

**Oral History Interview of
Dr. Heenan Johnson**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
June 19, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

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*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

Johnson, Heenan Oral History Interview, June 19, 2014. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Paul Doran

Editor(s): Jason Rhode

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Heenan Johnson, who discusses the Lubbock Tornado, his experiences as a member of the Disaster Committee that helped to rebuild Lubbock after the tornado, and his experiences as a soldier in World War II.

Length of Interview: 00:42:40



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Tornado and recovery	6	00:02:00
Disaster committee	11	00:08:30
Building the civic center	19	00:18:18
Community activity	23	00:25:41
Importance of community spirit	25	00:33:59

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Keywords

Tornado, World War II, community action, Lubbock Civic Center

Heenan Johnson (HJ):

Robert Taylor—I don't know where they are, but I know all the rest of them are dead.

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Now we're talking about Robert Taylor, Robert Taylor's father, who had "R.C. Taylor Tobacco," and then—

HJ:

I don't know.

AW:

Yeah.

HJ:

I don't recall—I don't even know what he looked like. I know the rest of them, but a lot of them were my friends.

AW:

Boy, that's a tiny photograph. So that's you—

HJ:

With the arrow. (laughs)

AW:

And Bill Blackwell's bound to be—as the city manager, he was city manager at the time.

HJ:

He might have been there, but I don't know. I know Charlie was there, Charlie Murdoch, because he was chairman.

AW:

Do you know who the woman is there?

HJ:

Every—Betty Anderson.

AW:

Uh-huh. Well this is great—that is wonderful. Let me say for our recording, it's the nineteenth of June, an important day, 2014; here at the Southwest Collection, two in the afternoon, Andy Wilkinson with Dr. Heenan Johnson. And we're going to today talk about some things we didn't

talk about the last time—one of which is this committee—a photograph of the assembly of that committee, that Dr. Johnson just brought in. And now what was it called—I know the object was to talk about the recovery.

HJ:

The Tornado Recovery Committee.

AW:

Tornado Recovery Committee.

HJ:

And it was appointed by the mayor at the time, Dr. Jim Granberry. And he involved quite a few people in the activity for the recovery. But these were twelve that he appointed for the specific duty of recovery—and we were assigned different sections of town with a storm that done the most damage.

AW:

Physical sections?

HJ:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah, and so your section was what?

HJ:

Well my section was complete Avenue 4—4th Street.

AW:

Wow.

HJ:

4th Street, up and down 4th Street.

AW:

Because it really got hit.

HJ:

It got hit pretty hard.

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AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
Because one of the places there was Fields & Company, it was a—

AW:
4th and Q, just about.

HJ:
Yeah 4th and Q, and that's when it was completely demolished—there was nothing standing.

AW:
Yeah. And just maybe back up a little bit—on the evening of May 11th were you in Lubbock?

HJ:
Yes.

AW:
And were you at home, were you at—

HJ:
I was at home.

AW:
So where was your home at the time?

HJ:
Same place it is now. 2802 Walnut Avenue.

AW:
Okay, and that part of town didn't get hit?

HJ:
It didn't get hit. But the only thing that came close to us was these creek medians on 19th Street. We could hear tin from all of the buildings, the warehouse buildings that were up on Avenue A hitting those lights, and the medians there, and they made a terrible noise. And you could hear pieces of tin hitting those medians.

AW:

If I remember correctly, there was also some tornado damage out at Slaton Highway, a little southeast of you, too.

HJ:

Yes, but that was the direction that the storm was supposed to have been going, according to the people who were following it. But that was not the main storm—it was headed toward Idalou, according to the people who were tracking it.

AW:

Right.

HJ:

And people in Idalou got in their cars and they were coming up 4th Street to Lubbock.

AW:

Right into it?

