Citation for this collection:

MSS 179  Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu
INTERVIEW OF

ALFRED F. JOHNSON, JR.

November 25, 1974

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

GOERGE K. VAPA, NARRATOR
Vapaa: Today is the ah, 25th of November and we're at Magnolia, Delaware. And ah, with an unusual program I think to present to you. Ah, first of all, I would like to have our guest here introduce himself.

Johnson: My name is Alfred F. Johnson, Jr.

Vapaa: Yes, and your mailing address?

Johnson: Is R.D. 1, Box 13, Magnolia, Delaware.

Vapaa: And your zip code for Magnolia, Delaware?

Johnson: 19962.

Vapaa: Now you have 2 telephones here--a business phone and a ah, ah, home phone. Would you give us the 2 numbers?

Johnson: Right. The home number is 335-5141.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: Business line is 335-5454 and 5455. That's a trunk system and also a watts line.

Vapaa: Yes. In other words you get a jumper if you dial 5454 and you'd have to be busy to justify 4555--right?

Johnson: That's correct. And the watts line is just toll free within the State of Delaware--that's an 800 number.

Vapaa: Um-hum. I see. So ah, you don't have to use ah, 302 in other words to get you?

Johnson: In the State of Delaware you don't have to dial 1.

Vapaa: No.

Johnson: You can dial on the 800 number.
Vapaa: On the 800 number.
Johnson: Um-hum.
Vapaa: Which is good I think for your farmers I suppose.
Johnson: That's the ones in the long distance calling area. They can call me toll free at any time.
Vapaa: All right now, Al, the reason I've asked you to ah, ah, do this oral history for the University of Delaware ah, is simply to ah, find out what farmers are doing here in Delaware now and what they did in Long Island where I understand you came from. You were born where?
Johnson: In ah, ah, Commack, Long Island, New York.
Vapaa: And ah, when was this? What's your birthday?
Johnson: Oc--November 16th, 1933.
Vapaa: So you've just had a birthday?
Johnson: Just about a week ago.
Vapaa: Yes, right. And you would be now ah, how old?
Johnson: 41.
Vapaa: Forty-one years of age.
Johnson: Yes. Um-hum.
Vapaa: Now ah, how long ah, ah, did you live--did you live on a farm in Long Island? I mean where you born on a farm in Long Island?
Johnson: Yes. I was born and raised on a potato farm in Commack.
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: We lived there until ah, 1953 when we moved to Delaware. But my parents still do live up there.
Vapaa: Yes. Now ah, who are your parents, Al?
Johnson: Well, my father is Alfred F. Johnson, Sr. My mother is Violer--Viola Grenstead (sp?) Johnson.

Vapaa: I see. Was Grenstead her maiden name?

Johnson: Grenstead was her maiden name.

Vapaa: G-r-i-n-s-t-e-a-d?

Johnson: No. G-r-e-n-s-t-e-a-d.

Vapaa: G-r-e-n-s-t-e-a-d. Now ah, they were both born on Long Island?

Johnson: Yes. Well, my mother was born in New York City.

Vapaa: I see.

Johnson: My father was born in Dix Hills, Long Island.

Vapaa: Dix--?

Johnson: Dix Hills which is only about ah, 4 miles from Commack, Long Island.

Vapaa: I see. How about your grandparents? Do you know anything at all about them?

Johnson: Well, my father's parents came over from Sweden.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: I don't recall the years. But ah, they moved into East Northport, Long Island as potato farmer--or Dix Hills originally and then to East Northport as potato farmers back in the late 1800's.

Vapaa: I see.

Johnson: And my father was born in 1898.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: And has 5 other brothers and 2 sisters I believe. I have to think about this for a second--2 sisters.

Vapaa: Any of them--are they all living?
Johnson: No. I had 1 uncle died. Ah, in fact, he died I think--we was dis-
cussing this the other day--it's 14 years ago. And his wife just
died about 2 weeks ago.
Vapaa: Um-hum. Now, do you have any brothers or sisters?
Johnson: Yes. I've got ah, 5 sisters and 2 brothers alive. I've 1 brother
died when he was 19.
Vapaa: Ah, what was the reason? Can you tell us?
Johnson: Yeah. He died from ah, nephritis (sp?)--acute nephritis--infection
of the kidneys.
Vapaa: Um-hum. Now, Al, you've been ah, living off potato farming you
might say all your life.
Johnson: Um-hum.
Vapaa: And you grow a few potatoes here I believe still don't you?
Vapaa: Your brother-in-law does.
Johnson: Right. I ah, gave up potato farming in 1957 when I started in the
spraying business.
Vapaa: Oh, now wait a minute. You've been in the spraying business longer
than 1957.
Johnson: Well, in the airplane spraying business.
Vapaa: Oh.
Johnson: Since '57.
Vapaa: Oh, I see.
Johnson: Actually It's the same --
Vapaa: 'Cause I remember doing a lot of draft surveys on you.
Johnson: Right. That's—that was ah, back ah, farm deferment, yeah, that time.

Vapaa: That was during the Korean crisis wasn't it?

Johnson: Right. I got out of high school right during the Korean crisis and moved right to Delaware where we had bought these farms in 1952. And we moved down here in January of 1953. And January was my first farming year in Delaware.

Vapaa: Now your father did live down here for a good while didn't he?

Johnson: When we first came down he spent ah, all the summer here and a portion of the winter. And as time went on he gradually got out of it and more or less retired.

Vapaa: I see. So now he's not really—ah, farming?

Johnson: No. He's 76 and he's retired. He's having a little trouble getting around now because he's ah—legs getting a little bit ah, paralyzed.

Vapaa: I see. Well ah, but your father always was a farmer?

Johnson: All his life. (unintelligible) ...a farmer. He did go into the building business at one time there somewhere in the ah, I believe it was the ah, late 20's. He was a contractor for a few years and he built several houses in a developed area in Long Island.

Vapaa: I see. And I presume that most of that farm land now is in houses. Is it?

Johnson: Well, the farm that we had in Long Island is all in houses. It's completely developed now.

Vapaa: I see. And it's still called Commack?

Johnson: Still called Commack.

Vapaa: C-o-m-m-a-c-k?
Johnson: That's right.

Vapaa: Right. Now ah, where exactly is that in Long Island, Al?

Johnson: Approximately 40 miles east of New York City in Huntington Township.

Vapaa: Huntington Township. Now what county would that be?

Johnson: That'd be Suffolk County.

Vapaa: Suffolk County.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And if I remember Lin___ Wells was your county agent ah,--

Johnson: That's back when I was--yeah, paying my draft on Long Island. Right.

Vapaa: Right. And your county agent up there--they handled the draft situation a little bit differently I know than they did down here in Delaware.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: The county agent was a little more involved. And I had to do this work for Lin____ Wells beca--you were--I happened to know him.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And he used to work in Delaware. I don't know whether you ever knew that or not.

Johnson: No, I didn't.

Vapaa: He worked with the Soil Conservation Service and started out just like Fred Mott did.

Johnson: I see.

Vapaa: With the Soil Conservation Service. Of course, Fred Mott came from in--upper New York State too, but ah, that's upper New York.

Johnson: Um-hum.
Vapaa: Ah, you're actually southern New York.

Johnson: R--right. Lower south eastern corner.

Vapaa: Yes. And actually Long Island, I mean ah, is an island.

Johnson: That's right. It's a true island. It's separated by the East River ah, on the west side and of course, on the north by Long Island Sound.

Vapaa: And everybody living over there wants you to know it's on an island.

Johnson: Yeah, that's right. Ah, speaking of ah, Mr. Wells, I'm ah, the reason for this--course they were involved in the agriculture and the agriculture was getting very limited at that time in Long Island. And all we had to have was verification that I was in agriculture in Delaware basically. Ah, the present county agent I believe is Dan Fricke--Fricke. Isn't it?

Vapaa: Yes. F-r-i-c-k-e.

Johnson: The funny thing about Dan Fricke is him and I grew up together in East Northport at--well, I think he moved away when I was about 5 or 6 years old. But him and I used to ge--get in a lot of trouble. (laughter) And now he's a county agent. You know I wondered what happened to him for years. And all of a sudden I heard he'd come in as a county agent.

Vapaa: Well, I didn't see Dan in Tucson ah, a month ago. But I did see Lin Wells. He's retired you know now.

Johnson: I see.

