

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Dorothy Johnson,
Wife of the Fort Hancock Post Commander, 1965-69.
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS
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Transcribed by Maren Morsch, NPS, 2008



Dorothy Johnson in Officers' Wives Club fashion show in the Fort Hancock Officers' Club, March 1967.

Rasa: Today is September 8th, 2005. My name is Mary Rasa, Sandy Hook Museum Curator. Today I am doing a telephone interview with Mrs. Dorothy Johnson, who was an officer's wife at Fort Hancock. And, first of all, I would like to start out saying hello, and please state your full name for the record?

Johnson: Dorothy Darlin Johnson

Rasa: Okay. And can you tell me when and where were you were born?

Johnson: I was born in Columbus, Georgia, November the 16th, 1920. But I didn't live there long, by 6 months I was in Atlanta, Georgia, where I lived until I married, December 28th of 1940.

Rasa: And where did you attend school in Georgia?

Johnson: I went to the public schools in Atlanta, girls' high school, and then to Agnes Scott College.

Rasa: Did you graduate there?

Johnson: No, I got married, and didn't go back to college until I was 49.

Rasa: (LOL), Okay.

Johnson: I have 2 degrees from the University of North Florida.

Rasa: Okay. What are they in?

Johnson: My first Bachelors' is in English and Literature, and the second one is in Human Services, a Masters' degree.

Rasa: Okay. Tell me a little bit about how you met your husband, and when/where you were married?

Johnson: Oh, I was just starting college in Agnes Scott, and he was in Georgia Tech. And we met at a fraternity party and...love at first sight! It was the roses that did it, because I met him in the first of February, and Valentines' he sent me a dozen red roses. That did it.

Rasa: So, Sounds pretty good. And how many children do you have?

Johnson: I have seven.

Rasa: Okay.

Johnson: 4 girls and 3 boys.

Rasa: And, okay, so while he was in Georgia Tech, he was in the ROTC?

Johnson: Yes, he was in National Guard.

Rasa: Oh, okay.

Johnson: He came into service under the National Guard.

Rasa: And when was he called up to active duty?

Johnson: In February of 1941.

Rasa: Tell me a little where he ended up going.

Johnson: He started out at Camp Blanding, Florida, and then 4 different times we had visited Fort Sill, Oklahoma, artillery heaven, and ended up in the state of Washington before his unit was sent overseas in World War II.

Rasa: And where did he go?

Johnson: All across North Africa, and into Italy. He was gone oh, three years.

Rasa: And then he was injured?

Johnson: He suffered a blood clot, and was hospitalized, and sent home for surgery at Walter Reed.

Rasa: And then when were you able to see him again?

Johnson: Let me see, 1945.

Rasa: Oh okay, and he remained in the Army then?

Johnson: He really enjoyed his Army career, and that was his profession.

Rasa: What rank was he by the time World War II was over?

Johnson: He was a Lieutenant Colonel by the time he was 27, and a full Colonel temporary by the time he was 29.

Rasa: Oh wow.

Johnson: Unusual.

Rasa: So after the war ended, where was his next duty assignment?

Johnson: Let me think, I'm not prepared for this. (LOL)

Rasa: Oh that's okay. So he remained in the artillery his entire career, right?

Johnson: Right. I do have a list somewhere of all of his service, but I don't have it right in front of me.

Rasa: Okay, well why don't we...then let's fast-forward. By the time you came to Fort Hancock, what year was that?

Johnson: That was 1964.

Rasa: Okay, and at that point in time, did you have any of your children living with you?

Johnson: Well, the first one was already married, 'cause we had been stationed in England when my husband had his second stroke, and when we were sent back, Fort Hancock was his first duty after his stroke, and so he was on active duty there for five

and a half years, and then retired medically in January of 1969.

Rasa: Uh-huh.

Johnson: My oldest child was already through college and married, and the oldest girl was in graduate school, but I still had the second-oldest boy was also married, and the third boy had gone to Canada in defiance against Vietnam. And so I only had 3 girls with me when we moved to Florida and he was retired.