HJ:

Didn't know they were coming right into the storm. And the reason I know that, I had a fellow who was a friend of mine, and he was leading the pack. And he said he looked out his pickup, and he saw a truck flying across 4th Street, a *pickup truck* flying across the street! So he jumped out of his truck *immediately* and started waving his hands, telling people to "Go back the other way down, that's where the storm is up in front of us!" (laughs)

AW:

Yeah! At the time I lived at 46th & Flint, and there were actually—now, they never would admit that there was a tornado out there—but at the intersection at 50th & Elgin, just a ways from us, there was no damage except for all the four business right at the corner.

HJ:

Is that right?

AW:

Yeah, so it looks to me like something round came down there.

HJ:

Well it's amazing how those storms seem to pick out certain things that they completely demolish, and others they would hardly damage.

AW:

I know it.

HJ:

It's amazing how those storms seem to be selective.

AW:

Yeah. What did you do after the storm hit?

HJ:

Well, first thing—I wanted to find out, since they said it hit downtown Lubbock, well, my office was down on 17th & B, so I was trying to get down there to see what damage had been done there, if any. But I couldn't, because a policeman stopped me at Avenue A and told me I couldn't go there because of downed power lines, and a lot of damage and articles in the street—I couldn't get there. So that's what I tried first thing to do. But I went back home because I couldn't get to my office.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. When were you able to get down there, how long was it?

HJ:

The next day.

AW:

So you were able to get down pretty soon.

HJ:

Yeah, during the daylight I could see, and they allowed me to go down and look at it.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. How badly was your office damaged?

HJ:

Wasn't damaged at all. The building next door to me had a drain spout torn off, and it was hanging loose—and that was all that I could find that was damaged in that area.

AW:

Wow, that is fortunate.

HJ:

Yeah. Most of the storm hit the Guadalupe area, and the most damage was over there after it left downtown—4th Street & Avenue Q, in that area. And a part of it went out toward Estacado High School, but it didn't do as much damage out there as it did in Guadalupe. Guadalupe caught it and that golf course out there—yeah.

AW:

Yeah the Lubbock Country Club.

HJ:

Country club area, that's what hit it.

AW:

And the--

HJ:

I had a patient who lost a life in that storm.

AW:

Oh really?

HJ:

The strange thing about it, she and her husband were in the aluminum siding building, placing aluminum siding to buildings. So he had gone to Arizona to get another order set up, and she decided "Well, I'll just stay home and go to bed." And that's where they found her the next morning, after the storm—one of the overhead beams had fallen on her in the bed.

AW:

Wow. Was that in the country club neighborhood?

HJ:

Yeah, in the country club area.

AW:

Yeah, I know it was hit badly. And then, you'll remember that just north of downtown where the civic center is now—all that was residential.

HJ:

Yes.

AW:

And that was really—

HJ:

That was really demolished. Everything in there was really damaged severely. And the only reason that that was taken care of after the storm was because of urban renewal, and Robert Stack got that going, because there wasn't enough money from FEMA and all the other things that were supposed to provide money for the recovery—wasn't enough money. Urban renewal had to come in and help out.

AW:

Yeah. Well, this photograph you said was taken a month after?

HJ:

Huh?

AW:

A month after this photograph?

HJ:

No, that's a week after.

AW:

A week after.

HJ:

We met a week after, in the First National Building.

AW:

So when did you get the call from the mayor to be part of this committee?

HJ:

Well, the first part of the week, we were together at the First National Bank Building for the first time.

AW:

And so this was your very first meeting?

HJ:

Yes.

AW:

Wow, that's really fast action on the part of the city government to get a group together in a week of the—

HJ:

Well, Lubbock has had a disaster committee or whatever you want to call it, set up for a long time, and they had just recently got this in place. And so, everything was just about ready to go when the storm hit. So they had it already in place set up. And as a matter of fact, the central location for this activity was down in the basement of the city hall.

AW:

Where they used to have the Emergency Communications Center.

HJ:

Yeah. Yeah, it was emergency set up, it was set up already. So what they did was just put it into action.

AW:

So were you already a part of the group that they were going to call into action?

HJ:

No.

AW:

So they actually picked people?

HJ:

They picked different people in the community.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

HJ:

It was a community effort. Most of the people who were picked had some kind of knowledge of what property value and all that kind of thing would be. So we had real estate people on there, we had lawyers—and people like that, to sort of give the input that they needed.

