

Interview with Harold R. Johnston

**Aleutian World War II National Historic Area
Oral History Program**

April 4, 2013, Roland, Arkansas

Interviewed by Janis Kozlowski, National Park Service
Transcribed by Professional Transcripts

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Harold Johnston was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. His son Johnny Johnston and a grand daughter were also part of the interview. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

The transcript has been lightly edited.

(The dictation starts out with dialog after the phone was answered by Mr. Johnston and before the interview starts)

0:00:00.1 Greetings and introductions.

Harold Johnston: Hello?

Janis Kozlowski: Good morning. Is this Mr. Johnston?

Harold Johnston: Yes ma'am. It's me.

Janis Kozlowski: How are you doing this morning?

Harold Johnston: Just a moment. Let me.....

Janis Kozlowski: Okay. *(Electronic beep goes off)*

Harold Johnston: Well, that's.....Hello. I'm sitting here -- I'm trying to read this thing -- it prints out what you say. Go ahead, and I'll -- what you said now. I'm about ready.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay. I just wanted to ask you how you're doing this morning.

Harold Johnston: You take the cup on and tell me.

Speaker 1: She just wants to know how you're doing.

Harold Johnston: Yeah, I still got the cold. I'm going to have it a longer while -- can't get rid of this virus, I guess. But -- I usually never have one.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, there's some -- there's some bad colds going around these days. Do you think today's a good to talk, or would you rather wait until you're feeling a little better?

Speaker 1: Do you want to talk.....

Harold Johnston: Yeah, this will be all right. My daughter -- granddaughter's here, and she can tell me what -- or I can read what it prints out on this screen here.

Janis Kozlowski: Does it seem to be working okay?

Harold Johnston: No, just go ahead. I'm feeling okay.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay.

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah, it's working right now.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay, good. And is it okay with you if I record our conversation today?

Harold Johnston: Yes, go right ahead and record it. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay.

Harold Johnston: My son's here now. Maybe he can help.

Janis Kozlowski: Was he the fellow that was in the video with you?

Harold Johnston: Yes, you can go ahead and record it.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, okay. So I wanted to ask.....

Harold Johnston: Yeah, he's the one that was on at the last. He was in Vietnam. He got a couple of medals.

Janis Kozlowski: It sounds like a son to be very proud of. He looks a lot like you, too, doesn't he? (Laughs)

Harold Johnston: Yeah. You said he looked a lot like me. (Laughter) We didn't neither one look too good then. (Laughter)

Janis Kozlowski: I thought you did.

Harold Johnston: That was a few years back.

Johnny Johnston: I'm here now.

Janis Kozlowski: Good morning.

Johnny Johnston: Good morning. Johnny Johnston.

Janis Kozlowski: Good morning, Johnny. I'm Janis Kozlowski, up in Alaska.

Johnny Johnston: All right, you have my permission to record.

0:03:15.9 Trip to Alaska on the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Dutch Harbor

Janis Kozlowski: Okay, great. Great. So, I wanted to ask you, what -- when you heard you were going to Alaska, what did you think about that idea?

Johnny Johnston: Daddy? Daddy? She said when you were going to Alaska, what did you think about that idea? Can you hear me? He's got a phone over there that prints out everything that everybody says. I think I'm just going.....

Harold Johnston: Oh.

Johnny Johnston:to be quiet.

Harold Johnston: Oh, right. When I made that trip, yeah, I was glad to go. That was on the 50th anniversary of when they hit Dutch Harbor. I went with a part of the 206th Coast Artillery. They was at Dutch Harbor when they hit.

Janis Kozlowski: The Arkansas boys.

Harold Johnston: Went up in a large plane. It carried about a hundred of us. We landed at Fairbanks. We got on a 3C-140, or whatever those are -- it could land down at Dutch Harbor. So we went out there and they had that ceremony and all for three days. We -- part of us stayed in the motel out there, but what couldn't stayed in a -- belonged to the fishing company -- Japanese, I think -- where the workers stayed during the fish season.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah, the -- yeah. Uh-hmm.