Rasa: Okay, well while you were at Fort Hancock, did they attend local schools there?

Johnson: Yes, uh-huh, the youngest girl went to Navesink, is that the right word?

Rasa: Yes.

Johnson: And the older ones all went through Middletown High School.

Rasa: Oh okay. Did any of them graduate from there?

Johnson: Yes, the two middle boys graduated from there.

Rasa: And can you tell me about, now which house did you live in?

Johnson: We lived in Quarters 13, beautiful, beautiful house.

Rasa: When you arrived there, did you have to do anything to the house, any painting, or...?

Johnson: No, it was in great condition for the age of the house, and my children really enjoyed the house. And we didn't have any servants. There was nobody who wanted to come all that distance out, and go through security and the whole thing, and so my housemates were my kids!

Rasa: (laughter)

Johnson: And they could tell you stories now about how they used to wax the floors. We would take old wool skirts and cut 'em into squares, and I would put the wax down, and then the kids would ski across the floor. And they would toboggan, sitting on the rags, or sometimes they would stand on the rags, and that's the way we waxed the floors.

Rasa: Now at this time, was your husband a Lieutenant Colonel or a full Colonel?

Johnson: A full Colonel.

Rasa: Oh Okay. And what was his job?

Johnson: He was the base commander.

Rasa: Okay. And did he ever, so he basically ran the functions of the fort?

Johnson: Right.

Rasa: Anything ever happen interesting, concerning that?

Johnson: Oh, he was greatly loved by all of his GI's, and was frequently asked to stand in for the father of the bride at weddings.

Rasa: Oh okay.

Johnson: He had a lot of weddings.

Rasa: In the Post Chapel?

Johnson: Some in the Chapel, and some outdoor ceremonies, and you can't imagine. Lots of young men got married on that stage.

Rasa: And so when you moved in did you...what's the situation with the shipping of all your furniture? The government pack everything up and then bring it there for you?

Johnson: Yes. We came from England, and everything had gone into storage and nothing looks the same when you unpack it all, you know, after you've been gone for months. But, we really loved the house, particularly the dining room. I don't know if they still have it or not, but at that time they had plate warmers over the radiators?

Rasa: Yes.

Johnson: And we had 6 different mantles, fireplaces, and I didn't realize until I moved there that each pattern has a name, just like quilts have a pattern name? And so some of ours were called "wedding rings," and some of them were called other things, each of the mantles was hand-carved, just beautiful.

Rasa: Was that the biggest house you ever had?

Johnson: Oh, indeed. The changing room, and the kids at that time were all into playing music, and the basement was empty, and so it was kind of a hang-out space for the teenagers, because they could go down there in the basement and make noise, and I might not even hear much of it upstairs. They claim that Bruce Springsteen came and played in my basement, but I wouldn't have known him if I'd seen him...or any other kid.

Rasa: Did you use the third floor attic space for anything?

Johnson: Never went in it.

Rasa: Okay.

Johnson: I have no idea what was up there. I should have. I say to myself “Why didn’t I go up there?” But I never did.

Rasa: Well, you had plenty of room on the second level.

Johnson: Yeah, we had front stairs and back stairs, and theoretically, the back stairs were for the servant, but we didn’t have a servant. So we kept the front stairs all pretty. We polished up the front stairs with shoe polish. There’s a certain color of Cordovan shoe polish that just matched those stairs.

Rasa: Now...

Johnson: My girls learned a lot about how to keep house in unorthodox ways.

Rasa: I guess so, with such a big, such a big building there.

Johnson: Oh, I loved the butler’s pantry. First time in my life that everything I owned had a place. So good. And I think I had told you once before that upstairs, one of the toilets had a little...not really a leak, but a sound, and I raised up the top of the tank, and there was a signature, Stanford White, 1901. And whether he was actually there, or whether somebody...just put his name on it, or what I don’t know, but it was interesting. I thought that was proof that he had built my house.