AW:

And what, when they got you together, what did they say your job was in that committee?

HJ:

Well, we were mostly assigned to different areas where the town had been damaged most. And what we were to do, is to go in, ask the business people who had storm damage, what kind of help they could possibly need, or what—

AW:

Right.

HJ:

And that's what we went in, we had to interview everybody up and down the street.

AW:

That's a big job.

HJ:

Well, that was just part of it.

AW:

I know.

HJ:

We had to do that.

AW:

Yeah.

HJ:

Then the other thing, we had to bring forth some kind of a recovery strategy to be used to maintain, bring back the town to its normal normalcy.

AW:

Yeah. So what did people tell you when you went out to interview them?

HJ:

Well, I can remember one who had a furniture store over there. And that was Mr. Robert Heath.

AW:

Yeah, I remember.

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HJ:

And he said "Come on in here and see what kind of damage has been done, and look at this, and look at that, and look at the other." And that's what I did, I went and looked at it.

AW:

Yeah.

HJ:

And of course, I had a little pencil and paper and I wrote down what I saw, and I reported it to the committee when we got back to our meeting, and that's how we did it.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. How did the other committee people interact, I mean you just got together and reported what you had seen?

HJ:

That, and we made suggestions—

AW:

Yeah.

HJ:

As to what could be done.

AW:

And what were those suggestions?

HJ:

Well, one of the things was, these things were already sort of brought up by people in large committees when they decided "What we can do to improve Lubbock?" Well, these things had already been talked about, and people had made their suggestions and said "This is what we need. Civic center—we need a central library." At the same time they had this canyon development deal.

AW:

Yeah, Canyon Lakes.

HJ:

And Canyon Lake development—all of these things had already been discussed.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
And people had already agreed on them, so this was an excellent opportunity for a civic center and a library, because all of the areas where they could be placed had been demolished by the storm.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
See? So in order to go in and clean up the storm—and we'd put the civic center here, put the library here, we'd finish the Canyon Lake projects. Those things were already decided, and we tried to get those things done, get them done, do this activity.

AW:
Was there any disagreement in the committee about course of action?

HJ:
Of course, some of them didn't want the library downtown.

AW:
They wanted it—

HJ:
They wanted it—

AW:
Same argument that we're having now.

HJ:
You know why they wanted it where the Godeke branch was over on Quaker.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
That's where they wanted it.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
They wanted a central library over there.

AW:
Yeah, which that wasn't central in 1970.

HJ:
But they wanted it where the Godeke branch is.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
And we told them no, we don't want it there.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
And most of them, by and large, on the committee, agreed to put it downtown where the library's located now, the central library.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
But we did not want it put out there where the Godeke branch was, we told them about it you see? So what happened—they put the Godeke branch out there, and see what happened to Godeke branch.

AW:
Right, exactly, yeah, yeah.

HJ:
A lot of them didn't want to put a basement in the library at the time. Oh, we discussed all of these things.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
But, I guess I was sort or one-sided when it came to that, because I was the chairman of the library board.

AW:
Well in 1970, Godeke wasn't central at all.

HJ:
No it wasn't.

AW:
It was on the edge of town.

HJ:
That's where they wanted to put the central there.

AW:
Yeah, yeah that's interesting.

HJ:
That's where they wanted to put the central.

AW:
And we're still dealing with that—where to put a library, aren't we? I mean, you know, it's been moved from Godeke now to the Barnes & Noble old building, and now they're looking at buying a building over on Frankfurt.

HJ:
Frankfurt, yeah. There's some kind of western store there, Luskey's Western Wear. Yeah. But you see how if they'd have put the central library, you see what it would have been going through?

AW:
Having to replace the central library, yeah.

HJ:

Well, I don't know, most of the people who were on that committee were people who were really interested in the growth of Lubbock, and the growth and benefit of everybody. Another person who was really interested and helped and established a lot of things in that area was Dirk West. Dirk West, he was a real go-getter when it came to getting things done, and so he got, well, a lot of the library and the civic center activity was brought on by him, he really pushed it a great deal.