Harold Johnston: I enjoyed that visit. I'm having trouble understanding, but I can read what you say.

0:05:13.0 Going to Alaska in 1942

Janis Kozlowski: Did -- was that the first time you had landed on Dutch Harbor? Did you stop at Dutch Harbor when you got to Alaska? The first time?

Harold Johnston: Oh, we went through Dutch Harbor on the way to Umnak in 1942, you know, in January. We went up the Inland Passage right after, about a month after Pearl Harbor and went to two or three ports there and finally made it out to Dutch Harbor. We were on the *St. Mihiel*, you know -- I said in that video thing you got.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, the *St. Mihiel* was not a very fancy boat, as I understand it. Was that a pretty difficult trip?

Harold Johnston: No. It was an old ship from World War I, I think. It had been a hospital ship. It is a -- we went up through the Inland Passage. You could see land on each side most of the way and -- because of the battleships and submarines. But that took about twenty-three days. We stopped and waited. The war hadn't been going long. Hit a rock one time, but it didn't damage anything.

0:06:59.0 Life and work at Umnak

Janis Kozlowski: Oh. And so -- when you got to Umnak, what exactly was your job? And which company were you in then?

Harold Johnston: When I got on Umnak? Well, at that time, I was supposed to be the driver. I had been in the machine gun section all the time, but my buddy got me into driving. We had two Jeeps in the company. When we got on the island, we was -- we was the first ones on there, on that far end of it and there wasn't any bays -- wasn't any deep enough for big ships, so they put us ashore in a barge and then they was using a -- started a base over at Chernofski Bay, which is about twelve miles around the end of the island. That's where the ships would come to unload. We had just went in early in February of '42. Went in on a bare island and there was just caribou on there and they ran back. We ran them off. *(Laughter)* And I remember seeing a cross there on the beach. You know, someone was buried there, just one person. It was just a rough cross. But anyhow, we was -- went down in pup tents the first two nights and then they brought us some 16 X 16 tents. And we got about three of them up. It wasn't -- we was the only ones on there and it was a secret. At first they had us -- the address, when you wrote home, was the fish company. *(Laughs)*

Janis Kozlowski: So -- how.....

Harold Johnston: Well, they didn't have APO's right then, but they started them. But they didn't want us -- anyone to know where we was, so we was there and they was going to build that airbase after -- they started right away bringing runway steel. You know, these sections that -- on a barge from that other place. They'd bring it anytime the weather permitted. Of course, that weather up there, it wasn't -- they would bring it when they could. And when the barge would come in, we'd have a different platoon go down and unload it and put it on a trailer with tracks on it and had a few engineers up there to build a runway. So we would go down in the day or night, whenever the next barge would come, different ones. It was rough working in all that weather. So, E Company of the 153rd was laying the runway steel, but the engineers were supervising,

with F Company, which I was in, we was unloading it. We'd go down, night or daytime, whenever we wanted -- a barge would make it in and unload it. We did that for I guess a month or so, when we got it built and.....

0:11:42.9 Loss of supplies on sinking barges

Janis Kozlowski: I understand that the -- a lot of ships, or barges, didn't make it across to Chernofski Bay, that they actually sank. Did you know that supplies were being lost that way? Or did you have any idea how difficult it was to get supplies over to you?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. They would lose those supplies. They told us about the bulldozers, when they were trying to get them over with -- they would lose them from the rough water. And we didn't get food hardly. We had C rations, which would barely keep you alive, if you could get it down. *(Laughs)*

Janis Kozlowski: Especially on a young guy's appetite, right? You were probably pretty hungry at that age.

Harold Johnston: Well, it was hard to get it over there. Yeah, I remember we had our own cook and everything in the company, but they didn't have anything to cook and you'd get pretty hungry. We didn't have cigarettes or anything. Most of us smoked.

Janis Kozlowski: So.....

Harold Johnston: I smoked till I was twenty-six and I quit when my son was born. That was after the war. I didn't want to smoke around him.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. So.....

Harold Johnston: And we was pretty hungry and.....