Rasa: Did you use the front door often, or was that more for guests?

Johnson: Which face?

Rasa: The front door, that faced the water.

Johnson: Had beautiful, leaded glass, not colored, stained glass, just leaded glass. And then about 5 feet in, there was another door. And about the first of November, the engineers would come around and nail shut that first front door.

Rasa: They did really?

Johnson: The wind was so strong, and everybody had to go in and out the back door. And so when you knew company was coming, you couldn’t, you know, greet them at the front door, and though then if the kitchen was a mess, you had to clean up the kitchen!

Rasa: Laughter

Johnson: And then another thing, as the commanding officer, my husband was authorized to use a little boat. And for little trips over to Governors Island, you could take oh, maybe

8 or 9 people in the little boat, and the Coast Guard kept that boat in good condition. And so, no one was supposed to use it except the the officers, but if my husband had a trip planned to go to Governors Island, I could bum a ride with him over to Governors Island.

Rasa: Oh, sure.

Johnson: And then you could just come across to Wall Street and right into Manhattan. And it cut the time down considerably, traveling.

Rasa: So you would take the ferry from Governors Island over to lower Manhattan, then.

Johnson: Right. And other than that, we did have a bus, and the wives' group would, during the season, occasionally plan trips to see certain shows, and I can remember seeing Carol Burnett, in "The Princess and the Pea" was called "Once Upon a Mattress," and we saw Auntie Mame and Lunt Fontaine. Way back in that time, you know, the theater district of New York was thriving, and it was great fun because we could take a bus over, and attend the shows, maybe have a bite to eat, and shop a few minutes, and then at a certain hour get back on the bus. You didn't dare miss it!

Rasa: Oh, sure.

Johnson: And one time, we were using a school bus, a yellow school bus, and some driver, not familiar with the Garden State freeway, cut right in front of us. And the driver slammed on the brakes, and caused a minor accident.

Rasa: Oh.

Johnson: And some man driving behind us stopped, thinking he was gunna open that back emergency door and find a whole lotta little children. And he was very surprised to see a bunch of little ol' ladies with white gloves and hats and... on our way to the show. But nobody was really hurt, it was just one of those things that could have been tragic but wasn't, thank goodness.

Rasa: Were you able to continue on, or did you have to go home?

Johnson: Oh yes, we went on.

Rasa: Oh, okay. So...what else was functioning at the Fort at the time, because I know by the later years, some things weren't in operation. Was there still a, a theater that was functioning, playing movies?

Johnson: If there was, my children probably knew, and I'm sure that the GI's would use it. But I personally never went to a movie there.

Rasa: Oh okay. Did you go to, were the church--

Johnson: One thing, you see, we had no babysitters other than our own children who were older. And, like one of my girls babysat for the chaplain, when he was having choir practice or, church services or something. We didn't have anybody from off-base who came in and worked, you know, like as a babysitter.

Rasa: Sure.

Johnson: If you didn't grow your own, you were in bad shape.

Rasa: Were there enlisted men's wives that would be able to do stuff like that or, not really?

Johnson: Not really.

Rasa: Okay.

Johnson: And I did have one story about the mantelpieces that um... When there's a fire in one set of quarters, and they've renovated the quarters, they took out at least two of the old mantelpieces, and stored them down in...where they used to store...in the bunkers?

Rasa: Yes, the gun batteries?

Johnson: And it really annoyed me, because they were so beautiful and intricate. And so I wrote a note to Jacqueline Kennedy, who was in the White House then, and she sent a truck to up pick up those, and I never got the details of ... I wish I had had the kind of husband that told me all these little details. They...they left, somebody came and picked them up, and exactly where they went I don't know, and I have never had anybody tell me, but I hopefully helped save some of the mantles.

Rasa: Was that when, on Officer's Row, there was a house that went on fire on the corner? Is that—

Johnson: Right.

Rasa: Yeah, did...And then at some point they renovated it and put in marble mantles?