AW:

Really?

HJ:

And he later became mayor.

AW:

At one time his office was down there between the police department and the newspaper—was it there at that time?

HJ:

Well, I don't know, I don't recall exactly.

AW:

I don't remember—

HJ:

He had an office at several places, I don't know exactly.

AW:

Yeah I just wondered. Who else was a leader in that committee?

HJ:

Like I said, Robert Stack, he was with the urban renewal. And he got a whole lot of things done, because the federal government wouldn't allow land to be sold unless it was properly appraised. And would only let it be sold under the appraised value. And that sort of hindered a lot of people wanting to purchase a place, purchase it. And that killed a whole lot of time, but Robert Stack got that worked out through urban renewal, see? And that's another thing that benefited us.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. What about, was there any discussion about—well, if the Canyon Lakes had already been thought of, and that was already planned, then that was not having to create something new, that was putting a plan into action, as you said. And I'm just thinking about the discussion about

having the lakes, and that big park, as opposed to southwest Lubbock, having it in the north part of town.

HJ:

Well, like I said, a lot of that was pre-planned. And many of the people on the committee were in agreement with that. So that's why it was brought in and completed. Because many of them were in agreement that this needs to be done. And that's why it was done. But the one that we had a great deal of effort to try to get established, besides the library, was the civic center. The civic center was also agreed to by a lot of people, but then there were people who were against it, because the civic center in Amarillo was failing. And that's the one that they were blaming, they were saying "We don't need something to fail like they got in Amarillo." So we went to Abilene, got up four o'clock in the morning, caught a bus to go to Abilene, can you imagine? That's what we all had to do—got on that bus and went down to Abilene to look at the one they had done there, and it was a jewel, it was a beautiful thing. And it was functioning real well. So we came back with the idea that yeah, we need one. (laughs)

AW:

And there was no discussion in opposition to putting it where it is now, in the area that had been—

HJ:

No, no, because we felt it was ideal. Not only was it ideal, but it'd be attractive to bring people to a downtown area of the city, the core of the city, and that's what's needed right now—we need to have something to bring the people downtown again.

AW:

Do you think the new proposed entertainment center, the performance hall, will be--

HJ:

Yes, it will be a similar activity. It would bring people to the downtown area. The other thing that I look at now—I'm not on a committee—but I look at this: we've got a beautiful hotel down there, completely restored, completely restored; what would be against having Tech students occupy it, at a reasonable rate? You could bring them in at a reasonable rate, and have them occupy that building. If they come downtown, and occupy that building, the Tech students are going to be people who will need to have downtown services.

AW:

Restaurants—

HJ:

You see what I'm saying? Restaurants and fast food joints, and all of this stuff. All of that could be provided right downtown, which would bring a great deal of people down there. Now, if you filled up all the rooms in that hotel down there with Tech students, you see, you not only would develop that, but you could also have this little train that they're talking about running back and forth. Now for the record, we're talking about the old Pioneer Hotel.

AW:

Yes indeed, the old Pioneer Hotel.

HJ:

Yeah—hello.

AW:

Yeah.

HJ:

Don't you see if it could be occupied by Tech students it would be fine?

AW:

Yeah, no, I think it'd be great.

HJ:

Not only that, we could let them have the rooms at a cut rate.

AW:

That would be the tough part, getting somebody to let them have—

HJ:

Well, even so, some of them pay twelve, eleven, twelve, and fourteen hundred dollars for a room. If they let the rooms go at eight hundred dollars, or seven hundred dollars—you see what I'm saying? You could probably get a whole lot of kids who come in and go down there and stay. And they could go right down Broadway to Tech. They don't have to go across town.

AW:

Right, yeah. No, I think it'd be a great idea.

HJ:

Well, like I said, I'm not on the committee okay?

AW:

Well we might need to get you back on it.

HJ:

I used to be on the recovery committee.

AW:

Yeah. How long did the recovery committee meet?

