the front lines back to R and R. Of course, I being in a communications company, I was not actually on the front lines, so to speak. So that was a nice feeling, really. We did -- we did realize there was casualties, seen casualties, and that was a sad -- even the first day. First day, maybe the second day, we were on a convoy. Commander told all these Jeep drivers, "Jeep drivers, stay on the road. Definitely stay on the road. Don't get off on the side anywhere." The second day that we were there, the Jeep driver, for whatever reason, four soldiers in the Jeep, for whatever reason, he pulled off the side of the road and blew up. Now, you can imagine the thoughts we had in our heads then. Blew that Jeep sky high. And I often thought, my goodness, it's only the second day and the parents, folks back home

are reading about those gentlemen. What -- what a sad situation that may have been, but that was -- that was kind of common, really. It wasn't nothing new. It was accidental for whatever reason, but that's the way the war days go by. I don't know. We were thinking about -- I often think about what we called it Task Force Rhine. We were 35 miles west of the Rhine River, and about 7:00 one evening -- in the evening -- this is in December -- 7:00 in the evening, we had orders to mount -- climb on a tank force. It was a colored tank force company. We called the Task Force Rhine. So we spent the night riding these tanks to arrive at the Rhine River in the morning, which we did. That was a scary situation. There was a river on one side and a mountain on the other. So we were going down the road. We all felt riding on top of the tanks scared -- who wouldn't be -- not knowing what was going to happen. We run across a German supply team and their supplies are all by horse and buggy, horse and wagon. And it's surprising how we hit them at night and these big old tanks, bulldog tanks run them down, run them down. Have pictures, we have pictures here where the bulldozer come along behind them like you're plowing snow, but you're plowing German horses and supplies off the road. But we made it to Rhine River in the morning unconcerned. I mean, they had 50 caliber machine guns on these tanks with tracer bullets so -- and they was always firing these tracer bullets all the time so we could see where we were going. Going through towns and no German resistance. We didn't have any fire back at us at that time. So it was good. The morning came along and everything was kind of quiet. Unbelievable really. It was quiet. So then there was a case of R and R. We did our task and had R and R and when you have R and R, you spend two or three days in the bivouac area. So you prepare, and then you have your full course meals and have your rest area, sit around and do nothing in particular. Only just talk about it. Talk about what you've been through, until further orders. And we just seemed to cross the Rhine River and we got back in action across the Rhine River on a pontoon bridge, which was built by the engineers previously. And I don't recall -- I can't recall any of the specific battles that we were in other than we got to the -- come through December into January and faced at that time the Battle of the Bulge. We were lucky enough \_\_\_\_\_ was lucky enough to be on the southern flank of the Battle of the Bulge. And there was a cold, cold icy snow, snow, ice. So icy outside you couldn't even -- we bivouacked in homes, naturally. We didn't have to bivouac in tents. We were lucky enough to bivouac in homes. Potbelly stoves. We was able to slide around outside on the ice. There was no firing and there was no battle, as far as at the moment, and pick -- and lather wood to keep the potbelly stove going and that's the way we bivouacked. We laid on the floor around that stove to keep warm. And I didn't really -- I mean, you hear about the Battle of the Bulge quite a lot at Bastogne. That's where captain -- what was his name -- said nuts to the Germans.

**Tom Swope:**

McAuliffe.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

McAuliffe, General McAuliffe said nuts to the Germans on that situation.

**Tom Swope:**

Now, when you were in these homes, had the people fled the area?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

People always fled the area. Never ran across anybody. There was one area back before we got to the Rhine, before we crossed the Rhine, where we were clearing out a town and I was -- we were checking homes, myself and several other buddy soldiers. Checked inside the house, and it's strange that we went upstairs -- when we entered the house, there was two children in bed, both of them dead. And we went up -- upstairs and mother and dad were hanging from the ceiling. And that was, you thought, "Oh, my goodness," but -- that was, I suppose, kind of maybe normal all over Germany. Maybe a possibility. But it was strange to us at the time. Well, anyhow, they were gone to the Battle of the Bulge and when that was over in February, it seems to me the time was February, and not too long after that, February, March, April, it seemed like late, but the war really wasn't over until May -- May the 8th, I think, was a definite.

**Tom Swope:**

VE-Day, I believe it was.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

VE-Day.

**Tom Swope:**

\_\_\_\_\_ + cease fire \_\_\_\_\_.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah. So we were all tickled to pieces about that. Of course, we heard about the president passing away.