Janis Kozlowski: So when you got there -- when you landed, there was nothing. There was nowhere for you to stay, there were -- nothing set up for you guys. You just landed there, you saw the caribou, and then you had to start building, or putting up, places just to give yourself a place to stay.

Harold Johnston: *(Garbled dictation)* We was the first ones on there. We stayed in the pup tents the first two nights. The first morning and the next morning, I got up and it had snowed during the night. *(Laughter)* Snow fell in when I opened the end. But we were in the weather, but we got those larger tents and got them up. But you know, it was hard to keep them from blowing away when the williwaw would come.

Janis Kozlowski: About that time, did you want to go back to Arkansas?

0:14:41.6 Duty at Camp Murray, Washington

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. I wanted to go back. I went in the Army, in the National Guard, in '39, to get a license for my car. I could get it for eighty cents. But they cost eleven dollars back then, so I was in the Guard and they mobilized us in December of '40. And it was a year before Pearl Harbor was hit. We was at Camp Robinson at that time, except when we were on maneuvers, training and training -- we trained some recruits, we got two, and they sent us up to Tacoma, Washington, to -- I can't think of the name of.....

Johnny Johnston: Camp Murray?

Harold Johnston: I sat in that.....

Johnny Johnston: Camp Murray?

Harold Johnston: Camp Murray, yeah. I think it had been a National Guard camp for Washington. But it was a tent city. We was in tents. But the rest of the regiment, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, was already up in Alaska by then. They went up that summer. Some was at Annette Island. I don't know where the others were, but they was scattered all around. And we was still there, when they hit Dutch Harbor -- I mean Pearl Harbor.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you know that you were going to head to Alaska? Were you preparing for that?

Harold Johnston: Camp Murray was.....

Janis Kozlowski: When.....

Harold Johnston: No, I wasn't ready. I was ready to go anywhere, wherever they wanted to go. But at that time, I was driving one of the weapons carriers we had. And right after that, they had us -- I was driving that -- they had us guarding the airbases near there and had some of them down on the dock in guard duty. And I'd haul them down there in that weapons carrier and they had some guarding the gates on the airfield there, and some were guarding the -- some of them were guarding the airfield.....

Janis Kozlowski: Did you -- did much happen when you.....

Harold Johnston:the planes at that time.

0:18:12.0 Activities at Camp Murray, Washington

Janis Kozlowski: Did much happen there? Did you have any kind of incursions on the base that you had to deal with?

Harold Johnston: Did we have any incursions?

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Did you -- there was -- were people trying to get in the base, or what was your biggest concern at the time?

Harold Johnston: No, I was driving that weapons carrier, one of them; we had two in the company. And they had a machine gun mounted on the back. They'd have two men riding with me and we would just patrol around the outside of the field on the roads. We'd go by a school there and sometimes at night, the girls' basketball team would be practicing (*laughs*) and we'd go there and stop and watch them a while. I guess we weren't supposed to do that, but we did. (*Laughter*)

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I bet you didn't have that opportunity when you got to Umnak.

Harold Johnston: Well, there was -- it was right after Pearl Harbor and they had blackouts and all that because of the civilians and all, is what I understood. We just knew what we were doing there. And.....

Janis Kozlowski: Can I take you back to Alaska for a couple minutes and ask you.....

Harold Johnston:when I got to Umnak.....okay, ask me what?

Janis Kozlowski: I'm sorry; I didn't mean to interrupt you. When you got to Umnak, you said that they were having.....

Harold Johnston:had us prepared.

0:20:14.0 Building a secret base on Umnak

Janis Kozlowski: You said that they were -- you were building this secret base that they were calling a fish cannery? Was there -- were there specific things that you were doing to make the base look more like a fish cannery than a military base?

Harold Johnston: They were calling it that. We named it -- we gave it the name that it has now, whatever it -- I can't

Johnny Johnston: Glenn.

Harold Johnston: Fort Glenn. Yeah, we just got our mail with that cannery factory just about a month and then they gave us that APO number.