HJ:

Well, we had a reunion after ten years—we didn't meet after everything was rolling and in place. We didn't meet regularly after that, but we did have a ten year reunion. And we had the ten-year reunion in one of the rooms in the civic center.

AW:

When things were getting started, did you meet weekly, monthly—was it very frequent?

HJ:

No, we really shut down after we got everything in place, and everything was operating. They were building the civic center, they were building the library, they were doing all these things with Canyon Lake, and all that stuff was going on, and we didn't have to meet anymore.

AW:

Yeah, well up to that point, did you meet often to get those things underway?

HJ:

Well we met occasionally to see if things were going all right, that's all we did. Like meeting every week, or every other week? No, we didn't do that. No.

AW:

At that reunion, were people pretty satisfied with—

HJ:

Oh Lord, we were all walking around there with our chest stuck out—how great this is, and what a wonderful thing we did to help recover this beautiful city that we love. And everybody was walking around, mixing and mingling, and enjoying each other's company, and I think that was a wonderful thing, ten years after. And so that was the end of that tale.

AW:

One other question—who were some of the other committee members that stand out in your memory, that you worked with?

HJ:

Well—

AW:

Besides Robert Stack, and—

HJ:

Bob Nash.

AW:

Bob, and Dirk West, I guess he was on the committee.

HJ:

Dirk West wasn't on the committee.

AW:

Oh he wasn't?

HJ:

No. Charlie Verner, First National Bank president; Betty Anderson, Ray Chapman, Robert Lugo, Frank Carrillo, J.R. Blumrosen, Arnold Maeker, Bob Messerschmidt, Jack Steele—like I said, I don't know what Robert Taylor looked like, I can't remember him.

AW:

Yeah, you got a great memory though.

HJ:

Huh?

AW:

You got a great memory, that's—

HJ:

Well, like I said, some of these people were my friends. Bob Nash, Ray Chapman, see? And I knew them well—Robert Lugo, Frank Carrillo—[inaudible] guys.

AW:

What else is worth talking about that committee, before maybe things I haven't asked you about—seems like you really got some important work done in a fairly short order.

HJ:

Well, I can say this about the group—most of us had been involved in activities in the community. Community activity was part of our game—we were involved in most of the community activities—and most everybody on that committee were. And I think the mayor, Jim Granberry, he made a selection based on that, about committee people—people who were able to serve on a committee and do the job.

AW:

Right, right.

HJ:

You see, because they had been involved in the community activity, and that was the important thing, I think. You see, Jesus chose twelve, and so did Jim Granberry—and he didn't have a betrayer in the group. I'd like to see Jim Granberry; he's out in Lindale, Texas on his ranch.

AW:

Yeah, I haven't seen him in a long, long time.

HJ:

No, I haven't either. But I'd like to see him. It would be a wonderful thing if we could get together one more time.

AW:

You probably ought to go down there and talk to him.

HJ:

He lives in Lindale.

AW:

Let me ask one other question about this: it strikes me that your Tornado Recovery Committee met and got more done with less infighting than what city government seems to do in today's world—and I don't just mean Lubbock's, I mean just—it seems like there was a greater sense of community, maybe community service, or spirit in 1970.

HJ:

Well let me tell you—I'm a veteran of World War II, and most World War II veterans, when

they came back home, they came back home to do things that would be beneficial to the country. And most of us, we had that desire, you see? And the people on our committee, most of them were World War II veterans. And we came back with the desire to do something for our country, and do something for the community we lived in. And most of them have done that. You just name a few of them, and I'll tell you, yeah, they were WWII—Bob Dole one of them, you know Bob Dole, Senator Dole? He almost got killed in Italy, I was over there with him, same time. So we came back home with a desire to do something for the country. And that's why we were so energetic in doing things, and wanting to do things. And none of us were there for the political reasons, or personal reasons—none of us were there for that reason, and that's why we got it done, because we had a desire to get it done. And I don't think that's available in today's world, so many people are not desirous of doing something for the benefit of all—they desire doing something for the benefit of me—"Well, what am I going to get out of it?" If we had gone with that attitude, nothing would have been done. Nothing would have been done—we didn't go with that attitude, we went with the attitude "Let's do this, let's recover this town, let's get it back into shape." And that's what we were about.