Johnson: Oh, I didn't know that. That was probably after I was gone.

Rasa: They were the ones, you must've gone to the General's house. He had different types of mantles in his house as well. He had marble mantles.

Johnson: Uh-huh. You know every New Year's Day, the Commanding Officer has to have a reception for everybody who is assigned to him, all the officers, and that was one of the times when the front door was nailed shut. And so, it was kind of a tradition that they had something called "artillery punch." 'Course, my husband, having been a field artilleryman...and it's a very potent punch. And I would have fruit slices of Georgia

punch fruitcake. And people would come in, shake your hand, have one little glass of punch, one little piece of cake, say goodbye, and leave.

Rasa: So they would come to your house because he was Post Commander as opposed to the General's house.

Johnson: Well, the General was in charge and command of all the troops from the missile site, and from missile base, in Atlantic Highlands, but my husband was in charge of all of the troops who had duty at Fort Hancock itself. He was, the General was in charge of the missile people.

Rasa: Right, Okay.

Johnson: They were supposed to be protecting 53 million people. You could draw a concentric circle around all of New York, New Jersey, in all, and there were 53 million people who were supposed to be protected by the missile base up in Atlantic Highlands. And I did go visit that once, it was very protected, but it was fascinating because the GI's were trained to write from the back of the glass, so everything that they did was backwards.

Rasa: Backwards, Okay, oh okay.

Johnson: And you would see a clip, and they would know whether that was friendly aircraft or not, and ask for identification and all that kinda stuff, and it was very intensive. And so, the missile sites, which were down on the spit of land called Sandy Hook, and the fail-safe were two of the things that were under the General's command.

Rasa: Oh okay.

Johnson: Does that help you with that?

Rasa: Sure! So, so your husband would be the one that they would all visit on New Year's Day though.

Johnson: No, only the people who were involved in actually running the day-to-day Fort Hancock.

Rasa: Oh Okay. So would that be a lot of people by that point in time?

Johnson: Oh...a lot?

Rasa: How many do you think would have come through your house in that point in time?

Johnson: Fifty, sixty.

Rasa: Okay. Well that's quite a few.

Johnson: Yeah.

Rasa: Now would that be, would the enlisted men be able to come over?

Johnson: No.

Rasa: Just the officers?

Johnson: Just the officers.

Rasa: Oh Okay. And would they bring their wives and children, or just wives?

Johnson: Just wives.

Rasa: Now, as being a Post Commander, did your husband deal a lot with Fort Monmouth for services?

Johnson: We used Fort Monmouth for a source, because we had no commissary, and no exchange, and so mainly that's, you know, what we did, and for healthcare.

Rasa: Okay.

Johnson: And so we did go back and forth, back and forth, but the commands were completely separate. One thing that was really funny is my oldest son already had a five-year-old when he was stationed, when my son was stationed in Vietnam, and his wife wanted to go over to Hawaii when he had R&R. And so I offered to keep her two children. She had a five year old boy and a two or three year old girl. I had no trouble with the little girl, but the little five year old boy had a mind of his own. One day... you know, my house faced the rocks and the water of the bay,

Rasa: Right

Johnson: And then three blocks over was the ocean, while it was wonderful in the summertime when the weather was good, once the wind started blowing and all, and, and after September, (inaudible)... But I missed the little five year old boy one day, and he had decided that he was going to walk, and see all of Sandy Hook himself. And so he was walking down toward the security gate, and one of the engineer trucks came by, and the "You know, he's not supposed to be here." And so, they picked him up. And gave him a ride, coming back toward the Headquarters, and he wouldn't tell them his name.

Rasa: Oh boy.

Johnson: He was having a good time, riding on that great, big Army truck. And so finally, they brought him back to the Headquarters building, and somebody said "Oh! That's the Colonel Johnson's grandson." And they brought him home. But he never would tell 'em

who he was, because he wanted to stay on the truck.

Rasa: Can't you blame him.