Janis Kozlowski: Um, okay. Did they have you.....

Harold Johnston: They had us.....

Janis Kozlowski: Did they have you do any.....

Harold Johnston: it didn't feel like it when we got it.

Janis Kozlowski: Did they have you do anything to the buildings or the runway to disguise it? From.....

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. No, not from the air, no not anything. We couldn't camouflage, but there wasn't any planes coming around. The Japs didn't know we was up there, but they was wanting to hit Dutch Harbor. They didn't know we was there then, and we had the runway completed and some planes. And we had -- our company was furnishing security too. We had an outpost about eight miles up the beach, up towards -- I guess it was north. We took them up there. I went on detail and we carried them up there. Carried a tent for them and they'd leave a squad up there of men to look for planes or whatever or ships or anything. But I guess it was good they was up there because they -- we got a little warning when the Japs came and found us the second day after, the next day after Dutch Harbor was hit.

0:23:00.8 The Japanese find the base at Umnak

Janis Kozlowski: It sounds like you saw some pretty interesting activity when -- from your gun position on the beach on that second day. Did you witness a dogfight?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yes. We was out on the beach and by then, I was back in the machine gun section. That's what I'd trained in at Camp Robinson. George K. White, a boy from Pine Bluff, was with me, and we was out there. We would stay four hours and someone would relieve us. And it was dug into the ground and had timbers over it and dirt over it and openings where we could watch the beach and the next island over, which I guess is Unalaska, the far end of it, from Dutch Harbor. There was a big rock come up out of the water out there. We called it Ship Rock; I think that's what they called it on the map. It was shaped like a big ship. But it was about a quarter of a mile, I guess, over to the next island and there was nothing over there. It was -- no trees out there or anything, it was just grass.

Johnny Johnston: *(Aside)* I might eat later.

Janis Kozlowski: So for the most part, it was pretty boring, just looking out from your hole.....

Harold Johnston: We witnessed that dogfight, so..... *(reads printout)* At you from your hole. Yeah. Well, after they started fighting, we got out in the trenches. We went into and were watching them. And we saw all the fight. They -- there was two planes came over pretty close to us. It was all right there out in front in us. And we saw them fighting and going down and they all landed in the water, except one landed on that other island. The pilot had parachuted out on the island and later they sent a boat over and picked him up. We saw them go over and pick him up and they brought him back. But of course, we couldn't camouflage the planes or anything from the air. We did try to camouflage some of the stuff, but.....

Janis Kozlowski: What was your reaction after seeing that dogfight? Did that -- what did you think about having seen that?

Harold Johnston: Well, we didn't know what was going to happen. We knew that they had found us in the -- that's the first they knew we were out there. Those planes were coming back from bombing Dutch Harbor. It was about ten or twelve. They were coming down that edge of the island and the P-40's, those guys that were up on that lookout and radioed in that -- and they knew they was coming, so the P-40's started taking off real fast. When they would get over the water, it was -- which is right there close -- they dropped their wing tanks off, which is the reserve tank on the end of each wing of those P-40's, for long distance stuff. But I told George, I said, "Something's going on; they're dropping their wing tanks." And then we looked up the beach, way up there, and saw the planes coming. It looked like about a dozen of them and so they met out there from us and started the action. They were all shooting at each other.

Janis Kozlowski: You had a front row seat for that action.

Harold Johnston: They was going up in the air and down and around and we would see one go down every once in a while. We wouldn't know which one it was. And we had a good seat for it. It wasn't but the two of us out there. The rest of the company was up at the camp there with the -- which was, I don't know, a quarter of a mile or a half mile away from the airfield. It wasn't all that far; we'd walk down when we changed shifts on the gun.

Janis Kozlowski: Did -- when you saw that dogfight, did that make you concerned that the Japanese might invade Umnak, where you were?

Harold Johnston: No, I wasn't concerned. Maybe I wasn't smart enough, but I never did think that it was going to happen to me; I'd think someone else was going to get hurt.

Janis Kozlowski: And did you know -- when you said you know now that Dutch Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese over those two days. But when you were on Umnak, did you know that that was happening? Was anybody telling you that?