AW:

You had a shared experience from the war that is not present today.

HJ:

Well, I guess, and not only that—most of us went through Depression, most of us went through a Depression. We knew what it was like—hardship. The other thing that I can think of right now is, we had a desire to get things done, and we wanted to be for the benefit of everybody, see? And that's why. I also think that it's something that ought to be remembered. You said we got it done—well, there are people who lost their lives in that storm, twenty-six of them—twenty-six people lost their lives in that storm, and I think they should be remembered. Twenty-six people—a whole lot of veterans from World War II have lost their lives, and they've been remembered on Memorial Day. They have a memorial in Washington, D.C. because we want to remember what these guys did. But I think we ought to have a memorial to our committee—we did the best we could for the city of Lubbock after that tornado—we ought to have something. If it's nothing but a small post down in city hall, or down—especially the civic center--

AW:

Yeah, exactly.

HJ:

Because that's the one thing that we were most proud of—put us something down there to let Lubbock know that these are the guys that got it done, they got it done. And they didn't take two years to do it, it was a very short time.

AW:

Yeah, no, it was an incredibly short time.

HJ:

But we got it done.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

HJ:

And I think these guys ought to be remembered—I ain't too particular about *my* name being there, I got my name two or three places in this city already. I don't particularly care if my name's on there, but I think these other guys ought to be remembered—people like Charlie Verner, Bob Nash, Ray Chapman.

AW:

Yeah, well just the fact like just said, you came together in a short period of time, made largely harmonious decisions that have really benefited the city now, many years after. I mean we're still a much better place, don't you think, because of the work?

HJ:

Of course, because Lubbock came together as one at that time. It was unity all through the city—people helped each other. People in need, people didn't have anything, storm took it all away. You see, that spirit is needed daily, and it's a spirit that people ought to be reminded of—"You need to do this." Don't take two or three months delaying and hemming and hawing. You see, for the benefit of the city, the central library was put downtown—if it had been put out there where the Godeke branch was where some people wanted to have it—look at the trouble we'd be having with it now. They're trying to find a place for the Godeke branch. What would have happened if we decided to put the central out there? We didn't decide to put the central out there, okay? (laughs) I don't know.

AW:

That's pretty remarkable the amount of work that was done after that tornado, and how fast the city came back together—because of that spirit that you're talking about.

HJ:

Well, that's what's needed today, it's needed now—it's needed here, it's needed in D.C., it's needed everywhere where we got dormant—it's needed. And listen, we're dying out, folks; we old WWII guys are going, we're not going to be here much longer, we're dying every day.

AW:

No, you're right.

HJ:

We're dying every day—every morning I pick up an obituary column, and I look in there, and I shed tears, because I said "That's one of my buddies."

AW:

You said your service was in Italy?

HJ:

Philippines and Italy.

AW:

Oh that's a lot, a lot of—

HJ:

Well, I went to Italy as a combat fighter, combat soldier—infantryman, 92nd Division, under 65th Infantry Regiment, Company C. I went there after the war was over—I didn't have seventy points to come home, needed seventy points—I didn't have seventy. So they took us and gathered up about five thousand of us up together, sent us to the Philippines. You know what our job was in the Philippines?

AW:

No.

HJ:

To guard the depot over there that they had supplies ready to go to Japan, to guard it against Filipinos who were stealing it. They would come through there in trucks and load stuff off of that supply depot, and drive off. Now, we stopped all that nonsense.

AW:

I bet.

HJ:

Oh yeah. Because we had combat experience, see, and you didn't steal stuff from us—unless you got a few bullets behind you.

AW:

How long were you in the Philippines?

HJ:

Well, until the war was over, over there. I think it was about sixteen or eighteen months, it was eighteen months over in Italy. They dropped the atom bomb, that's the only reason I came home, I think we was headed to Japan. As a matter of fact, they told us we were supposed to be going in there in November.