**Tom Swope:**

Where were you when that happened?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

April 12th. April 12th, yes. Actually, that was before the war was over.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you have specific memories of that day?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah. When they notified us of that day, it was a very sad situation. Sad to all of us because we lose our Commander. But we got over that, naturally, and we knew that President Truman would become president. So as time passed, time went on, after that -- after the Battle of the Bulge, of course, everything was quiet then. So the preparation was then -- we didn't know anything. We ended up in Innsbruck Austria, Army of Occupation. Beautiful, beautiful valley of Innsbruck. And the valley was green, springtime green, and up in the mountains was snow. And so we go up in the mountains and ski, go down the valley and go swimming. And then I was surprised at one time. I got a -- I was in communications, of course. I got a telephone call from my brother Victor. He had been in Germany, too. He went into the war in '40. He was in -- entered the army in '40 and he fought through Sicily -- Italy, Sicily, Africa, ended up in Germany. And he was in communications also. Air to ground communications. But I got a call from him. And this was after the war now. He was -- his outfit had come down -- come down into Italy through the Brenner path. Just a sight-seeing tour. He didn't want to go. He had been in Italy, Sicily. He had been there already. So he wanted to know if it would be all right if he'd come down and stay with me, and I'd meet him -- I was about 60 miles south of Innsbruck and he was going to get off -- he said he would get off the tour at Innsbruck if I come up and pick him up. Well, I had available -- I had a Jeep available and a real close buddy named Charlie Bishop. I said, "Charlie, got to go for a ride." And we went up to Innsbruck and picked my brother up. And so he was with me for three days. Well, that was very unusual. You know, sent that information back home. You can imagine how the folks back home felt. Two brothers meeting over there

under these circumstances. So we were there -- oh, I don't recall. We were about two months, I think. Army of Occupation there in Innsbruck. And that was just -- nothing there to do, only just like a summer vacation.

**Tom Swope:**

What were the people like there?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Very nice. Very nice. They're farmers and their homes are built. You have a residential part and you also have your barns where the animals stay right -- it's all in one building, and they went from there out to their farms. And they were nice people. We ran across meeting some English speaking people. We didn't have any problems. They had everything. They had butcher shops and a normal life, you know. So eventually, of course, time had -- we had to come back home. So we boarded a 40 by eight train cars, old boxcars, and took us about three days to go up to La Havre, France where we shipped out from La Havre, France. And I don't recall the ship that we came home on, but the idea was to come back home on a 30-day furlough preparation to go through the south Pacific. I'm sure if we went to the South Pacific, we'd have to invade Japan which is like D-Day in Europe. Well, made it home around a 30-day furlough, and I guess that was probably just in the month of August '44 -- '45.

**Tom Swope:**

'45.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

That's right, '45. And while I was home on that 30-day furlough is when they dropped the bomb. Boy, that was a great day. That was really something. Now we knew good and well that it saved the day from us, me particularly, going to the South Pacific. Some of the units that I was with in basic training had already gone to the South Pacific and I was -- because I had applied for arm - - for officer training school, they kept shipping me around here to go to school, but I never made it. For unknown reasons, I never made it. So it might have saved me from going to the South Pacific, and that was a worse situation over there than it was in Europe, I'm sure. So after the bomb was dropped, I still had my 30 days. Went back to camp, Campbell Kentucky, for discharge. And that took about three weeks. I was lucky enough to have Marilyn, my wife, come down to Kentucky and she spent time down there while we were being discharged. So I guess

that I was fortunate enough to come back home, and I went back to work to the Industrial Rayon plant, same job that I had when we left. And --

**Tom Swope:**

Any trouble adjusting to civilian life after --

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

No, no. I don't recall, Tom. I don't know why there should have been, ha, ha, really.

**Tom Swope:**

Your job specifically was a telephone operator with a headquarters company; is that right?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

A headquarters company, second battalion \_\_\_\_\_ worked the old switchboards, switchboards and the Morse code, yeah.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you have any particular memories of buddies over there?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yes. Very, very specific particular memory of a buddy. His name was Helby and he was the life of a party, life of a party. He talked like Donald Duck. If you can imagine the enjoyment we got out of him talking Donald Duck. He was in the platoon to deactivate mines. They had roadblocks, roadblocks with mines in them. And this was -- this was in the middle of winter, snow. About maybe three or four inches of snow. And we're patrolling. We're going ahead, and Helby and a buddy of his, which I don't know the other buddy, are deactivating this by bending over. They're bending over and deactivating it, and whatever happened, they made a mistake or something, and the mine blew up and took both of them. Blew their guts right out. And nothing we could do about it because we kept marching. We looked back and there's Helby and his buddy laying in the snow bank waiting for people to come behind and pick them up. Of course, they were completely gone. That's -- that's the worst situation I think I had seen. We were very sad about it. I was, and of course, my platoon and other buddies that I had. So --