Vapaa: Finally retired. And ah, I guess he's 65 or--must be. But he's in very good health. And he and his wife ah, flew out like we did--

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: ...to Tucson for National County Agents' Meeting. And I see him
every year at this National County Meeting which is held somewhere around in the United States.

Johnson: I see.

Vapaa: Now ah, Al, I'd like you to tell us a little bit about the differences about farming up in Long Island as you've experienced it and what you see down here now.

Johnson: Well, farming in Long Island when I was up there--Of course, there isn't but very little up there today. In that area in particular. Now, out east there still is quite a bit. But in the Commack area where we were born and raised and where we did a lot of farming ah, it was basically all potatoes--very little other crops. There was some sweet corn mainly for fresh market--

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: ...roadside stands and the ah, markets--markets in New York. Ah, a little bit of grain. This was mainly because the golden nematode had come through and supposedly ah, ah, ruined the potato crops. And we weren't allowed to raise potatoes any longer. And that's the reason why we sold our farms and moved down here.

Vapaa: Well, you could raise potatoes couldn't you, but you--couldn't sell 'em.

Johnson: Yeah, but couldn't sell them. You could raise them. There was no problem, but you couldn't sell them on account of the spreading of the golden nematode.

Vapaa: Nematode.

Johnson: Which is to me ah, has been a little bit more of a farce than what we ah, we just couldn't fight it. It was too big a thing.
Vapaa: Well, you were able to sell those nematode potatoes to New York City weren't you?

Johnson: No. You--

Vapaa: You weren't?

Johnson: You couldn't raise them or sell them anywhere.

Vapaa: Oh. I thought you could.

Johnson: Un-hum.

Vapaa: Well, anyway--

Johnson: Like you couldn't raise potatoes on the ground. You would have been penalized. They ah, we could raise grain or something else, but couldn't raise potatoes.

Vapaa: And of course, people always worried about when we were going to get golden nematode here in Delaware. And they thought they found some one time--

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: ... and ah, it turned out that ah, we seemed to be nematode free.

Johnson: Well, it turned out the similar deal that happened in Long Island but it-- when it happened down here I think the farmers fought it. And that there really was no golden nematode the same as on Long Island.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: It was part of a move to force farmers to sell out-- sell their land. But ah, it appeared this way in New York anyway. And nobody ever proved any different/

Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: And you couldn't fight it because it would only hit one farmer at a time. And back then you know farmers were hard to organize.

Vapaa: Yes. How well I know that.

Johnson: They still are as far as that goes. But I think they're getting more organized now because of the situation of the world mainly.

Vapaa: And particularly here in Delaware as we have fewer potato farmers today.

Johnson: Right. Well, we ha--ah, Delaware re--the potato farmer is just a small portion of Delaware farming as opposed to Long Island.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: Long Island ah, potato farming was just about all of it. And of course, here you've got many variety crops as you realize. You've got corn, soybeans which are your big crops. Which you didn't see any field corn or soybeans at all in Delaware--ah, in Long Island rather. And of course, you've got a lot of cannery crops here which you didn't have any of those in Long Island either. But ah--

Vapaa: You couldn't afford to use that expensive land for those other crops which are less profitable, right? Is that--

Johnson: Well, that's about the ah, that was the basic idea at the time. Because you couldn't afford ah, to ah, farm that land in field corn or soybeans or grain unless it was a fill in. Of course, when we were putting in grain, ah, this was right after nematodes had struck and we were being paid for the land. I think the first year they paid us $150 an acre not to farm potatoes. And then it came down each year until finally it got to the point where you just had to sell your land.
Vapaa: I see. Well now, Al, ah, getting back to ah, the growing of potatoes here ah, in Delaware and how you got into the spray business.

Johnson: Well, I got into the spray business really I always was interested in flying. I was in--in fact I was flying when I came to Delaware.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: And I was always interested in becoming an ag pilot--an ag operator. Ah, I guess I kinda--everything more or less falls in line when you prepare yourself for it. And it really started off back in 1956 when I hired a fellow out of Florida to dust my potatoes. This was back when crop dusting was still done.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Which today is completely different. There's very little dusting done. And I made a very good acquaintance with this man and in turn ah, I was single at the time and living here in this farm house all by myself. And they'd move up from Florida and needed a base to operate out of. And we set 'em up right here. Ah, for 1957 season which I worked on the ground and I was also farming that year and then in 1958 I was also flying myself and also working out here. And then in '59 was when I formed Air Enterprises and went off completely on my own then. 'Cause those boys didn't bother coming back up. They more or less--. One of 'em was killed and the other one went with the air lines.

Vapaa: How do you feel about the risks in aerial flying?
Johnson: Well, I don't think it was--. I don't consider it as, as risky as people or laymens who don't understand it do. I feel safer in that airplane than I do traveling down the highway. Ah, number 1 is eh, it's all up to my skill. Now I have enough confidence in my skill. And of course now I've not only got the beginning skill, I've got ah, knowledge and background and a lot of experience. But I feel as though I'm a lot safer in that ag plane as I said before than traveling down a highway when you consider that it's just up to me to go around everything. Everything else is standing still and I've got to just avoid it. That is really no problem. But when you're traveling down the highway at ah, 50 miles an hour or 55 miles an hour and you're passing within 3 feet of another car at 50 or 55, that makes 100 to 110 mile an hour impact. And that guy could be drunk and cross over to your line and a matter of a couple of feet and you've had it. So I, I always try to relate this ah, with my experiences. And I feel a lot safer in that airplane than I do ah, in an automobile. Although--and we have never had any major accidents. We keep our maintenance program ah, ex--we got an extremely good maintenance program here. We really work on the airplanes and, and tear them down every winter and rebuild them.

Vapaa: How many airplanes do you have, Al?

Johnson: Right now we've got 4 flying and we've got 2 other ag planes disassembled. And ah, so that actually counts about 6.

Vapaa: And how many pilots do you use?
Johnson: Well, ah, this coming year we anticipate 2 and a part of a 1. In other words, 1 on a part time basis and myself. So that counts to 3 of us: full time and the part time worker.

Vapaa: Well, now you said about the maintenance work. Does that mean you have a mechanic too?

Johnson: We have a full time maintenance man. He works year around. Of course, during the winter time is when we completely go over the airplanes and clean 'em down real good—redo 'em completely.

Vapaa: Just like a farmer com--cleans up his potato machinery.

Johnson: Same thing. Only we're probably much more thorough.

Vapaa: Oh, I don't know, Al. I think these potato farmers do an awfully good job of cleaning up--

Johnson: Oh, yeah. I won't say that they don't. But on an airplane you have to be much more thorough.

Vapaa: Yes, well--

Johnson: (voice overlap, unintelligible)

Vapaa: ...particularly as far as the engine is concerned.

Johnson: Right. The engine and the air frame and the electronics equipment and so forth. You can't be haphazard. Ah, we don't even like to see a spray accumulation built up on the airplane. Because we are handling something that's a little more dangerous than ah, just a plain old ground duster or something. I mean when you fool with chemicals and chemical drifts and so forth.

Vapaa: Let's talk about a few of these chemicals that you're using today, Al. Because as I understand it, most of the ah, ah, spray work on
potatoes to--today is done by airplane. Is this right?

Johnson: Ah, that's correct. Ah, opposed to 10 years ago yet we were still an--we were only spraying maybe--or put it this way--air spraying was only during approximately maybe 10 to 15% of the potatoes. And as of today ah, I would say airplane is doing 95%, almost 98%. As a matter of fact, in the Dover area all potatoes are sprayed by air.

Vapaa: Can you give the advantages of aerial spraying over ground equipment?

Johnson: Yeah, there's many of them. Ah, first of all, when we started in the spraying business we didn't know really why we would get just as good a result and maybe even better than ground rigs. We didn't argue with it. But since then of course we've gone into a lot of research on it and wondering how come we were. And one of the big things is first of all is high droplet size (?). We have a heavier micron ah, droplet which takes longer to break down so it gives us longer control. Where on a ground rig of a s--a farmer who is spraying on a 10 day program ah, we could expand that program normally about ah, 25% further. Or roughly a 14 day program. And of c--and the big assets are first of all we don't get the ground compaction and the damage to the plant. Ah, we've run tests on this on several occasions and several locations. And ah, we have proven that ah, the farmer pays almost his complete application and spray bill--chemical bill--by just the reduction of the ah, increased yields because of the reduction of the compaction track in the field.
Whereas ah, ah, an, and of course, this varies naturally. If the price of potatoes is $2 a hundred, naturally you ah, you might ah, then you're saving 10/100's to the acre well that's $20. But if it's $8 a hundred, that's $80. So naturally with a higher price it comes even more ah, noticeably. And another thing is weather conditions. We don't have to wait for rain. We don't have--or ah, ah, wet weather. Ah, we can wait until after rain and go in immediately--as soon as it rains. Whereas with ground rigs you'd have to wait maybe 1, 2, 3, 5 days or 6 days and sometimes never get in because you have another rain following it.