AW:

For an invasion?

HJ:

And the war was over in August.

AW:

You were going there to invade Japan?

HJ:

Invalidate. Yeah, they were going to stage in Okinawa, and invade Japan in November.

AW:

That would have been tough.

HJ:

Yeah—after Okinawa they sort of changed their minds a little bit, but they still had the invasion plan set up for November. They dropped the bomb and that stopped it. Manila Bay—you could walk from one ship to the other, and they were that close together in the bay. You could get off the ship—

AW:

Yeah, just go across. So did you stay in the military very long after the war was over?

HJ:

No, no, no. Strange thing—I signed up for three more years, but another war broke out in Korea in 1950—I missed it by one year.

AW:

And they didn't come back and get you?

HJ:

They couldn't come back and get me, because I was out—the three years was up.

AW:

Yeah. Where were you stationed after the war ended and before you got out?

HJ:

Camp Stoneman at San Francisco, California, and Fort Sam in San Antonio.

AW:

Really?

HJ:

Yeah, I was discharged at Fort Sam. I came through Lubbock after I was discharged.

AW:

Really?

HJ:

And I was on the train going to San Antonio and the first town they hit was Texaco, Texas, and the next town they called "Lubbock." And I never heard of Lubbock—I'm from East Texas. So I went to the window and looked out the window, and they had the street lights on, and it was black dark, and there was a dust storm. And my statement at that time was, "How in the hell can anybody live in a place like this?" You know how long I've been in Lubbock? Fifty-three years.

AW:

Yeah I think you and I talked about that when you were here—

HJ:

Yeah.

AW:

The last time, about the dust storm, that's great.

HJ:

And I'm here fifty-three years after I made that statement. (laughs) Well anyway, it must be a good town for some reason. I raised two wonderful kids here.

AW:

Yeah, and you've been through at least one or two dust storms since you been here.

HJ:

Oh, not as bad as that one.

AW:
Really?

HJ:
Not as bad as that one. That one was dark, it was *black dark*. That was the old kind, it was black dark. They had the streetlights on. (laughs) Yeah.

AW:
Pretty amazing, that's great. So the plaque that you and Monty have been talking about is a plaque to commemorate this committee?

HJ:
Yes, I want to be remembered, I want them to be remembered for what they did. They didn't have to do it.

AW:
No, and not—

HJ:
It was all volunteer.

AW:
Yeah.

HJ:
We didn't get paid.

AW:
Right, but even more important than that is, you got something done.

HJ:
We got it done, because we were people who believed in getting it done. That was instilled in us, most of us—old WWII veterans.

AW:
Was there a chairperson for the committee?

HJ:
Who?

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AW:

A chairperson, a chairman?

HJ:

Of the committee?

AW:

Mm-hm.

HJ:

Charlie Verner.

AW:

Charlie.

HJ:

President of First National Bank. Yeah.

AW:

Yeah, I know there's something written on the back there, is that a list of the people?

HJ:

This picture was sent to me by Robert Nash, Bob Nash, and that's what's written up at the top. That was his writing. Robert Nash sent that picture to me, that's why he made that little arrow there.

AW:

Yeah, well it's great, it's amazing, all that plywood and the damage to the ceiling.

HJ:

Oh well, all the windows were blown out—all the windows were blown out, upstairs and downstairs too. It was highly damaged, and so was the Great Plains building downtown. It was twisted.

AW:

Twisted.

HJ:

It's never been straightened up, it's still twisted.

AW:

Yeah, you can still see the twist. Well, this is great, well thank you very much, I'm really glad that we got this additional information about the committee. And as I told you before we started the tape, having been here and been part of the city government when that tornado hit—I never been through anything like that, and I thought all cities got together and worked that hard, and got things going, but it's not the case. I think this city has got something really important to be proud of in the way that we approached the recovery. And the city coming together as a group is pretty impressive, very impressive. So thank you.

HJ:

Thank you.

End of interview



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