Johnson: So as far as kids were concerned, it was very interesting place.

Rasa: Oh sure.

Johnson: One other thing, the Coast Guard Commander at the same time was Commander Thompson. And he was in charge of the lighthouse, and little boats that they ran. And he and my husband had read that George Washington had owned an apple orchard over at Freehold, and had left a recipe for making apple cider into something stronger. And so they decided to try it. And since I had a deep freeze on my back porch, they decided that they would follow this recipe, and it consisted of...they had 6 bottles of fresh apple juice. Nothing ever done to it, not pasteurized or anything. And they had 6 gallon jugs, and they put them in the freezer. And after so many days, George Washington had to put 'em in ice, real sheared-up ice. Like in the pictures, you know.

Rasa: Sure.

Johnson: After about six days, they would take what was not frozen, and re-bottle it. And so, 6 bottles came down to about 4, and 4 bottles came down to 2, and finally they decided that everything that was gonna freeze had frozen, and what had not frozen was a very strong alcohol content.

Rasa: Really?

Johnson: Because that's what wouldn't freeze. And so then they had to test it. And it made both of those men so sick.

Rasa: Really?

Johnson: It was pitiful. And so we had to call Mrs. Thompson and ask her if she would come and get her husband. We couldn't get him out the door. And my husband was on the bathroom floor.

Rasa: Oh my...

Johnson: My son Britt, who was about 16 at the time, came in and looked at his daddy, and thought he was really, really sick, and said, "Did you want me to call an ambulance?" And I said, "No, call the undertaker." That was one of the family jokes from then on, anytime anybody looked sick, "Shall we call the undertaker?" (laughter)

Rasa: Wow.

Johnson: They never again mentioned making this hard cider.

Rasa: It was real hard cider.

Johnson: Oh, baby. We had some real interesting people acting as chaplain when we were there. The Chaplain's Corps was under the Fort Hancock people, and one was named Hugner...Hubener? And he was the first person I ever knew who collected things. He was a Civil War buff, and he collected the ol', round lead balls which really were fired during the Civil War and he collected barbed wire.

Rasa: That's interesting.

Johnson: And, apparently, if you read the antique magazines now, barbed wire is commercially sold, and cut to certain lengths, and how many barbs there are per foot, and when they were manufactured and all, and during the Civil War, there were pieces of barbed wire left. And so this man has a wonderful collection now of things he picked up with a metal detector.

Rasa: Really?

Johnson: Yeah. I never knew anybody else who did that.

Rasa: Never heard of that.

Johnson: And you know that the lighthouse that the Coast Guard protected? It had been moved at one time. The sand had shifted, and so where the lighthouse originally was would be in water now.

Rasa: Well, it's kinda the other way around. The sand grew up around the lighthouse, so its--

Johnson: Did it?

Rasa: Further, it's the lighthouse...that...the lighthouse used to be at the tip, and then through sand currents, the sand built up. So now there's, instead of there being no sand in front of the lighthouse, there's a foot, a mile and a half of sand. So it's kinda, it's kinda moved around in circles. Were you ever able to go up in the lighthouse while you were there?

Johnson: No.

Rasa: The Coast Guard never had any tours for military personnel or anything?

Johnson: Not that I know of.

Rasa: Your kids never got to go up?

Johnson: No. They didn't tell me if they did. (Laughter) One of my sons, the one who refused to go to Vietnam and went to Canada, is accused of painting a peace sign on one of the Howitzers.

Rasa: Oh boy.

Johnson: And nobody ever confessed to it, and he still lives in Canada, is quite successful, married a German girl and all sorts of stuff but he has never confessed it to me, but some of his brothers and sisters would swear to ya, he's the one who did it.

Rasa: Were those guns right by the flagpole?

Johnson: There were Howitzers that were stored which they used over and over, and there were the ceremonial ones that they used when they had parades, so there were two or three different sizes and names of Howitzer.

Rasa: Oh, Okay. So when he refused to go to Vietnam, I assume your husband must've been quite upset.