Vapaa: And you prefer to spray after a rain anyway. Right?

Johnson: Ah, according to what you're doing. Ah, eh, and what the program has been. If the farmer has got a bad enough situation where he's overlooked it and hasn't been on a regular program ah, you might be better to go in before to get things cleaned up and also to put a little bit of preventative on ah, to help let the rain spread it. But if he's on a normal program, we'll normally always wait until after a rain.

Vapaa: Now Al, last Friday I believe it was, I--we were supposed to get together after a meeting that you were having. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that meeting?

Johnson: Yes. That was a sub committee meeting of the Pesticide Advisory Council for the State of Delaware. That's an appointed position by the Governor.

Vapaa: And who was running the meeting?
Johnson: At the time was Bruce Carlson. He's our new chairman we just elected a few weeks ago.

Vapaa: Is that C-a-r-l-s-o-n?

Johnson: Yes. Ah, did I say Bruce Carlson? I meant ah--it's not Bruce Carlson. I can't think of his first name right off hand. But it's ah--

Vapaa: Not John ah, McDaniels?

Johnson: No. Ah, John McDaniels was there. Actually John had run that meeting--portion of--of the meeting because this was a sub committee meeting. Ah, what we're doing is working on the ah, Pesticide Advisory Council on this relationship--new fiscal law--federal insecticides ah, insecticide (unintelligible) act. Ah, and what we're doing is complying with the EPA regulations on having everybody qualified to apply chemicals in the future. And this law will be into effect in 1976. It takes quite awhile to get this thing going.

Vapaa: Did you run into any unusual problems? You must have last Friday.

Johnson: We run into an awful lot of 'em. Ah, the big problems are we--we don't want to make the law too stringent. We want to make it so that everybody can live with it. But at the same time we're being pushed from behind by the EPA to make sure that we make it so that we cover all aspects of the law. So thi--we're trying to make it as minimal as possible. At the same time they're forcing us to go further than maybe what we want to.

Vapaa: Now Al, as long as we're talking about EPA we better define what we
Johnson: Right. That's the Envir---Environmental Protection Agency which is supposed to be purifying the whole atmosphere.


Johnson: Yeah. I think some of 'em a little too interested in it. But ah, they're having to take a little bit of a back seat because you can't get everything and ah, at the same time ah, ah, satisfy everybody.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Ah, ah, for example was one of these ah, EPA columnists in Washington made a statement to our national ah, director from the National Agriculture Aviation Association and told him, well ah, people don't need anything. We don't need a thing. And I don't know what he's going to think when food gets in a real short supply. But that--he's not worried about those right now. He's just worried about his little problems. In reactions to what he was talking about is the pesticides and fertilizers.

Vapaa: Yes. It seems to me ah, quite a notorious problem as you've indicated. I think ah, that people get all excited about things that ah, really they shouldn't.

Johnson: Right. I ah--

Vapaa: To the degree.

Johnson: My--well, my feeling is first of all, don't change everything completely. You don't get married and change your wife or she doesn't change you because you're only going to rebel. Or there's going to
be problems. And this is the same thing. I feel that—as though our progress has progressed to a certain point. And it should at least stay at that level and maybe control it from that point on. But not try to change what you've already done. Maybe you've been as time goes on make your minor changes and change things around. But your progress has come to this point for a certain reason. And when you start changing things I think this is a good reason why the country is in the situation it is today.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Too many changes came about too fast.

Vapaa: Yes. Al, I'm looking back here over my notes and I see that I never even covered your education. How much education did you have?

Johnson: I had 12 years schooling.

Vapaa: Twelve years of high school. I mean—

Johnson: Right. Grammar school through high school—1 through 12. Got no college. Ah, ah, I was—and one time interested in it, but at the time the way we moved down here we went right into farming. And I don't see where I've lost anything by not having a college education.

Vapaa: But you do work with our University people. Particularly our pesticide people.

Johnson: Yes. I work very closely with the University. As a matter of fact, we do a tremendous amount of testing for 'em. Because first of all, they don't have any access to airplanes so we do all of their ah, aerial test work ah, evaluation work. And we evaluate our own
chemicals anyway. We put the actual field evaluation in on our own. No matter what the University comes up with we still have our own tests because sometimes the results are different by air than they were by a ground rig test.

Vapaa: Um-hum. I see. Well now, Al, ah, umph, I've forgotten my question already that I wanted to ask you. Ah, we're talking about the research and ah, the part that you take with the University and with others. I presume some of the chemical companies ask you to do some too don't they?

Johnson: Yes. We get a tremendous amount of chemical company information which we usually work it a combination between the chemical company and the University. Most of the chemical company is research data that is needed for the EPA to get license or regulations on their labels. And a lot of it is just information that we want for ourselves. This new EPA regulation has made it a little bit rough on ah, obtaining ah, experimental ah, registration.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: So we've got a watch where we're going.

Vapaa: Now, Al, besides spraying for potatoes you've also sprayed other crops.

Johnson: Yes. Potatoes has really just been a pretty new crop for me. I've been spraying business basically started off I was strictly working with the canners--with the peas, the lima beans and snapbean growers. And of course, asparagus and sweet corn come in--in over the years. We do a tremendous amount of sweet corn work today.

Vapaa: Umm. Don't worry about that clock, Al. We're picking it up. The
secretary will have a little bit of trouble ah--

Johnson: Oh.

Vapaa: ...transcribing some of this. But ah, I think she'll get it all right.

Johnson: OK.

Vapaa: So ah, ah, we'll just not worry too much whenever it strikes—happens to strike. How often does it strike?

Johnson: Every hour. Or—or it'll strike every half hour and every hour.

Vapaa: I see. You have a very nice home here.

Johnson: Well, we're proud of it. It's an old farm home estimated to be 200 years old or better in one section of it. We—we're basically is being fixed up now—huge beams down there. You know they just chopped the tops of the logs off. And I just remodeled ah, these 2 rooms here this past year. They're not completely done yet even. But ah, I've put a lot of money in the place and kinda proud of it. I've lived here for quite a few years now.

Vapaa: Yeah. Well, just last week I happened to be up at Joe Lamberta's house. Have you ever been there?

Johnson: I haven't been in it. I know he's—new home. I know where it is and everything. But I haven't been in it.

Vapaa: Well, you ought to go up there and look at his ah, basement. He's got it all paneled off. And he's got a pool table down there and—

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: ...all sorts of entertainment. Of course A—Joe you know has 1 artificial leg.
Johnson: Yeah.

Vapaa: Had his one--his right leg taken off below the knee when he was younger--

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, you can't tell really.

Johnson: No. You don't notice it really.

Vapaa: You don't really know that he has a wooden leg unless he tells you.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah--

Johnson: Well, my basement is going to be kinda unique. It's all old brick. It's the original old brick footing. For this--this house is brick even though it doesn't look it. The front section is all old brick.

Vapaa: Well ah, what kind of siding do you have on this house now?

Johnson: Well, we got vinyl siding in the front.

Vapaa: What is it?

Johnson: Vinyl.

Vapaa: Vinyl.

Johnson: Over the brick ah, we put a vinyl siding on it. And ah, the back section's got a wood siding--lap stick (?) siding.

Vapaa: You didn't worry too much about this when you were single did you Al?

Johnson: No. No, I didn't. (laughter) Didn't care much about it really just as long as I had a bed to lay down on.

Vapaa: And you and ah, the Libby man--I'm trying to think of his name.

Johnson: Dwayne Shirer(Sp?)

Vapaa: Dwayne Shirer. S-h-i-r-e-r I believe.
Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: Ah, used to be the most eligible bachelors in Delaware I guess.

Johnson: I guess in Delaware. I guess Dwayne still is.

Vapaa: He still is.

