

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Carl J. Johnson-Experiences of WWI

By Carl J. Johnson

December 15, 1973

## Box 2 Folder 4

Oral Interview conducted by Elizabeth Dickerson

Transcribed by Heather Mattson      December 2004

Brigham Young University- Idaho

I am Carl J. Johnson, and I am being interviewed by Elizabeth Dickerson regarding my experiences or some of them that I remember during the time of the First World War. The date of the interview is December 15, 1973. We are talking about the period of time around 1914 to 1918.

ED: Mr. Johnson, where were you born?

CJ: I was born in what was then called Lyman, Idaho, Bannock County.

ED: How long did you live there?

CJ: I lived there about 44 years.

ED: How old are you? What was your birth date?

CJ: My birthday is the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 1890.

ED: Okay. Where were your parents born?

CJ: My parents were Swedish immigrants. They were born in Sweden.

ED: That's interesting. What was your occupation during World War I?

CJ: My occupation was farming. I was working at home with my father on the farm.

ED: Was that your only occupation that you had?

CJ: That was my only occupation.

ED: When they men were called to war, how were they drafted? I mean were letters sent to them?

CJ: Yes, we received letters from the draft board, then we went in for interviews with the board.

ED: Where did you have your interviews?

CJ: The interviews as I remember them were in the county courthouse in Madison County, then Fremont County, I think.

ED: So did every man between certain ages get a letter?

CJ: Yes, I don't remember the ages, but oh I imagine it was between at least 19 and 35.

ED: So they did refuse some people?

CJ: Yes, yes, there were- what did they call them? Number 4's, whatever they were. They couldn't get in. Then there were others that had disqualifications for general work that they could use in special work.

ED: Were you refused?

CJ: Yes, I was refused on the fact that they county was in need of grain; and because was farming, I was told to go home and raise wheat.

ED: So that's what you did?

CJ: So that's what I did, yes.

ED: You were married at the time?

CJ: Yes, I was married at the time.

ED: Did you have any children then?

CJ: Yes, we had at least one child, I think. Let' see if it were, yes, if it were 1916 we're talking about, we had one child.

ED: Then you moved from Archer to Rexburg?

CJ: Yes, I moved from Archer, we moved from Archer in 1934 to Rexburg. I was elected assessor of Madison County, and so I served three terms in the assessorship in our country.

ED: So you farmed then for some time?

CJ: After that? Not after that.

ED: You just farmed before you came to town?

CJ: Yes, when I came to town, I never went back to the farm. Sorry.

ED: I understand there were food stamps.

CJ: Yes, there was rationing. Gasoline, sugar, flour, cereals. I don't remember much about meat being rationed, but I suppose it was. An oh, some of the other, oh, I think

that's the, the main part of the rationing. And I think we had to get shoes, stamps for shoes too, as I remember.

ED: So you had stamps for about everything. How much, can you remember, how much gasoline was a gallon?

CJ: I don't think I'd dare say that. I remember sugar was \$33 a hundred or 33 cents a lb. Honey went up to \$33 for 5 gallons; and as I remember it, meat was quite expensive, too. Everything, when we went into the war, everything went up.

ED: Well, then since you were living on the farm, you had your vegetables?

CJ: Oh yes, we had our potatoes and vegetables and corn and peas, things of that kind. They weren't rationed.

ED: Did you buy flour at the store?

CJ: Oh yes, we bought some flour, and we ground the what we used of the whole wheat and we ground ourselves.

ED: So mainly you bought your shoes. Did you have to buy clothing?

CJ: Yes, we had to buy some clothing too.

ED: How did the men get to where they were supposed to be when they were drafted? Say to Washington?

CJ: Well, as I remember that you were drafted, and then you went to Boise and if you finally made your grade there, then you were sent to wherever they wanted you to go. A lot of the people here went to Fort Lewis in Washington. Some went East, some of our boys went east, and those who went into the Navy, David went to California.

ED: They went by train?

CJ: Oh, yes, they went by train. Yes, there wasn't anybody that flew then.

ED: Did you ever see them when they went?

CJ: Yes. The county paper would usually advertise usually advertise, as I remember it, when a group was leaving, and then there would be the neighbors and some people would come, there would usually be oh maybe a couple a hundred of people come over. They would go by way of rail.