Johnson: No, they understood each other's viewpoints, and the older brother was Air Force, and shot down planes, and dropped bombs, and had no concoctions about it, and the younger one...just could not do it. And the middle one was never called.

Rasa: So he, he went to Canada, and he just never came back then?

Johnson: Oh, he came back when President Carter had his...

Rasa: The pardon?

Johnson: He's had dual citizenship, so he could come back, and he has been back many times. But, his mother-in-law is German, and speaks only German to the children, and her grandchildren. So it's...My grandchildren are all bilingual or trilingual, and I'm not. (Pause) And, fishing there was so good, and my husband was a great fisherman.

Rasa: I just need to pause the tape for just one second. {Pause} You were talking about the fishing?

Johnson: Right. When the red bass were running, word would come down and my husband would just be thrilled, and...we ate more red bass than I would ever, ever want to inflict on my family again, but they were huge. And you would have to bake them because they were really big fish, and if you baked them, in the red sauce and all, they were really good. But to this day, none of my children is really crazy about eating fish. And there was one old gentleman who had been in the Coast Guard stationed there, who would come back to fish, and Commander Thompson would allow him to stay in a building, with the Coast Guard dudes (?), because he loved it so, and he came just to fish, and didn't bother anybody. And I don't think anybody ever asked for an explanation, and

the Base Commander never asked “Why is he there?” But he would come for, you know, several weeks every year just to go fishin’.

Rasa: Was, at the time you were there, did they have the recreation area for Army personnel to go to the beach?

Johnson: Well, they had a place that was like a couple of barracks, where people on active duty could come and enjoy a vacation. And it worked out very well. The quarters were not fancy at all, but they were very very inexpensive, and families would come and spend a week or two, and enjoy the beach and the ocean and all of the amenities, and then they could leave. And it worked out really well.

Rasa: Was your husband in charge of that?

Johnson: Yeah, that was part of, I believe his duties, uh-huh.

Rasa: So he was in charge of all the post engineers then, right?

Johnson: Right. Is the virgin forest of holly trees still there?

Rasa: Yes, between Sandy Hook and Fire Island have the two largest and oldest in the country.

Johnson: Well, one of the...my daughters had been dating a boy whose family was quite wealthy, and he only lived in Scarsdale, and I couldn't think of anything to do for them in return for their having had my daughter as a houseguest several times and all. So one year I packed up some little clippings of the virgin holly in a box and sent it to them the week before Christmas. Come to find out, they had gone to Switzerland for Christmas week, and when they got home, they opened up this box and here was this dead--

Rasa: Ohhh.

Johnson: So I wouldn't ever do that again. If I did do that, tell somebody. Oh, dear.

Rasa: Did you...have...did you think that there were many people who would try to sneak onto the base, was that ever a problem?

Johnson: I don't think so because even the, when the high school kids would come to my house, they would have to stop and go in the security building, and show ID, and that they had a driver's license, and the car was insured, and all of that. No I don't think there was ever any problem over there.

Rasa: Did your family ever go to the state park while it was working in the southern end of the park?

Johnson: No.

Rasa: No?

Johnson: We didn't need it.

Rasa: Oh, because you had your own.

Johnson: Right.

Rasa: Did they go to the beach often, in the Army beach?

Johnson: Oh, yes. They did have a little, teeny little building there that served...canned drinks and little snack items during the summertime.

Rasa: So it was a pretty nice place to be stationed?

Johnson: I'm sorry, what?

Rasa: It was a pretty nice place to be stationed?

Johnson: Oh, it was wonderful. And the children could get anywhere they wanted to go by themselves, as long as it was right on the base. They just couldn't get off the base!

Rasa: Right.

Johnson: The school buses would come right to the back door, and would honk a horn, because I guess they didn't have that many to pick up. And then my children got a really good education there, they really enjoyed the school system, and Middletown High School, I think, served a really good purpose. They got everything they needed, and they had fun at the same time.