**Tom Swope:**

Does anything come to mind, you know, more \_\_\_\_\_ really vivid memories of that time overseas?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Well, we, of course, the memory with motor fire. Motor fire is when you fire up over a hill and down. And of course, we had to be in foxholes. Good thing we dug foxholes when motor fire was coming in. We were fortunate enough to not get any bombs. Of course, the Germans had nothing. They had the 88 mms, but when they shoot these motors come down on you, it was kind of hectic. We had a few scares like that, even back where our communications battalion was which was back off the front lines, maybe a quarter of a mile or a half a mile or something like that. Scary. That's all. And then there's a few cases where there's direct hits. We lost a captain on a direct hit in a foxhole. We lost a captain -- I don't know why this was. Captain Titlebaum (ph), his name was. He was riding on the hood of a Jeep and going across wherever and across the fields, and we had 50 -- 50 caliber machine guns behind him. And whatever happened, he -- he drove in front of this line of machine guns and took his head right off. That's terrible. You know. But those things happen. You think, gee, you know, why did he do that? How did this -- bad communications or something? Things like that just you can't understand. But other than that, I don't recall specifics situations that I encountered. I'm sure of hearing other areas of battle there was very serious situations. Such as prisoners. You say -- well, we took a lot of prisoners. After that Task Force Rhine period, the Germans, we just took prisoners like you wouldn't believe. Very happy to get it over with. We had an area probably as large as -- we had a fence, one-wire fence \_\_\_\_\_ one-wire fence, and our prisoners stood inside of that. Came in, hands up. Just stood there in that barbed wire area happy to be -- have it over with. And really after -- after crossing the Rhine, I think the whole -- the whole battle period just kind of swooped -- slowed right down. Of course, as you say, Tom, your dad, Selestat, whatever that situation was. I mean, I wouldn't -- I would never realize it.

**Tom Swope:**

You weren't near \_\_\_\_\_+. Apparently wasn't near enough for that, see. Now, Task Force Rhine, was that the time when the -- did you actually cross into Germany in that mission? Because I read 103rd, somewhere in the middle of December actually crossed into Germany for a short while.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah.

**Tom Swope:**

Were you part of that?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

I wouldn't doubt it. I wouldn't doubt -- yeah, I specifically remember making statements -- the commander and somebody making statements, "There's the German line." Yeah. I said, "Oh, my goodness." And then I'm thinking of the Black Forest and the Black Forest was black. We bivouacked in the Black Forest for a time. And pine needles, there was a pine forest of pine needles that was the best mattress bedding you would ever think of. That stands out in my mind. There was a time when we drove up the -- what's the big highway in Germany?

**Tom Swope:**

Autobahn?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Autobahn. There was a time when we rode on the Autobahn. My goodness. That was quite an experience. I mean, just a four-way highway, four-lane highway, but it was the Autobahn. Something you could see, like we think about here, the Pennsylvania Turnpike or whatever. So....

**Tom Swope:**

Actually, I read in \_\_\_\_\_ that the 103rd was maybe the first American unit to cross over into Germany.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

I think I read that.

**Tom Swope:**

They had to pull out shortly after that because of the Battle of the Bulge. But it was right within days before the Battle of the Bulge.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah, I think I read that in one of these books somewhere.

**Tom Swope:**

It's probably \_\_\_\_\_+

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you remember doing anything in particular for entertainment when you were overseas?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

No.

**Tom Swope:**

Didn't get to see any shows?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

No, didn't get a chance. I didn't, myself didn't get a chance to go anywhere. A lot of the fellas got passes, R and R passes to go wherever they -- wherever. I never had the opportunity to.

**Tom Swope:**

Letters from home?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Letters from home, write letters. I don't know how often we wrote letters. Do you remember honey? Did you get a letter every week?