Harold Johnston: Yeah, we heard the -- we heard that they were bombing the first day. We knew about that. But the Japs didn't know we was out there and they didn't know we were out there the first day. But they said that they couldn't -- they tried to contact from Dutch Harbor and the radio didn't pick it up. Anyhow, that -- our planes from the base there didn't know to go up there, so they weren't up there. But the second day, they hit them again and they came down and found us then.

0:30:35.7 News of the Battle of Dutch Harbor

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have any idea -- did they tell you how bad the bombing had been on Dutch Harbor?

Harold Johnston: Well, I didn't hear how bad it was. We knew it was bad. We didn't have -- we just had one radio in the company and it was issued and it was up in the officer's tent part of the time and the -- we just -- they'd hear some programs from Japan -- that lady was -- playing popular music in the.....

Janis Kozlowski: Was that -- did you hear Tokyo Rose?

Harold Johnston: She called herself Annie -- I don't know.

Janis Kozlowski: It wasn't Tokyo.....

Harold Johnston: Oh, it was Tokyo Rose. Yeah, that's the one they'd hear.

Janis Kozlowski: So did she.....

Harold Johnston: We didn't have a radio in the squads or anywhere else and it wasn't too good of reception either.

Janis Kozlowski: So did you hear Tokyo Rose saying things to the American troops?

Harold Johnston: No, I never did listen to that radio.

Janis Kozlowski: And did you.....

Harold Johnston: There was just one in the company and there was about a hundred and eighty men and I didn't -- if we weren't busy, we were sleeping or trying to. But they kept us too busy working and looking and guard duty and all that.

Janis Kozlowski: So it sounds like you didn't have time to be bored there.

Harold Johnston: No, I wasn't bored. That weather was terrible, though.

Janis Kozlowski: What do you remember about the weather there?

0:33:00.9 Suicides and cemetery duty on Umnak

Harold Johnston: While we was on Umnak, we did start a small cemetery with the -- my company was the one that would -- when someone would die or they committed suicide -- my company, didn't anybody commit suicide, but some later -- we got some poor battalion guys from New York and two or three of them committed suicide and they buried them there. My company was the one that furnished burial detail. We'd go out and put on better clothes and have a ceremony and fire the gun -- the pistol -- I mean, the rifles. When we was in the States before we went up there, I was on that -- Garner and I was the two that -- one of us was on each of the flag and we'd fold it up when they would play that -- we would fold the flag up and give it to the survivors at the cemeteries here at home. But we stayed there for a year, a little over, because I had two birthdays there.

Janis Kozlowski: That's a long time there. How -- can you tell me what -- do you know why -- were these guys from New York -- were they just bored? Was that why they were -- or the isolation got to them?

Harold Johnston: I guess they were. But they said they had been drinking Sneaky Pete and stuff. They were unloading the stuff and they would get alcohol from containers. They called some of it some kind of juice -- they could get - I think it went in submarines. I mean, what the submarines shoot, you know, out of -- through the water. They would drink that stuff.

Johnny Johnston: Torpedo juice.

Harold Johnston: Yeah. Torpedo juice.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

Harold Johnston: Oh.

Johnny Johnston: Must have been filled with the torpedoes.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. *(Laughs)* No wonder it did them in.

Harold Johnston: We were there about a year and we had about three graves there.

Janis Kozlowski: Did they die from drinking that juice?

Harold Johnston: What did they -- that's what I heard, that they -- from drinking. I mean, just commit suicide.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, what -- what generally was -- do you think.....

Harold Johnston: We didn't have anyone in our outfit that committed suicide. But still, it was fairly common up in that area.

Janis Kozlowski: So, was troop morale not good? Was that part of the problem?

Harold Johnston: Well, I don't know how the morale was. They would get mail every once in a while and -- from home, and -- but I don't know what the others' morale was. Mine was all right. When we were up there on that tour, we stopped at one airbase up at -- at where you are there, and someone came around while we were eating and asked me if -- about committing suicide and all. I told them I didn't know; it didn't bother me, but I didn't have any problem with that.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Harold Johnston: But that was someone asking for publication or something.