Rasa: It was a long bus ride for them!

Johnson: Well, I think that's true all over the United States. From where I live now to the high school is only about 3 miles, but yeah, we had to go further than that...you know, the town of Navesink was interesting, and every year their fire department would have a sale to raise money for their fire department, and so I went one time, and I bought two little pink tumblers? Two little, short little drinking glasses? And somebody said, "Oh, you know, those are very, very valuable." And I was taking a course at the Middletown High School at night on antiques, and one time would be on silver, and the next time would be on glass, and the next time would be on...pottery. And so I took the two glasses, and I had them in a brown paper bag, and I set it up on the desk where the lecturer was coming, and when he came in, he sat on them,

Rasa: Oh my!

Johnson: And he broke one! So the other one is still in my kitchen window, and it's very pretty. But he felt so badly that he had broken my glass that he invited me to come to his shop and he would give me something to replace it, but I never did. But I've got one, and I think I paid a quarter for it, those two glasses. But the people in Navesink were very warm and welcoming to the Army people. And the only problem that we ever, ever encountered was that...our chaplains came and went. And sometimes you would have a Baptist, and the next time you'd have a Congregationalist, and next time you'd have a Lutheran...you just never knew who was coming. And so I decided I would visit the local little church in Navesink, which was about as close to the Church of England as you could get. And I didn't know that the pews in that little church were donated by certain families, and that's where they sat.

Rasa: Oh.

Johnson: And so, I had a couple of my children with me, and I sat in the wrong place! But they were very sweet and nice about it, and nobody ever said anything, but finally, two three weeks later, somebody told me, "Did you know you sat in so-and-so's place?" And the people of Rumson? Even though they had a reputation for keeping quite a few undesirable gangster types, we never had any problems with any of the people from Rumson.

Rasa: Really? I never heard that.

Johnson: The people there seemed to have lots of money.

Rasa: Yes, they still do. (Laughs)

Johnson: And on a certain day of the week, I think it was Thursday, they would have pick-up day for their trash. Pick-up. And people would actually drive around on Wednesday night, late, and see what the rich people of Rumson were throwing away. I never did it, but I heard stories about people who did that.

Rasa: I think I've even heard of people doing that as well.

Johnson: Are they still doing it?

Rasa: Yeah.

Johnson: Oh, my. (Laughter) Well I think it's very sweet of you to do the history, and unless you have some questions--

Rasa: Sure, I have a couple for you. Where would you typically go shopping, I guess food shopping you would go to Fort Monmouth?

Johnson: Right, We would go to Fort Monmouth, and I don't think any of the schools provided lunch. And so I would have maybe three loaves of sandwich bread, and...cheese and ham and bologna, and...everything to make sandwiches with, and we would make like a factory out of it. One kid would smear on the mustard, and the next kid would put on the meat and the next kid...(laughter) and then we would wrap them and put them in the paper bags and label them, and so when my children were ready to go to school, they would just reach in and grab a bag. And it worked.

Rasa: Well that's good.

Johnson: And they all grew. Nobody complained.

Rasa: And for clothes shopping, where would you go to do some of that?

Johnson: To Red Bank.

Rasa: You would go to Red Bank, okay.

Johnson: There were quite a few very nice little shops, and course the exchange at Fort Monmouth had the basics.

Rasa: If you wanted to get, I assume you had one family car? Would that be how you got around?

Johnson: Right, and then my husband had the use of a sedan, and a driver, and so there wasn't any confusion about... if he needed the car for anything official, he had his own.

Rasa: Oh, so you were able to then drive around?

Johnson: Right.

Rasa: Tell me about the Officers' Club. What did you think of the building?

Johnson: The building was quaint, that's the only word for it, and even way back then, it had structural problems. And I think it always had a leaky roof at one part or another, and they really didn't seem to have much luck keeping GI's who wanted to work in the Officers' Club.

Rasa: So there was a staff at that time?