**Mrs. Johnson:**

Every day.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Oh, my goodness.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

I did. I don't know about you.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

I probably spent my spare time writing letters back home. Not only to my wife, but family, you know. We didn't have entertainment. In my outfit they talked about entertainment. Professional singers, things like that. I never seen anything like that, you know. So we're just dough boys out there. When it comes to eating, we had kitchens with us and R and R periods. And I think of breakfasts specifically. You always had scrambled eggs, scrambled eggs maybe and some bacon. It's great how the kitchens and the kitchen personnel kept up -- kept us supplied that way. It could be we'd be fully dressed, helmets and everything, and get up in the morning at 7:00, 8:00, whatever it was, had breakfast. Raining, just pouring down rain, but we didn't care. We'd go up with your mess kits and you hold it here like this and eat and the water running off your helmet. That didn't make -- man, those eggs \_\_\_\_\_ they really go in, I'm telling you. Rain, water and all. It didn't make any difference. Then there's a few times when we -- like I say, I never recall being hungry. We would run a few heads off the chickens, fry them up. And we, of course, we had K rations, which looks like a pack of cracker box. What are those little boxes? Jack?

**Tom Swope:**

Oh, Cracker Jack boxes.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Cracker Jacks, that's it. K Ration was Cracker Jacks boxes that consisted of -- I always called them dog biscuits, piece of chocolate, cheese. Good to keep us going, you know. I don't recall losing any weight or anything like that over there, or gaining any weight either. So all in all quite an experience.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you have any specific memories of the homecoming \_\_\_\_\_ when you saw your wife?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Well, I think I -- I think when I got home, we got off Camp Shanks New York. When we went over, we left Camp Shanks, came back to Camp Shanks. Spent time in New York City, Times

Square. So on and so forth. Preparation to coming home. And I think I came home -- I think I was -- I don't recall whether I was in Camp Breckenridge Kentucky, anywhere, what camp I came in to here to come home, but I don't think I let her know we was coming home. Did we, honey?

**Mrs. Johnson:**

No. You got a ride.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Didn't let you know. I think I got a ride somewhere. Whether -- I think there was a train ride probably to Cleveland. In Cleveland I got on a Greyhound Bus and I had my duffel bag with us and I walked -- if I recall, I got off the Greyhound bus up here on Route 20 and I walked home. Do you remember that, honey?

**Mrs. Johnson:**

I sure do.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

And met her at home. I don't think anybody knew that I was coming in.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

No, we did not.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

We kind of sneaked in on them. Well, that was quite -- that was quite a homecoming there. Ha, ha, ha. Yeah. Yeah, that was nice. I do specifically remember in Carrabelle, Florida basic training and we were preparing for a D-Day invasion. Carrabelle, they took us out in landing craft way out in the bay at 3:00 in the morning. Full field packs, gun and the whole works. And we were going to land -- we were going to land on the beach in the morning, whatever. They came into the beach. They dropped the ramp down and everybody off. And we were in water well over our heads. Well over our heads, and that was a battle. Really a battle trying to swim to shore, full field pack, rifle and the whole works. And I know, we even lost some men on the situation. Even drowned. But in all the shuffling, it really was a battle that we finally hit our toes on the bottom and walk in. That was -- I think that was a big mistake.

**Tom Swope:**

They just couldn't judge the depth of the water?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Well, whether they -- we never -- we never got an answer to that. Never got an answer to that. But in the whole complete outfit, we lost about 13 men, drowned. Bad news. Bad news. It was a battle trying to get in. What a pleasure to be able to feel your toes on the bottom of the ocean or the bay there. Yeah, that was quite an experience. And we had snow there. We had snow in Florida. It's the northern part of Florida. While we were there training, I remember getting up a couple of mornings with an inch of snow on the ground. Didn't stay long. So those -- those moments flash back every now and then, you know. Also, in basic training we had an opportunity to ride in the glider in Texas. I was a buck sergeant and about 12 of us were authorized to take a ride in the glider. Now, that was quite an experience. Why that was, I don't know, but they picked us up on the run, took us up and around, sail around, and when they cut us loose -- just as quiet. Of course, you could hear wind on the wings of the glider. Cut us loose, we went down and glided us right into the hanger. That's another thing that's kind of outstanding. You know? But that was the only -- the only time I was in the air in the army.

**Tom Swope:**

There was no possibility you were going to be in a glider troop, was there?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Apparently not.

**Tom Swope:**

The airborne people did that.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Apparently not. I don't think so.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

What about the USOs?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

USOs? Service\_\_\_\_\_. Well, I don't know, honey.

**Tom Swope:**

Did you see anything like that over here, did you, in the States?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

USOs?

**Tom Swope:**

Any shows?