0:37:59.6 Entertainment on Umnak

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm. Did they bring entertainment in for you guys on Umnak? Like USO shows or anything?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. We brought -- after we were there a few months. We weren't there but a year. But we had the runway and it had been -- the Japs had already landed out west of there, of Umnak and Kiska. Well, they sent Errol Flynn; he came up there with some girls and all. And Bob Hope came with Jerry Colonna. Wasn't that the guy with him? The comedian? Bob Hope came in a plane with some USO lady and they got on the back of a big truck for a stage and had a speaker up there. *(Laughs)* And they performed for us and we got to see that. But now, that's the only ones I saw up there, was -- you know, later, Errol Flynn came. That was when we were on Umnak and Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna and Francis Langford. They were all before your time, I'm sure.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I do know who they are. But besides Francis Langford, how many other women were stationed with you on Umnak?

Harold Johnston: On Umnak? There weren't any women there. *(Laughter)* No nurses or anything on Umnak. The only ones we saw were those USO girls. We saw some of them twice.

Janis Kozlowski: How about when you went onto Adak later on? Were there any women stationed there with you?

Harold Johnston: *(Reading)* When I went to Adak later on, were there any women stationed there with you? Not that I know of. If there was, they would have been nurses in the hospital.

Janis Kozlowski: You.....

Harold Johnston: But later, when they sent us to Adak, which was a little over a year later, it is -- someone was already there and they had started it, so we would -- they moved us out. I don't know why, but they moved us out and brought some from the States to take our place and sent us out to another island there and -- Umnak, we had it built up fairly well. We had a mess hall and a theater where you could see a movie once in a while. But we were at Adak then and we built a runway there and they'd bomb Kiska and Attu whenever the weather would permit. But we were losing more planes to the weather than there was to the Japs down there.

0:42:04.5 Black soldiers on Umnak

Janis Kozlowski: Can I ask you one more question about Umnak before we talk about Adak? When -- on Umnak, did you work with any black soldiers there?

Harold Johnston: No, I didn't never see any black soldiers. They had some Navy there and I didn't see any black sailors. I saw black sailors on the ship we went up on.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay. There was a company of black soldiers on Umnak, but it might have been after you left. So once you got a certain amount of work done on.....

Harold Johnston: It would have been after I left there. But I didn't have any problem with them. I was raised up with them and I had friends in Dardanelle; young black people. They didn't do them right back then.

Janis Kozlowski: A young man just wrote a -- his master's thesis on -- about Umnak and the military buildup there, and he talked about the N Troops, which were the black or Negro, they called them at the time, troop and he was trying to figure out where they lived and how they were treated on the island, so I just thought I would ask you what you know about them. But I think they probably came after your time.

Harold Johnston: I'm reading what you're saying here. I can't understand you. But they came after we left, so they weren't there then. They weren't up there then.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay. So.....

Harold Johnston: They.....

0:44:18.4 Moving on to Adak and the Japanese prisoners

Janis Kozlowski: They decided to send you to Adak to do some more construction work. You probably knew by then that the Japanese had occupied Kiska and Attu. Was that a concern for you, moving closer to where the Japanese were?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. The Japs were already on Kiska and Attu. They got there before we left. Right after we saw the dogfight and all, they landed on Attu and Kiska that same -- they had a taskforce, but they decided they couldn't get up there, so they went out there. It was about seven or eight hundred miles, I think, west towards Japan. They went out there and occupied those two. We just had weather people there. One of them had military and the other was native people on those two islands, that was all that was on there. They took them prisoner. After they -- later on, after they took Attu, which they passed us up and didn't take us out there. But after they took that, they brought twenty-two prisoners. That's what they got right at the end, the only ones they took. They brought them back to Adak there and our company was guarding them in the wire cage place there for a few days and then they sent them back to the States on a boat and we sent five men from our company. One boy's mother had died while he was up there, so they sent him, and four others. Of course, I'd like to have been in the bunch (*laughs*) but they took them back to San Diego and they got a leave and then they had to come back.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember where they kept the Japanese prisoners on Adak?