Johnson: There were supposed to have a staff, but they had a hard time keeping people there. I don't know if it was the pay, or if it was the hours, or what, but--

Rasa: So would they be civilians or military working there?

Johnson: Most of the people who worked there were military people doing extra duty.

Rasa: Oh okay, so it was a kind of a side duty.

Johnson: Right, not an assignment, but...

Rasa: For pay, for additional pay.

Johnson: Yeah.

Rasa: Do you know what they did with the second floor at that point in time? Was anybody living in there?

Johnson: I don't think so. I don't remember that anybody actually lived there because I don't think that they had staff enough to service them and feed them.

Rasa: Right. Was the building open on a regular basis, or was it just open say, Friday nights, or for...for special events?

Johnson: Yeah, I think special events, and receptions, and maybe like on Sundays.

Rasa: Oh Okay.

Johnson: A meal on Sundays or something. It was open on...I hate to say this, but it wasn't really all that successful.

Rasa: Well, it was near the end of the Fort, there weren't as many people there, I assume. Would you ever take your family there, or would you just typically go there for the Officers' Wives Club functions?

Johnson: Well, the Officers' Wives Clubs were pretty much mandatory, but yeah, we would take the family there every once in awhile, I think sometimes partly to try to boost the attendance, to try to keep it open and going. But of course, the post wasn't big enough to support a well-run club.

Rasa: Right. There probably weren't any more than 500 people assigned to the post, right?

Johnson: I doubt it.

Rasa: Yeah.

Johnson: I don't really have that information.

Rasa: Sure, I was just curious if you would remember that. And so did then, your husband retired from Fort Hancock?

Johnson: Yes. He was medically retired.

Rasa: And that was in 1969?

Johnson: Right, January.

Rasa: January. And then so, you left in that, in January of 1969?

Johnson: Right.

Rasa: And where'd you go then?

Johnson: Oh. My husband's mother spent her winters in Mt. Laurel, Florida, and so that's the first place we went. And my children said that everybody down there had white hair. So then we traveled back up through Orlando, and Titusville, and Cape Canaveral, and all of 'em, and we got to where there were beautiful oak trees, and I said, "Okay, I'm ready!" And so finally, about the 20th of February, we settled, and found a place to rent, and then bought this house in October.

Rasa: Oh, so you've been there ever since.

Johnson: Yes, same house since October '69. And knock on wood, we haven't had any hurricanes yet.

Rasa: Well, you're pretty far out north too.

Johnson: Well, so far we've been very lucky.

Rasa: Is there anything else you'd like to say about your time at Fort Hancock?

Johnson: Some of the friends that we made during that time period are still good, life-long friends. And some of the youngsters who were in school with my children at that time have kept up and are still good friends by long distance. And I think those five and a half years, particularly for the middle school children, were very good for them, and gave them confidence, and the schools of that section of New Jersey did well by them. And so far I would say my kids have been very successful, my oldest boy is just retiring as a United States Ambassador, the first girl is a financial advisor for multi-million dollar accounts, the third one took forty-three thousand people when Verizon Wireless came into existence, and managed pay, vacations, benefits, retirement, for forty-three-thousand people.

Rasa: That's a lot of people.

Johnson: So she's using her Master's in Business very well. And the next one, the boy in Canada works for General Motors in Canada, and the one girl is ill, and has cirrhosis of

the liver from hepatitis, but she's hanging in there, she's doing quite well. And the last daughter in California has a Master's in Art, and is for an artist, and her husband owns a foundry, and they're very interesting people. And so I feel that the five and a half years at Fort Hancock enhanced my family.

Rasa: Sure.

Johnson: And it was a great experience. And I guess I learned a lot from that too, because I had to manage, and I had to do without servants, which we had had when we lived overseas. Spoils you, when you go overseas, you know. But I appreciate what you are doing, and I think it's remarkable that Fort Hancock is keeping a history of all this.

Rasa: Well, thank you. Okay I'm going to end the interview, thank you so much for your time.

End of interview.