Johnson: Nope. He still hasn't got married. And Dwayne is a good friend of mine. As a matter of fact, he lived here for a little while during ah, one year he was being transferred from Puerto Rico back here. He had someone else living in his home. He did live here for awhile. He's also a secretary of my corporation.

Vapaa: He is?

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, what does he do now? He's not with Libby anymore.

Johnson: No. He's now with ah, Cane Miller Company ah, which has ah--

Vapaa: How do you spell it--Cane?

Johnson: C-a-n-e M-i-l-l-e-r.

Vapaa: Just like sugar.

Johnson: Just like in sugar, yeah. Or I take i--ah, I say C I mean it's K-a-n-e. I'm sorry.

Vapaa: Kane. Yeah. OK.

Johnson: Kane Miller Corporation which owns Fox Foods over at Queen Anne, Maryland and also--

Vapaa: Maryland.

Johnson: ...G.L. Webster and Company down at Cheriton, Virginia.

Vapaa: That's Gehl? G-e-h-l?

Johnson: Uh?

Vapaa: Gehl you say? How do--would you spell Gehl? I'm trying to help the
Oh, this would be ah, ah, Websters. Ah, what'd I say, G.L. Websters?

Yeah.

G. L. Websters.

G. L.

Initials. Initials. Initials G. L.

Oh.

George Low (sp?)

Oh, good.

G.L. Webster and Company. They're down at Cheriton, Virginia which we do their spraying too in both planes.

I see. How far do you go to spray?

That's as far as we go--Cheriton, Virginia.

Um-hum.

And we only go down just to do their work. We don't do any in between.

How about north?

We don't beyond the canal. Strictly wi--with--our basic operation runs about 35 miles of our--of Magnolia here.

Do you spray any fruit trees at all, Al?

No. We have over the years occassionally we'll get somebody that wants us to take care of their fruit trees. They can be taken care of very effectively. A good friend of mine in New Jersey ah, has an orchard. And he has an ag operation. He does all his spraying by air.
Vapaa: How about to crop dust tomatoes or--
Johnson: Yes, we do quite a bit of tomato work.
Vapaa: What other vegetable crops?
Johnson: Well, the ah, the--the vegetables by size we work on a veg--or a --.
This is fresh market vegetables?
Vapaa: Right.
Johnson: With the ah, potatoes number 1 and then we work on quite a bit of
tomatoes. But most of them are cannery. There is some fresh market
but not too many. And then we work on an awful lot of ah, cabbage
and cauliflower and brussel sprouts. But they're in very minimal
quantities in Delaware. Your cabbage is fairly large but the other
2 are very small. Ah, and also snapbeans, ah, sweet corn for fresh
market.
Vapaa: Where do you do this for sweet corn? I mean what area?
Johnson: Well, most of our fresh market sweet corn is done over here at Papen
Brothers or ah, ah, Chris Lee over in Greensboro.
Vapaa: So they're both worried about compaction too.
Johnson: Well, they--we mostly work with them when they're in a--when they're
in trouble--because the wet weather they can't get in. They don't
worry too much about compaction. Mainly is they stay on a tight
program and with we--with wet weather they can't get in so they
call us.
Vapaa: And they double crop or triple crop their land and get 2 or 3 crops
a year.
Johnson: Right. Right.
Vapaa: So that they can ah--compaction doesn't become quite as serious a problem with 'em.

Johnson: No. Well they ah, compaction doesn't affect corn like it would a potato crop.

Vapaa: No.

Johnson: ...Grows in the ground.

Vapaa: And they fertilize very heavily.

Johnson: Yeah. We do a tremendous amount of fertilizing particularly on pickles. Pickles has got to be a big crop with us. Ah, we've been doing an awful lot of fertilizing on pickles with calcium nitrate. And also late in the season we do a lot of spraying on pickles.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Pickles are a new crop since Vlasic moved in. Although we've had ah, pickles in the area. The companies that have been here before are starting to increase too.

Vapaa: Now Vlasic is V-l-a-s-i-c if I remember right.

Johnson: That's right.

Vapaa: And it's the name of a company.

Johnson: Right. That's Vlasic pickles.

Vapaa: Right. And--

Johnson: One of many products.

Vapaa: What problems do--what do you have to spray for on pickles?

Johnson: Mostly diseases--like a belly rot or something. Because a pickle will lay on the ground and they'll pick up certain diseases and certain conditions. There is some ah, pickle worm occasionally you'll have to spray for. But not too often. Most of it's disease control.
Vapaa: Um-hum. Ah, now perhaps you can help me out here ah, on some other--. You say you've never had any serious accidents.

Johnson: No.

Vapaa: And this is because of what would you say?

Johnson: Well, it's mainly because ah, I would imagine that ah, I stay on top of my operation completely. I don't let my pilots just do hazard things if I can help it. The airplanes we're flying today cost $60,000 ah, opposed to when I first started in business around $5,000. And naturally as you get more and more expensive airplanes ah, flying you want 'em to be taken care of much better. And I restrict 'em to land except in certain airport that are designated unless it's an emergency. Not to fly under power lines unless it has to be in order to cross the middle of the field or so. But not just to do it get closer to the ends to get 'em cleaned up because we got other method--methods that we can use. And just keep general safety. See that the oil is changed regular and airplanes are checked over frequently and that everything is in proper operating condition. And this is--and they're all such darn good pilots. Been working with 'em very close.

Vapaa: Now, the pilots that you had this year, where--where are they now?

Johnson: They ah, my number 1 pilot is in Florida this year. He had been here on a year round basis up til this year. But he flew so much during the summer he wanted just to go to Florida and take off and be down there with his brother. So he sh--eh, he's coming back with me next year. Which I'll be knowing shortly. I'll be talking with him.. He'll be back and ah, by the first of March when we start working again.
Vapaa: Is he married?
Johnson: No, he got a divorce this year.
Vapaa: Oh. But you are married?
Johnson: Yes. I just got married this year.
Vapaa: And who did you marry?
Johnson: Georgeann Lehmann from down in Milton, Delaware.
Vapaa: And it's spelled just about the way it sounds?
Johnson: Yeah. L-e-h-m-a-n-n.
Vapaa: Ok, yeah. Down around Milton?
Johnson: Yeah, un-hun.
Vapaa: You do get around don't you?
Johnson: Oh, yeah, yeah. (laughter) Yeah. Ah, and--I've got another pilot
who is--that is in training now. And he's with me full time. And
he's here right today. He's here all through the winter. He'll
be working with me on a maintenance basis.
Vapaa: What's his name?
Johnson: Gary Emeigh.
Vapaa: How do you spell Emeigh?
Johnson: E-m-e-i-g-h. He's also a professional photographer. He used to be
with the State News.
Vapaa: Um-hum. Oh, yes. I know Gary very well.
Johnson: Um-hum.
Vapaa: Good photographer.
Johnson: Very good photographer. As a matter of fact, ah, our National Con-
vention is starting next Sunday out in Las Vegas and I'm sending him
out. He's going out with Herman Brown tomorrow. And he's going to
to be out to our National Convention as official photographer.

Vapaa: All right, now I'm going to--I want to hold back on that because I want to put it on the other side of the tape.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, I don't think there's too much time left on this side. But ah, there are perhaps a few other things we could talk about ah, before we get to that point. This thing'll stop all of a sudden.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: Then we'll turn it over and ah, just go again.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: There's an hour and a half of tape on here. I hope you don't mind. It'll mean you have a late lunch.

Johnson: Well, that's all--don't make any difference to me. I could probably do without lunch.

Vapaa: What do you weigh, Al?

Johnson: Right now around 250.

Vapaa: Umph. Does weight make any difference as far as your piloting a plane is concerned?

Johnson: Well, yeah. It--it--an airplane is--is very critical on weight. But the airplanes we fly are big ones. They got big engines in 'em and they can take a pretty good load. Ah, I don't want too weak a pilot because it is a man's airplane too. So you need a pretty good size brute to handle 'em around it doesn't--it might look nice and easy from on the ground, but he's having to work up there to make it do it.
Vapaa: There's no such thing as power steering in it?
Johnson: No. Well, there is in a sense. They can put like several tabs
on the controls which helps and works as a power steering only
it's not power steering as you would know it in an automobile.

Vapaa: automobile.
Johnson: What it is, it just ah, use air to turn your controls and it--you
actually use the movement of air to help you turn the controls.