Harold Johnston: Oh, the -- (*reading*) do you remember where they kept the Japanese prisoners on Adak? Yeah, they were in a hut thing with a wire around it. Our company had boys guarding them and I don't think they were dangerous because the ones that were dangerous died and committed suicide and everything before they gave up on Attu. I think a lot of them just committed suicide at the end -- what I've read the books on.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Do you know who was.....

Harold Johnston: They were there just a short time until they got on a boat and -- there was a friend of mine that -- one of the five that went back with them -- of course all of them was friends, but a hundred and eighty men, you didn't know all of them and you weren't -- you were scattered everywhere and.....

Janis Kozlowski: Did you make some particularly good friends while you were in the war? With the guys that you served with?

0:48:52.6 Good friends for life

Harold Johnston: Yeah, I had some that were good friends and some of them I knew before I went in. But it was -- Buddy Garner, W. G. Bearden, and he was the one that came back with prisoners and he had to come back up there.

Janis Kozlowski: What was the second fella's name? Buddy Garner, and what was the other guy's name?

Harold Johnston: Buddy Garner, yeah. Oh, W. G. Bearden was the one whose mother had died after he was up there and they sent him back to guard the prisoners. They put them on the ship and put them in the place where they held them and just guarded them and I guess took turns or something.

Janis Kozlowski: Did -- are those guys people that you kept in contact with throughout your life?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. I kept in contact with them after we got out. After we'd been out about ten years, we started having a reunion at Dardanelle in the old place where the National Guard met, you know. So after that, we had one every year and I -- the ones that knew about it and they'd come -- we'd have a big reunion once a year until just a few years back. It got to where it wasn't many at all that would say they was coming. So we discontinued it and gave the money we had made up, for funerals and all that, and gave it to an outfit here.

Johnny Johnston: DAV.

Harold Johnston: It's.....

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

Harold Johnston:called.....

Johnny Johnston: Disabled Veterans of America.

Harold Johnston: Disabled Veterans, yeah. And then, you know, for the ambulance and for cars and bringing them down to the hospital down here. We donated to them, what we had. I still have three veterans down here in Little Rock in the neighborhood I contact all the time and we talk.

Janis Kozlowski: Did they serve in Alaska as well, or in other theaters?

Harold Johnston: Oh, (*reading*) did they serve in Alaska as well as in other -- well, most of us went on. When we came back, they sent us out to train and recruit. Some of them went different places to different -- and other theaters. A lot of them went to Europe, like I did, afterwards.

0:52:53.5 Getting back to the States and training recruits

Janis Kozlowski: Did Buddy Garner go to Europe with you?

Harold Johnston:to train and recruit. I was a sergeant at the time I came back to the States.

Janis Kozlowski: How did you actually get back to the States from Alaska? Did you go back on the *St. Mihiel*?

Harold Johnston: Let me read what you said. I don't see it. What'd she say, Johnny?

Johnny Johnston: How'd you get back to the United States from Alaska? The ship?

Harold Johnston: Oh, yeah. After we went to -- after we went to Kiska, we came back to Adak and went back to doing the same thing, unloading ships (*laughs*) and all that. And we unloaded bombs and all that for -- so they finally got us ready and got us all on the ship and brought us back to Prince Rupert, Canada. That's where we came to and they put us off there for about a week and we had military courtesies and stuff. I guess to civilize us, sort of. (*Laughter*) But then they sent us to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and gave us three weeks vacation, which we hadn't done in..... (*Laughs*) And we went home and when we came back, they sent us out to different places. I went to Camp Hood, Texas. Later it was Fort Hood, but it was Camp Hood then. We were in barracks there and training new recruits for thirteen weeks basic training.

Johnny Johnston: Him and Garner were doing that.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, okay. Okay.

Johnny Johnston: And then they went airborne to get out of there.

Janis Kozlowski: And they went -- did they go together?