ED: I was wondering, because on the TVs they have the pictures of the men going off to war in the railroad cars and just jam-packed full of men.

CJ: Oh yes. When they and when the men were ready to leave any particular camp where they were training, of course, they had a whole train loads of them, just packed. That's right. They were, oh, just as full as they could be.

ED: Do you remember when the banks closed in Idaho?

CJ: Yes, I remember there were banks closing. I thought that was a little bit later. That came after, a aftermath of war as I remember it.

ED: It was, I think a little bit afterwards. In class we were talking about when a few banks did close in Idaho and didn't open up until later on. I was just wondering if it was a great, big thing-headline news.

CJ: They got to closing so fast they didn't make very big headline towards the last. It was just another bank that closed.

ED: It's kind of hard to imagine that now.

CJ: Oh yes, with the fluency we have, you can't imagine it. I think without being questions two or three farmers now make more than the county did the.

ED: Oh, is that right?

CJ: Yes. These big, large potato farmers and the cattle ranchers, I think their operations are just as large as they were in the whole county before.

ED: Boy. That would be something. Do you remember the governor at that time? I believe it was Alexander.

CJ: Governor Alexander. Oh I remember that Alexander was the governor all right. I don't think that I could say that definitely.

ED: So he wasn't any, I mean, outstanding in your mind?

CJ: Well, he, he could be a very good governor, and yet it wouldn't have needed to affect me. I was interested in my farming, and as long as things were going well in farming, well in farming, well then, of course, we didn't have any complaints.

ED: Okay. Were the times different, any different in wartime than they were say before the war or after the war? Was there any big effect on you?

CJ: Well, I didn't have any brothers to go into the war, so from the, from a personal standpoint it was the neighbor's children that went or young folks, and it made an emptiness of course, and we try in the countries always to have a farewell for every boy that went and that was usually a public dance and whatever they took in they gave is to get in started off. Oh, there was tension all the time, yes, but we were busy because they,

you couldn't hire people you know. There weren't too many people, so we , we had to do, and we didn't have near the machinery then that they do now. A lot of our crops like hay, they just began to bail about that time and we cut the hay and raked it and wed it and then loaded it, you know, and hauled it and stacked it so it was a much longer process then that it is now. Irrigation, I guess, was the same as far as flood irrigation is concerned only that we have done a lot of scraping since then and so the land is much easier to handle and doesn't take as much water. The, of course, a lot of it is sprinkled now. So there's a difference in that.

ED: When did you stop using food stamps? Not have to use them anymore?

CJ: Oh, I don't think that food stamps stayed on very long after the, after the close of the war then I think within a few months we could get what we wanted. Maybe sugar stayed on rationed for a maybe a year, I don't know, but I don't think that.

ED: Well who, the government issued the food stamps? Right?

CJ: As I remember it yes, and then, of Course, we would have to get them through the state and then they would come into the country and we had to go to a county, oh I don't know what they called them, but it was Arthur Porter that took care of that, a lot of that.

ED: Did you buy them.

CJ: They were issued to you, but they would issue just so many according to how many there were in the family and that would, that would ration your flour and your cereal and your sugar and, well I guess you had to get separate sugar stamps I think, even for that and you had to get stamps for shoes.

ED: During that time, were there a lot of sugar beets grown?

CJ: Yes. The beet business increased some during that time I'm sure. And of course, they tried to get the farmers to raise them. But it was hard to raise them then because the people were gone, and we didn't have any mechanical thinners then, and we didn't have the seen that they have now so it was a much harder job to raise beets then that it is now. They have they call the segregated seed now.

ED: You know when you would sell that you made on your farm, who would buy your wheat? Would you sell it to a company?

CJ: Yes, we would sell our wheat to the flour companies and the grain elevators we would call them, and we personally, we happened to have a strain of wheat that father had, of I wouldn't say that he developed it, but he, he was careful with it so people wanted it and so we sold a lot of our wheat for seed.

ED: So that is mainly how you made your living then?

CJ: Oh, yes. That's where we made all of our living was selling the wheat and the pigs and hay and the milk and cream, and I think that was it.

ED: How big a spread did you have?

CJ: 120 acres.

ED: You had one child then, right?

CJ: Yes, but before it was over with we had two.