Vapaa: And your legs work just as hard as your hands do.
Johnson: Yeah. Your legs work your rudder controls.

Vapaa: Um-hum. I used to fly, Al. And actually the flying that I think I
enjoyed most was gliding. And my last pir--my last flight I believe
as a pilot was up at Elmira, New York.

Johnson: Oh, at Schweitzers.
Vapaa: At Schweitzers.
Johnson: Well, that's where our airplanes are made. The Grumman (sp?) Agcat
is made by Schweitzer factory at Elmira.

Vapaa: Oh, I didn't ask you what kind of airplanes you have. You said you
had 4 but--
Johnson: Yeah, well, we fly the Gr--ah, the main spray planes we use are
Grumman Agcats.

Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: And they're built ah, by the Grumman American Corporation under a
Schweitzer contract at Elm--at Elmira, New York. Which by the way
I was up there last week myself.

Vapaa: Um-hum
Johnson: And ah, the other one is a little spotter plane we use--the Piper
FA 12. And then the other 2 that we disassembled are Steerman--old Boeing Steermans A75's which are still good airplanes. But we don't need 'em because the Agcats can do so much more work and they're new airplanes.

Vapaa: But as a plane to fly the Steerman's probably the most fun isn't it? Most maneuverable?

Johnson: Ah, well, the Agcat is most maneuverable. We are building up a a 2 holer Steerman. Ah, that's another airplane that I've kind of overlooked even. But we are building it up. It's still in the warehouse. And we're going to build it as a playing airplane--as a 2 holer which would be for aerobatic and doing--that would be the finer plane.

Vapaa: Um-hum. (laughter) Do you like to do aerobatics?

Johnson: Well, I enjoy 'em. Ah, I--I had a friend of mine flew in from Ohio over Labor Day weekend. And he built himself what they call a PJ. It's a small 2 place biplane and fully aerobatic--full inverted system and the whole deal. And I flew it for awhile and--. But naturally you fly something like that you gotta go upside down.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: And I really enjoyed it.

Vapaa: Have you ever flown a Fairchild?

Johnson: Yeah, I've flown a PT19.

Vapaa: That's what I went to when I went to flying school in 1941.

Johnson: Un-hun.

Vapaa: The Cimmeron Field in Oklahoma--that's near Oklahoma City--where we started out in Fairchild PT19A's.
Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, the difference between that and the other ah, Fairchild was this has an in-line engine.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: Oh, and it was a wonderful plane to ah, for aerobatics.

Johnson: Um-hum. They were. They were very aerobatic--wonderful.

Vapaa: Yes. But then when I went from ah, pr--primary flying school in the Army to ah, basic why they put us on T13A's. Have you ever flown those?

Johnson: Yeah. Um back--we got engines from--that's where our engines came from.

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: T13's and then later on the T6 engine--the AT6.

Vapaa: Do any of those--are any of those used for spraying work--or--or dusting I mean.

Johnson: No. There was a ah--the T13's are all pretty well extinct now. But the--there was some AT6's I think set up for forestry work. But they never proved out too well.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: We used parts of 'em like the engine mainly.

Vapaa: Yes. So you can modify an airplane to do the job you want a do it too?

Johnson: Yeah. Oh, yeah. But ah, it's very costly and ah, most of the old airplanes you got problems getting parts after you do. And today they've got enough new airplanes on the market--they built something like 1300 airplanes last year.

Vapaa: Is that right?
Johnson: Just for the spray business.

Vapaa: Humph. Ah, you don't do any other kind of work with your airplane other than spray work, right?

Johnson: We do spraying, fertilizing and cover crop seeding. 'Course in the south they do a lot of rice seeding which we don't do up around here naturally. And we also do fire bombing.

Vapaa: Oh. Can you haul passengers?

Johnson: No. They're single seaters.

Vapaa: Um-hum. And you don't have any twin engine airplanes?

Johnson: No. We have one we disassembled (unintelligible) for the engines. We are looking for twins for congested area spraying--mosquito control contracts and so forth.

Vapaa: Who does the mosquito control spraying in Delaware now?

Johnson: Well, it's put out on a contract every year. But I think the last several years now it's been Joe Hudson who's got it.

Vapaa: And Joe Hudson's from down at Milton isn't he?

Johnson: Yeah. Yes.

Vapaa: He's also a farmer isn't he?

Johnson: Yeah. Um-hum.

Vapaa: But he doesn't grow potatoes?

Johnson: No. He's a Delaware farmer--beans and some process foods.

Vapaa: And all of our potatoes in Delaware are basically grown in Kent and New Castle County.

Johnson: That's right. In the ah, Magnolia, Dover area Do--there is one little farmer down by Joe Hudson who raises potatoes. But he's only a small.
farmer. And ah, Middletown area of Delaware. But the Middletown area seems to be fading rapidly on potatoes. And most of 'em are raised right here in the Dover area.

Vapaa: Well, don't you think some of this, Al, is because most of the potatoe farmers who came down from Long Island are getting older and they're getting ready to retire?

Johnson: Yeah, I think so. Ah, some of 'em in New Castle County weren't that old either. But for some reason they can't--they're not as successful. They're having problems up there. I think the weather conditions and what not.

Vapaa: The ground is heavier than it is down here.

Johnson: I believe so, yeah.

Vapaa: And they have stones and we have very few stones.

Johnson: Un-hun. Well, stones normally don't bother us because on Long Island that's all we had was stones. We could hardly tell the potatoes from the stones. (laugh) I mean when you talk about stones you have nothing in Delaware like it.

Vapaa: No. Um-hum. Well, let's see here. I can't tell where this thing is on the scale. Oh, yes I can. Um-hum. We've still got quite a bit of tape in here.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: So ah, on this one side before I turn it over. So ah, let's talk ah, let's get into this business about ah, the organizations that you belong to and are interested in.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: As far as ah, aerial work is concerned or any other organizations as far as that's concerned, Al.
Johnson: Well, in ah--I can name off a few local organizations that I'm in but ah, then I'll get into my aerial ones. I'm a member of the Moose Lodge, of course, and also the Elks Lodge in Milford. And ah, that's pretty much what I am on a local basis. Ah, I am on the Governor's Advisory Council for Pesticides. Also on the Governor's Aviation Task Force.

Vapaa: How long you been on these?

Johnson: Well, ah, this is that Advisory Council I've been on going on 3 years. No, 4 years--going on 4 years. Since when it first originated. And ah, on the ah, Aviation Task Force that's only been around a month now. That's--that's something new that they just appointed. And then on the national level I'm a member of the National Agriculture Aviation Association. I'm the present President of the Association.

Vapaa: How long have you been a member of that Association?

Johnson: Since it's origin in 19--I believe it was 1967--somewhere around there. I think this is our--going on our 8th year.

Vapaa: How big an organization is it?

Johnson: Well, it's ah, been growing rapidly. It's--I think right now our membership is up right close to 1,000 total membership. That's including ah, operating members, allied industry and so forth.

Vapaa: Yeah. These are not limited to ah, aerial sprayers though are they?

Johnson: Yes. It's--it's an organization for agriculture aviation operators.

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: In other words, it's ah, made up of ah, operators and pilots. Ah,
that is to say it's basically a new organization. Ah, I am President of it; and of course, I did have to travel this whole past year. Ah, I came up as ah, originally I've been also a member of the Northeast Association which eh, is 10 years old. It's a little older than the National. Ah, I was the third president of the Northeast. And of course, I was also a director for 2 years in the Northeast. Ah, a director into the National Organization--

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: ...which you had to become before you become a national officer. Ah, on the National I've held 3 offices. I've been the Treasurer, the Vice President and then the President. I guess I was the only one that moved up all 3 steps at once. They usually don't do that. They just pick a man. But we--I made a request that they do go from Vice President to President or at least from 1 other office to President in the future. In this coming year they're going to do about the same thing again because it is quite a big organization now and does take ah, a lot of knowledge of running an organization like this. And a man just thrown into it can't handle it as well as if he has had held one other office. But it did require the first 3 months of this year to travel around and give speeches at ah, all the different state associations. I think I've attended about between 17 and 20 of 'em in the past ah, 8 or 9 months.

Vapaa: Do you have any so called flying farmers as members?