Johnny Johnston: Yeah, they went airborne together.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I've had you talking for almost an hour and I know you're trying to get over this cold, so I won't keep questioning you. I just wondered if there were any stories or experiences that you didn't get asked about, either in your original interview or this one.

Johnny Johnston: Don't hang it up!

Harold Johnston: Give me the other telephone.

Johnny Johnston: Here.

Harold Johnston: You get that other one.

Johnny Johnston: You there?

Harold Johnston: This screen and thing quit working, so.....

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, okay.

Harold Johnston: Maybe I can understand.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I was just saying I don't want to -- it's been almost an hour and I know you're trying to get over a cold, so I don't want to keep you. But I wondered if there were any experiences or stories that I haven't asked you about or that you didn't talk about in your earlier interview that you would like to relate.

Johnny Johnston: Do you have any stories that you hadn't said right now that you want to tell her? You know, about anything?

0:56:30.9 Parachute training and heading to Europe

Harold Johnston: I don't know. I went to parachute training for four weeks. Are you still there?

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I'm here.

Harold Johnston: Okay. I couldn't -- I went to the parachute training for four weeks and got a leave and went home on Christmas of '44. And..... (*high pitched whine sounds*)

Johnny Johnston: His hearing aids are making that noise (*high pitched whine sounds*). I think your hearing aids are making that noise, Dad.

Harold Johnston: Oh, I can hear, but I can't understand some of it. But I shipped out from there to Germany. Went up to Fort Meade, Maryland, at first and then to (*high pitched whine sounds*) Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and New York Harbor, where we got on a ship. Did you any other questions?

Janis Kozlowski: No, I think -- I think you did a really good interview and I really appreciate it. Can I ask Johnny a question?

Johnny Johnston: Go ahead.

0:57:59.8 Father and son share war experiences

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I was curious if you and your father have talked -- you've served in Vietnam, so I wondered if you and your father had compared experiences. I know they were different wars, but were there things that you both agree are similar experiences that you both had?

Johnny Johnston: Well, he told me don't volunteer for anything and I volunteered for Vietnam. That was a mistake. (*Laughter*)

Janis Kozlowski: And you wished you'd listened to him, right? (*Laughs*)

Johnny Johnston: Oh, yeah. It's -- it was -- morale was bad over there.

Janis Kozlowski: Where did you serve in Vietnam?

Johnny Johnston: _____ Vien (58:34). I was in the 1st infantry division. I was a rifleman.

Janis Kozlowski: And when -- how long were you over in -- in the war? In the country?

Johnny Johnston: One year and one day.

Janis Kozlowski: That was probably like a lifetime.

Johnny Johnston: Yes, forever.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Yep. So did -- do you and your father have experiences that you both talk about? Your war experiences?

Johnny Johnston: Oh, he tells me his experiences and I'll tell him mine, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Johnny Johnston: How they treated us like dogs and worked us like dogs, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, you know. It was just -- it was bad.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm. Did your -- does your dad share that experience too, or did he think he had it a little bit easier?

Johnny Johnston: Oh, he -- he didn't have it easy, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Sounds like they kept him pretty busy.

Johnny Johnston: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Johnny Johnston: Now, we -- we just got our own experiences and accept them and I listen to his stories and he listens to mine, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Sounds like.....

0:59:50.0 Snafus keep him from the D-Day Invasion

Johnny Johnston: Garner -- him and Garner were buddies and then they went back to Fort Hood to push troops -- you know, basic trainees, and then they went airborne to get out of there and get the extra \$50 dollars a month, and Garner went on ahead. And Daddy -- Daddy got red-lined about his pay or something, and Garner went on over there and got in the 17th Airborne and jumped over the Rhine. But Daddy was on the way over there and he was there -- his ship got rammed by an aircraft carrier and they got diverted to the Azores. So he missed D-Day and the invasion and all that because they got diverted.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Johnny Johnston: But that's on that AETN thing.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Johnny Johnston: Oh! I need to get your address..... *(dictation cuts off)*

End of interview at 1:00:40.7