ED: Were any of them old enough to go to school or anything?

CJ: Not right then. No. It was after that.

ED: What school would they have gone to?

CJ: They would have gone to the elementary school at Archer. The country students at that time, we weren't in, in the united districts or combined districts as we are now. They bring them into the center. Now, we had a little country high school out there with the first two years of high school, but after the consolidation of the districts then they brought them in and then they used the districts in or the schools in each district the allocate, oh, certain grade for them. I think in Archer now maybe they have 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>- something like that.

ED: I was wondering how far they had to go to school.

CJ: Oh, we only had to go about a mile and a quarter from our place to the school.

ED: Would they had to of walked?

CJ: Yes they walked.

ED: Oh, that's kind of different from what children are today. Was there potato industry?

CJ: The potato industry was, there were, they could raise potatoes, but they didn't raise it like they do now. They raised, oh, if you had three or four acres of maybe up to ten in some instances. There may have been a few farmers had fifteen or twenty acres or maybe a little more but otherwise, no the industry was very small than what it is now. I think now, yes there are lots of farmers that have more in their one farm than they did in the whole country.

ED: There weren't places like Quality Pac?

CJ: Oh no, no there wasn't any of those potato processing plants; no they weren't in existence then.

ED: I just wondered when they started shipping them.

CJ: Well, of course, they, they would be shipped back to Chicago. That's about as far as I, oh they may have shipped some East of there, but it seemed like Chicago and California was our main centers for potatoes.

ED: What did your wife do on the farm?

CJ: Well, the wife on the farm, I think, she had everything to do from what a man does to her own work in the house. Usually, especially if they were raised on a farm, and they knew what farm machinery was, there was lots of the girls that were just as good at machinery as you could hire men. They just knew it. That's all there was to it.

ED: Did she can and cook?

CJ: Oh yes, they canned, I should say. Oh, they think my wife canned and tried to average right around 250 to 350 quarts a year. Fruit and vegetables and things of that sort. They did some meat canning, too.

ED: Did you hunt any?

CJ: No, I don't hunt.

ED: So most of your meat was your beef and pork?

CJ: Yes, mostly pork, I think.

ED: What did you do with it then? What did you use it in? Stews?

CJ: Oh, they would, they would process some of it, and you would put some of it on salt bacon. And there were, there were you could get a liquid smoke for hams and that's about what they did with it.

ED: Who was the mayor at that time?

CJ: Oh, I think Mayor Stole was maybe in at around that time, and Mayor Porter. Some, maybe I can't recall them.

ED: Well, how large was Rexburg?

CJ: Oh my. I guess maybe Rexburg was around 2,500, 2,000, 2,500.

ED: You know how people go to Idaho Falls now to go shopping. Did they ever do that?

CJ: Well, it wasn't as easy to go then-shopping-as it is now, because the roads weren't as good, and there weren't nearly as many cars and oh, you did well to get to Rexburg.

ED: So they didn't go to Idaho Falls?

CJ: Oh, not so many. There were some went, I guess. Maybe some even to Pocatello just to say they had been there, but you could buy anything here that you could buy there.

ED: Well, did you ever ride on the train or anything from Idaho Falls?

CJ: Yes. Here to Idaho Falls? Yes, occasionally that too but the excursions we had that I remember at all was at June conference and occasionally the autumn and the spring conference of the church down in Salt Lake.

ED: You say you went down there? Rode a train down there?

CJ: Yes.

ED: Oh, that would be fun.

CJ: Yes, it was fun.

ED: Do you remember when the trains, were the trains a booming thing then?

CJ: Oh yes. That was the means of transportation then. You bet. They ad, they hauled practically everything out of the valley and they hauled the coal and whatever, the machinery and all back in the called. Oh there was a little trucking, but now they didn't amount to anything as what it was now.

ED: So would you say that trains play important parts still? Or do you think that most of it is trucking know?

CJ: Oh, I think that railroads have their place, yes, you bet I do. Now I don't know of a, of a commodity or of a business that pays more taxes than the railroad and when you take the trucking they say they pay a big, a big fee, well they do. But goodness they their roadbed is laid by the people. So I think the railroad had it's place alright. Maybe we have abused it as we look at it, especially now that we can't get any, we would like to have train service very often in passenger trains, but of course, we can't get it anymore.