Johnson: Oh, yeah. Well, there is also a Flying Farmers group which I'm not
a member of. But ah, there is some of 'em that are members of this organization. There's also some what they call the 99'ers. That's a woman's group. They're also members of our organization. We have got a couple of women ag operators in this--

Vapaa: Is that right?

Johnson: Um-hum. Colorado there's 2 that I know of. And in fact, I almost hired one this past year—a young girl who has been doing some spraying. And ah, she's out of the Colorado area. And she's—I just put her on another committee here just this past week. Ah, for we are getting ready to build—an operator's training manual for the industry which the EPA has encouraged us to do also. And of course, I'm making a committee of 20 of us to do this. And next year of course I'll become the Convention Chairman at our National Convention which will again be in Las Vegas.

Vapaa: Is it always out in Las Vegas?

Johnson: No. Ah, we've had our ah, even years in Las Vegas and then the next year was East at a place like Dallas, New Orleans, Hollywood, Florida. But we've grown so big now that there's very few single hotels that can handle us in the East. And we've always got treated the best in Las Vegas because it is a convention city that ah, next year we were supposed to be going back to Atlanta. This is an even year so we would be normally in Las Vegas. By the way, also our even years eh, is a—is an international year. This is our third international meeting. In other words world wide agriculture aviation. We've tried to make our convention the ah, Paris Air Show of the crop dusting industry. And of course, crop dusting is a bad word to use let's say ah, ah, it's—it gives the environmentalists ah, ah, a file (?) in their nose because when you mention crop dusting they think of pollution so—-(TAPE 1, SIDE 1 ENDED)
Vapaa: And ah, we have ah, 45 minutes to talk here so we've got plenty of time. I hope you have time to talk.

Johnson: Oh, yes.

Vapaa: Because I think maybe in 45 minutes still why we can still have enough questions where we can ah, really get something out of it. Ah, we were talking about the National Association and your problems that you have finding convention space and so forth like this. I mean places that can handle--

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: ...your group--particularly large groups. Now how many do you generally have at these national meetings?

Johnson: Well, this year we estimated to have between 2,000 and 2,200. And I just got a recount this week from the Hilton Hotel. And they said they've already got 1200 rooms reserved as of last week. Ah,--

Vapaa: For next year?

Johnson: This is for this year.

Vapaa: This year.

Johnson: This year's convention.

Vapaa: Oh, yeah. I see.

Johnson: So we estimate to be ah--pick up at least another 200 rooms. So that will give us somewhere around 14 to 1500 rooms. And using on a figure of 1.8 persons per room we're gonna be right close to ah, 25 and 2800 people. And this ah, as I mentioned it's--it's a large convention. And we're already out of--ah, even out of Las Vegas growing out of the hotel. Because they don't like to rent all the rooms to a convention.
Vapaa: No. So how many hotels will you be using in Las Vegas?

Johnson: It looks like 3 right now. They've got some up in--we've got 1100 rooms in the Hilton and they're putting some in--in the ah, Landmark at the present time and also there's a small one right across the street from it. I don't know the name of it right off hand--Mount--the Royal Inn or something like that.

Vapaa: Yes.

Johnson: But we'll have a shuttle bus between there and the meetings will be in the convention center which is all right in that circle.

Vapaa: It sounds, Al, like your National Association is very much like our National County Agricultural Agents Association (C). Ah, we have a very good reputation as far as our national meeting is concerned. Because we know 4 years from now that we're going to be ah, let's see ah, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin I believe.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, we set this up 4 years ahead. I used to be the Northeast Director for our National Association. And if I hadn't had my stroke in 1969, I'd have probably been the National President ah, in the last year. Because the meeting last year was held in Baltimore.

Johnson: I see.

Vapaa: And the year before that it was in Atlanta. And the year before that it was in Oregon. But I didn't go to Oregon because of the stroke that I'd had the previous year before. The doc says there's no point in taking a chance so I--

Johnson: Um-hum.
Vapaa: And he told me, he says, (unintelligible). He says, "George, with your history of high blood pressure, I'd never get too far away from a good doctor or a good hospital."

Johnson: Well, he's probably just wise. Because I know I got a little--my blood pressures up pretty good too. And the doctor kinda tells me about it once in awhile.

Vapaa: You better watch it, Al. Do you take any medication?

Johnson: Yeah. No, un-un.

Vapaa: He doesn't give you any medication? Do you know--

Johnson: Well, when I have high blood pressure, yes. He'll give me some pills just to lower it right down. But I don't have the problem all the time.

Vapaa: I see. (voice overlap, unintelligible)

Johnson: I--I--I have blood--my blood pressures up mainly. But I think it's because of the problems or something.

Vapaa: What do you take for your blood pressure pill? Do you know?

Johnson: I don't recall right hand. It's just ah, it's a fluid (?) pill.

Vapaa: Does it look like this?

Johnson: No. Well, it's a fluid pill. It just drains my fluid.

Vapaa: Oh. This is ni--ger (srt). And I also take nitrostat (sp) which is a stabilized form of nitroglycerin for my heart.

Johnson: Um-hum. Um-hum.

Vapaa: 'Cause I had a heart attack too.

Johnson: Yeah.

Vapaa: In--3 years ago.

Johnson: Un-hun. I know.
Vapaa: But ah, I'm lucky to be alive really.

Johnson: Yeah.

Vapaa: And ah, glad to be able to do something. I--I know ah, the doctors were kind of disturbed that I wanted to stop work as a county agent. I says, "Now wait a minute. Mine is not a desk job." I says,"A lot of people think that a county agent spends most of his time in the offices." I says, "I spend most--20% of my time in the office. And I think I should."

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: "I spend most of my time in the field." Well he said, "Well, you can go out in the field if you wear your brace all the time." See I wear a brace on my left leg.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: I can't fly anymore because of it. That left leg isn't very good. And you have to have pretty good balance of course. And I'm sure that I couldn't ah, pass the physical.

Johnson: Well, I'll tell you this heart attack scares a lot of people. And I was talking to a fellow just last--just a last Friday and--in The Nuts. I was having lunch. And he was in there and had a lot of long hair and everything now, but he's 43 years old--44 somewhere in there. And he owns Tippy's Taco House. And he had a bad heart attack here about a month and a half ago. And he was telling me all about it. And the point is it scares the hell out a ya.

Vapaa: Sure does. You think you got a belly ache.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: That's the symptoms that I had.
Johnson: Yeah. Well, he said that you just ah, you just want a take it easy.

Vapaa: That's right. And ah, I've learned that if I get tired, I just quit--

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: ...whatever I'm doing--go lay down.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: In fact, when I leave here I'll have lunch and then I'll ah, get a nap this afternoon because my wife's going to have company for lu--tonight for dinner.

Johnson: And so you're going to prepare yourself.

Vapaa: I'll get ready for that.

Johnson: Well, my father-in-law also--he's had a heart attack. And he's been retired on disability. He's had not a real severe one like you had. But--

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: ...he's had enough to scare him. And he takes it easy.

Vapaa: What is your father-in law's name?

Johnson: Frederic Lehmann. He was in the ah--

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: ...bank down there at Seaford I think.

Vapaa: I see.

Johnson: Or Laurel--somewhere down there.

Vapaa: But he is retired now?

Johnson: He's retired now. I think he got an early retirement.

Vapaa: Yes. Well, I'm retired on disability. And I'm not--only 59 years
old in--2 days before Christmas. So ah, I wanted an early re-
tirement anyway but not that early.

Johnson: Yes.

Vapaa: I retired in '55, Al.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, that's really too early I think.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: But ah, I wanted a foreign assignment. And I've given up this idea
now of a foreign assignment because---. Of course, I've always
liked teaching work. And that's what a county agent's work es-
tentially is.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Vapaa: Is teaching.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, I'm sure you want to fly as long as you can.

Johnson: Yeah. You can't take me out of it. You know sometimes I say I
want to get out of it. But I know that I'm still gonna stay on
as a pilot because I enjoy it.

Vapaa: Do you have any trouble making your physical and in passing your
physical?

Johnson: No. No, I've had no problems at all yet.

Vapaa: How about your eyes?

Johnson: So far they're--they're been passing with 20-20. But I do know
that it's not going to last that much longer because you can feel
the ah, ah, blurriness coming in occasionally and--
Vapaa: Do you wear glasses at all?

Johnson: No.

Vapaa: Ah, how about a pilot wearing glasses? Do you have any pilots that wear glasses?