**Mrs. Johnson:**

In Texas there was.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

In Texas, yeah. We were in USO programs in Texas. Marilyn was fortunate enough to be with me two or three times.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

\_\_\_\_\_+.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Spent a lot of time there. So we sat around USOs. I don't recall we had any particular entertainment set up for us.

**Tom Swope:**

Just a club.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Just a club, yeah.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

\_\_\_\_\_ dancing and games.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah. So that's about it, Tom, I guess from what I can recall. I mean, without getting into a lot of junk detailing, you know. Of course, we had KP. We had to peel potatoes once in a while. KP. A couple of -- a couple of fellas that went in with me from here, knew real well that was in camp with us, different battalion, and we'd get together in Texas, Camp Halsey, Texas and steal watermelon from the camp, dining hall or somewhere, and go out and have a watermelon party, you know. And you notice the recent military passing away are right in my area. I'm 81, pushing 82. I'll be 82 Christmas time. Christmas day is my birthday.

**Tom Swope:**

Christmas day? Well, happy birthday in advance.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

So you notice as I read all those obituaries, they're right in my age area.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you remember celebrating Christmas over there?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Well, I don't remember anything specific about Christmas. We, of course, only spent that one day -- one Christmas.

**Tom Swope:**

Right. So that would be Christmas '44?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

So that would be Christmas of '44, yeah. I don't recall it was anything specific, special, birthday cakes or anything like that, Tom.

**Tom Swope:**

Guys didn't have a party for you?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Nobody knew. I mean, it's just another day.

**Tom Swope:**

Right.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Just another day, you know.

**Tom Swope:**

In the middle of the Battle of the Bulge --

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Yeah.

**Tom Swope:**

-- you guys were involved. You knew something was going on.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

We weren't involved directly. We were on a southern flank, which is better than being in the middle of it, you know.

**Tom Swope:**

Right. For the most part though, would that have turned out the way we wanted it to turn out? When you went through Germany, was that too much intense action for you?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Not really. Not really. The only -- probably, the only intense action I had, I was sitting at the table in a home, in a home doing my communications through switchboard and I had my helmet. Took my helmet off and laid it right down here. And of course, the building was full with the company, with the battalion, or however many was in there. And my first sergeant was upstairs and I heard strange things. Just a normal day, you know, just doing your thing. I heard a pop, Crack, something. And I thought, "What was that?" I looked down here. Here I'm sitting like this. I look down here and there's a hole in my helmet. And I looked around up here, there's a hole in the ceiling. And I thought, "Gosh, what was that?" I jumped -- I got away from that switchboard right away, went upstairs to find out what happened. And the first sergeant had been cleaning his rifle, doing whatever with his rifle, and that bullet came down. That was probably the closest

I had in my experience to be in action over there. Well, I gave -- I gave him the devil, my first sergeant. I'm only a buck sergeant, but boy I laid it into him. And he -- he was sorry. Naturally, he was sorry. He was scared, too, of what the possibilities would have been -- was. You know, he's upstairs. That bullet went through the ceiling. What happened? So -- but anyhow, that was -- I gave him the devil and he took it all, and I probably could have been court marshal \_\_\_\_\_ if nobody knows, and he was understanding my situation or my feelings under those circumstances, but there's that hole in that helmet. So there wasn't much left of Germany.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you remember any encounters with the German people when you were in Germany?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Encounter -- well, Charlie Bib (ph), my Jeep driver and I, on an R and R program met up with a German family and they invited us to a dinner and we had sauerkraut and wieners, wiener schnitzel or whatever.

**Mrs. Johnson:**

That's right.

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

Something like that. A nice -- real nice day with them. And however we communicated, they apparently spoke some -- spoke some English and we understood a little bit of German. We spent -- we had a dinner with them. Yeah. How that ever -- how we ever approached that situation or what? I never -- I don't recall, but I remember eating the dinner. Strange.

**Tom Swope:**

That wasn't a problem with fraternizing?

**Vaughn A. Johnson:**

No, we're not supposed to fraternize. There was no problem with -- at least I don't realize there was any problem. I mean, the company commander never caught us or anything. I spoke to the guys last night we had about the beautiful Blue Bayou. There's a song beautiful -- is it a song? Well, we had to cross the beautiful Blue Bayou, but I didn't see anything beautiful blue about it. No way. It was just a muddy creek, so to speak. It wasn't -- it wasn't a river. I didn't think you

could call it a river. You could call it a creek, muddy, cold. I think it was in December that we crossed that. Waited across it.