ED: Well, then did they have, oh, these luxury trains, you know?

CJ: Oh, they had the best of trains, yes. Of course, on our branch lines, we didn't, because there wasn't any need of it. You leave Idaho Falls, and you can get up to Driggs you know in three or four hours. Well, you didn't need a sleeper to get up there. Oh, then of course, during the summer we had what we called the Yellowstone special. And

they would leave Salt Lake in the evening or at night, and they would be up to West Yellowstone in the morning. They had service on that train.

ED: Did you ever make very many trips to West Yellowstone?

CJ: Oh, not many. We made some.

ED: Just enough. It seems like once you have seen it, you've seen it all.

CJ: Oh, yes. You say that you have seen it all anyway, and you have in a measure if you didn't go through too fast. But it's nice to revive it once and a while.

ED: What was the tourist trade like?

CJ: Oh, the tourist trade was, they would come, they usually had their campers with them, seemed to me like, because the Porter Park down here, they used to camp in that a lot. Then the city would try and furnish the wood, so there would be wood for them, and then they would buy the groceries and things like that, and I guess the business people had to furnish the food. I don't know.

ED: Do you know how many people averaged up at Yellowstone?

CJ: Oh, I wouldn't dare guess that. It was 100's of 1,000's, I guess, but it wasn't in the million.

ED: Have you seen Old Faithful recently? In the past few years?

CJ: It has been a couple of years anyway, maybe three.

ED: Well, from the time you first saw it to the time bow; do you think the geyser has decreased in height?

CJ: Oh that would be only a guess if I did say anything about it. I don't know, it's beautiful anytime to me.

ED: Yes, it is to me, too. What about, they didn't have Teton Pass and all that stuff?

CJ: Oh yes, we had Teton Pass, but it wasn't as good as it is now. IT was much more winding and narrower and steeper.

ED: I don't know if I would care to go in it then.

CJ: Lots of people didn't care to go on it, but they were on it; and they had to get over the hills, so they had to go.

ED: Was Jackson Hole a tourist place?

CJ: Yes. It has been an attraction all my life, I think.

ED: I thought maybe it just had since maybe the forties or so.

CJ: Well, there has been Jackson Hole in all my life that I can remember.

ED: That's interesting. Let's see if I have anything else. Can you think of anything you would like to talk about?

CJ: Oh, I think your questions have pretty well covered it.

ED: You had some friends that went overseas. Right?

CJ: Yes, oh yes, I had friends that went overseas.

ED: How long did they stay over there?

CJ: Well, I think that varied a lot. Some, when they first went in, they, they shipped them out real fast, because they needed them over there. They needed them all the time, but it was impressive to say there were so many thousands, you know, and while it may have had a deterrent in some on the German people, in other ways I think it encouraged them to think that the whole world had to be against them. And of course, they were operating in a littler central place while the world was coming from a long ways away. And the Germans developed the, I think it was them the developed the submarine or at least they seemed to have a lot of them, and it was dangerous to cross in these convoys. They sure tried to watch them.

ED: Do you remember, I'm not sure what the date is one this, when the, the big battleship was named after Idaho was built? It was the last one of the certain kind of engines built and then they went to the turban engines.

CJ: Oh I, I, if that was built during the second World war that would be, oh wait a minute we are talking about the First World War

ED: I don't remember what the date was on it.

CJ: I don't remember the date on it either. You may have to look that up.

ED: But I understand it was some big ship.

CJ: Yes. I haven't been on it, but I, I know that they had it as a, oh it was exhibited lots of placed. I don't remember what they did with it, but, I don't know.

ED: Our teacher was telling us that it kind of patrolled the waters and after it got back from the war, they took it apart and used its metal and kind of junked it.

CJ: I don't remember that.

ED: Do you think that the men, well how many of your friends came back?

CJ: Oh, I think there was at least 75%

ED: So quite a few then. So were they called during the first part of the first World War or the middle, or last?

CJ: Oh they would be called all the way along. Some of them had been in training for months, but they never got to see service. The war ended before they got to the line, see. They were just gradually moving up and they would move them into sections and then go up.

ED: Well, I can't think of anything to add, unless you can.

CJ: Well, thanks a lot then, folks.