Johnson: I don't, no. But there is some that do wear glasses.

Vapaa: To--spray work?

Johnson: Ah, yeah, yeah. Ah, the--there's no real--

Vapaa: I'm not talking about the goggles.

Johnson: No. I'm--there's no real stiff requirement on 'em. But very few wear goggles today on account a they have canopy airplanes.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: But ah, you have to carry a second pair with you. If you do--if it's required that you wear glasses, you have to carry a second pair with you. In case you stick your head out and lose it.

Vapaa: Yeah. What about ah, respirators? Do you have to wear respirators? When you fly?

Johnson: No, you don't have to. We usually carry them with 'em and during certain chemicals we'll wear 'em--the flying of certain restricted chemicals.

Vapaa: Ah, do you want to mention a couple of chemicals? I'll try and spell 'em for the g--girl.

Johnson: Ok. Well, the chemicals we use--we use approximately 40 to 50 different ones.

Vapaa: Yeah.

Johnson: But the important ones we use is Sevin, S-e-v-i-n.
Vapaa: S-e-v-i-n, right.
Johnson: Right. That's one of the largest we use. Ah, we use an awful lot of ah, Maneb.
Vapaa: M-a-n-e-b.
Johnson: Right. That's for fungicide control. We use Guthion heavy.
Vapaa: G-u-t-h-i-o-n.
Johnson: Right. And we also use a lot of Monitor, M-o-n-i-t-o-r.
Vapaa: That's a new one to me.
Johnson: That's a new one, right. That's only been out a couple of years. Ah, it's kind a short supply.
Vapaa: All right. What's it for? What's it supposed to do?
Johnson: Well, we use it on potatoes for ah, peach aphids mainly. And we also use it on cabbage and cauliflower--early season. On ah, loopers--cabbage loopers.
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: We also use a lot of Parathion yet.
Vapaa: That's P-a-r-a-t-h-i-o-n.
Johnson: Right. And Malathion--
Vapaa: Spelled the same way except M-a-l-a.
Johnson: Right.
Vapaa: OK.
Johnson: And also Cygon.
Vapaa: That's C-y-g-o-n.
Johnson: Right. That's used on--mostly used on peas.
Vapaa: Right.
Johnson: And ah, that's--that covers the ones that we use a lot--large amount
of. Maybe—we have a lot of others we use besides that.

Vapaa: Now ah, some of our farmers still try to use ah, Parathion with ground equipment.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: Now ah, this presents quite a problem to 'em doesn't it?

Johnson: Yeah. Parathion is a very highly toxic chemical. And it's ah—particular if your're in the drift of it ah, or working with it. You want to keep yourself very clean and wear respirators and protective clothing all the time. And of course, on a ground rig you—your si—sitting right in the s—spray drift basically with certain wind conditions in particular. Where with an airplane you're not. You're sitting above it and well out of the area of it.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Ah, there's some chemicals that are very highly toxic that you should wear all the protective gear that is possible.

Vapaa: Ah, Al, have you ever had to dump a load of chemicals because you couldn't get off the ground?

Johnson: No. Not—

Vapaa: Did you ever have that?

Johnson: ...because I couldn't get off the ground. Ah, we've had hoses ah—excuse me—hoses break—line break occasionally. But ah, since then we've put safety devices on—on the spray systems so that we don't—we lose only a very minimal amount. And we can shut it right off immediately. So that it keeps the load from dumping. But ah, actually dumping a load, no, I don't recall ever really dumping one—a whole load.
Vapaa: Well, the reason I mentioned it was 'cause ah, just before I quit I believe there was a case of a pilot not you--I know it wasn't you--

Johnson: Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

Vapaa: ...down below.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And what do you call it--Chandelle Estates I guess.

Johnson: That's Chandelle Airport, right. He dumped ah, a load of mosquito spray and oil right across the road there.

Vapaa: Right across the road and it landed in the man's ah, --

Johnson: And it killed his tree and his lawn and all that. Right.

Vapaa: Trees. And ah, we had an awful time about it. But (voice overlap, unintelligible)

Johnson: Well--

Vapaa: ...the man made it good. I mean the (unintelligible)

Johnson: Yeah, the operator did at the time. But ah, it's a case again where you got an operator that kind a runs a little bit of a shoddy operation. And this happens an awful lot. Where I think in the future you're gonna ah, break all this stuff up because ah, they've got to become better operators. And ah, it--they just loaded the airplane too much and the s--size for a minimal work load.

Vapaa: And there was a wire down at the end of the runway and he knew it.

Johnson: Yeah.

Vapaa: And in order to get off--over that wire he had to dump that load. He didn't have any choice.

Johnson: No. That's right. And there was some things that people didn't
know at the time either which I had heard later. That the ah, I believe he left his flaps extended or something or--or he didn't have 'em extended one or the other. But one reason that he didn't have proper lift. That if he had taken his time and had everything going right, he'd have made it all right.

Vapaa: So it is important that ah, an operator use all the safety precautions that he--

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: ...can.

Johnson: Well, you've got enough problems as it is. And you're working--ah, running a lot of loads you are--you want a be sure that everything is working properly. And you want to take an extra few seconds longer on the runway and--and get everything checked out before you go. Whereas I require my pilots to do this. In fact, I'll be on 'em all the time. If I hear 'em take off awful fast--in other words I can tell if they're normal they're engine isn't even warm enough. Because I know how long it takes from past experience. That's one reason I like to stay in flying so that my pilots can't snowball me and--or snow me and say that this can't be so and I find out it is. Because of my own experience I do know what it takes to--to properly check out an engine.

Vapaa: Sure is--a preflight check is probably the most important part in the initial operation that--

Johnson: The main thing is not to hurry. Ah, normally a--a pilot (unintelligible) ...from being checked out thorough enough they'll know what to do. Where they get into trouble is where they hurry and they forget.
Vapaa: Now ah, Al, what percentage of the flights that you--the spray work that you do do the flights originate here? Most of 'em?

Johnson: The majority of 'em. I would say ah, 75% of our flights originate right out of here.

Vapaa: Do they ever land on the farm itself?

Johnson: No. Very seldom--unless they have a runway. Ah, occasionally we'll have a pilot land on a farm but we'll check it out first. We'll ah--now once in awhile they'll sneak in. But that's when I raise heck with 'em and usually chew 'em out because they could hit a pothole or something and wreck an airplane. And it's not worth the damages and the risk when the--eh, the amount of money we're paying for an airplane today.

Vapaa: Well, how about Chris Lee's farm for example. It's over near Maryland line.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: Ah, does he have a runway?

Johnson: No. Un-un. we (voice overlap, unintelligible)

Vapaa: How about a neighbor? Do you ah, do any work for him? He has an airplane and he has a runway.

Johnson: Oh, you're talking about--yeah, I know who you're talking about. His runway was very poor. We had s--talked to him several years ago about using his runway. But his runway is very narrow.

Vapaa: Um-hum. Yeah, I know it was narrow.

Johnson: Yeah, and with our low wing airplanes and these big airplanes like this the wheels would go from one side to the other. And it's just too risky. So we don't work off it. Our work is work right out
Do you use ah, a retracted landing gear or is it--?
No. All fixed.
All fixed landing gears?
Um-hum. That's ah, just less maintenance problems. You'd have a lot of maintenance problems. But we make a tremendous lot of landings and take offs in a day's time. And if you pull that gear up every time, it's gonna just make your maintenance that much higher. And they're very expensive to put on an airplane.
When is the best time of day to spray, Al?
Well, we like early morning always the best because it's calm and quiet and there's nobody else out there. And it's just peaceful really. And actually ah, it's according to what you're doing. It might be in the middle of the day is best. Now some stuff we can't put on early in the morning on account of dew ah, like say fertilizers or so forth or certain insecticides.
You get a certain burn--burning effect.
Right. So we have to put it on when the plant dries off.
Um-hum. How about the early evening?
Well, early evenings are usually good also. Ah, you don't get as many good early evening days as you do early morning.
Do you use lights at all on your airplanes?
Yes. We've got one rigged for night spraying. We ah, we've actually done some work at night. We don't see any real need for it. But we've got--we're gon--we're gonna rig 'em all with 'em. But it's more of an emergency measure. The pilot has got lights
for landing and also if he is working on a project and it gets dark, he can finish it out with lights. And of course, we didn't know whether attacking certain insects at night would be better than working in the daytime. So we have set up for night spraying.

Vapaa: How do you ah, ah, maintain your ah, level above the ground. I mean, do you have to get fairly close to the ground don't you?

Johnson: Yeah. We--we spray an average altitude of 4 to 8 feet above the ground.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: And that's all this natural instinct. The pilot knows where he is. And we can run on wheels within inches of the ground and know right where they are.

Vapaa: Now it's important too that the pilot get down that low isn't it?

Johnson: No, he doesn't have to get real low. Ah, if it's--if he's got some wind conditions, he's better off flying lower to keep his drift down and--and get the spray where he wants it. But actually on a dead calm conditions his best altitude of spraying is probably as high as 17 feet in the air. But you have only--that's a very rare condition. You have to have the proper temperature, proper no drift, ah, perfect ah, cool, crisp air. And you don't get this but very, very limited amount of times in the year. So you have to kind a spray on a--on a general basis and--and generally are--our altitudes run about 4 to 6 feet and not more than 8 to 10 feet at any time.

Vapaa: What is your normal spraying season, Al?
Johnson: It goes from March through--well, actually towards the end of March mainly on herbicide work on through to ah, October--about the end of October.

Vapaa: Now ah, when you got to these national meetings to--. I'm shifting--slipping around quite a bit. Ah, do you fly to a larger airport and get on a transport plane?

Johnson: Yes. Yeah, I'll fly out of a--by commercial airlines on all these flights. I don't take any private airplane.

Vapaa: Do you drive to the airport--

Johnson: umm.

Vapaa: ...and leave your car there?

Johnson: I'll drive to the airport, leave my car there. If they have valet service, I let them take my car. They just run me up to the terminal, let me out and then when I come back just go over and pick up my car and then come back. And I've got it down to a pretty good routine now. I used to plan to be there an hour or two ahead of time, but no more. Just as long as I'm there 10 or 15 minutes before. (laughter)

Vapaa: Where do you fly out of mostly when you go to the meetings?

Johnson: Mostly it's out of Philadelphia. Recently it's been ah, this year in particular I've been--done an awful lot out of National and a little bit out of Baltimore. Mainly because ah--that's Washington National.

Vapaa: Yes.

Johnson: Mainly because our Executive Director and our Washington Office is in Washington naturally. And I do come back with our Executive
Director or our Assistant Director and it gives 'em a chance to
do a little more talking and going over. And quite often I have
to go to the office there anyway. So I've been coming back to
National an awful lot this year.

Vapaa: So your office is in Washington? Your National Office?

Johnson: Yeah. We have one in Washington and a field office in Loveland,
Colorado.

Vapaa: Oh, I see.

Johnson: And I was in the Field Office also last week.

Vapaa: I see. Well, where is your office in Washington? What's the
address?

Johnson: Ah, it's right at the--in ah, Don Lewch (sp?) and Company. And
Don Lewch is in a tremendous amount of agriculture (voice overlap,
unintelligible)

Vapaa: (voice overlap, unintelligible)

Johnson: He's a ah,--

Vapaa: Public Relations.

Johnson: Right. That's where our office is. Don is a nice fellow.

Vapaa: He certainly is.

Johnson: He--as a matter of fact, his company that ah, sees to it that we get
this magazine printed.

Vapaa: Well--

Johnson: And ah, it's his people that work with us on it.

Vapaa: I'm sorry we can't show the magazine, Al, ah, on the ah, on the tape.
But y--y--can you get me an extra copy of two that we could include
with the report?
Johnson: Yes. I can give you several extra copies. Ah, I've got ah, the original inaugural issue no. 1. I got a whole stack of 'em in here. And in fact we got--

Vapaa: Oh, I wouldn't ask you for that.

Johnson: Well, I got several of 'em.

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: I mean I got a whole stack of 'em.

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: Of the inaugural issue. And ah, ah, I—that's cause I've got a column in every one but one or two of 'em. And I'm also the first operator of the month they had in the magazine.

Vapaa: Um-hum

Johnson: It's just something new that we got going this year. We did a couple of new items in this ah—in our industry this year that I think was very detrimental to it. And ah, one is the ah, magazine as a means to communicate with all our operators and pilots—and also the industry in general—all county agents and a lot of chemical people receive these magazines. And also we hired a second man to assist our man in Washington, D.C. A fellow by the name of Burt Brower from Kansas City, Missouri.

Vapaa: Well, I'll have to get Don [illegible] and order this for awhile. I'd like to see it because I'm very much interested--

Johnson: I'll put you on the mailing list. I'll—I'll see that you get it.

Vapaa: And what's the cost on it?

Johnson: There—it'll be nothing.

Vapaa: Oh, I--
Johnson: The organization—the organization does this—they send it to county agents. In fact, last week I was up to Cornell and I took a list of names and eh, all the last few meetings I've been, I've been taking a list of names and operators and people who are interested and don't receive the magazine to send it on to 'em. Ah, eventually—we do have a subscription rate, but it's mostly for uninterested people who—who want it. But I don't think we have any on the subscription rate yet. We're just mainly trying to get exposure to it. I think our publication this month is up to 10,000.

Vapaa: Well, I call myself an Agribusiness Consultant now.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: Whatever that means.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: And you can tell people I'm not competing with the county agent.

Johnson: Well, you leave your card with me and I'll be talking with the man this afternoon—

Vapaa: All right.

Johnson: ...because I've got to write my December column. And just leave your name and address and everything with it and I'll just see that you get it.

Vapaa: Well, I've got a card in—be sure—and I'll be glad to do it.

Johnson: And I'll tell 'em to send you all the back issues.

Vapaa: Well, I don't need them all.

Johnson: Well, you might as well have them all if you want a do it.

Vapaa: hum-humph. I think I can do you some good with 'em. Oh, I'm sure
that the University would be glad to have--

Johnson: They do get 'em.

Vapaa: They do?

Johnson: Jo--John McDaniels gets it I know.

Vapaa: Well, that's in Ag School. I'm talking about the Morris Library which is the ah, main library at the college.

Johnson: Well, they probably--

Vapaa: They would get it through the Entomology Department.

Johnson: Yeah. Well this--there are several people who are on the list. I know ah, ah, from the Department of Agriculture we do send it to ah, I think there's 2 people who get it there. I know Martin Isaac is one. And the other one I think is Lee Littleton. I'm-- I'm not sure on Lee Littleton. And ah, we do send it to several other people at the University also. And the county agents.

Vapaa: I've been wanting to ask you too about ah, helicopter spraying. Have you ever done any of this?

Johnson: No. We looked into it several years ago. As a matter of fact, before I started buying Grumman Agcats. And I couldn't see where it was really feasible. And in fact it's not as good on most test results that I have ah, over a fixed wing. Now occasionally you'll get a person who says helicopter is better--or that--and it's only because they think it's better because they see the blade spinning over the top. Ah, but that blade is nothing but ah, the same as wings on a--on an air freight--

Vapaa: plane, right.

Johnson: ...plant. It's a support to keep it in the air. And really your
penetration does not come because the blade is spinning. You can slow it up and get more penetration in a certain area. But then you're not calibrated properly and you could burn a crop or have--damage it. But ah, fixed wing is a lot better than a rotating wing--is the way I sell it--is because you've got an even distribution of air coming out so you know how your spray patterns are going. But when you've got a rotating wing you have no fixed spray pattern because the air is constantly changing, very unstable, and you get very erratic spray patterns.

Vapaa: Do you use anybody in the field for spot--spotting your ah, tract?

Johnson: No. Only for beginner pilots ah, and where we're fertilizing or seeding we will use a flagger. And that's mainly because ah, in particular in fertilizing at higher rates now--lower rates we don't--but at higher rates you've got ah, the airplane is only gonna make a pass or two or three across the field. And he's got to be very accurate. And because we're running at very narrow swaths. We're running maybe 20 feet. And flying fertilizers we fly 'em at 30-40 feet in the air to get the proper spread.

Vapaa: You want the disbursement.

Johnson: Right. Well, we don't--we--th--this is--we can fly 'em lower, but to get the proper spread--

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: ...and--and so you're not damaging the crops or anything to fly it much higher than you fly a 12 or 15 or 18 foot swath. And we use what they call an automatic flagman. Your flags would drift too far. And so we use a flagger in the field to help identify
and mark it. And also they have to use and count the plannings or something.

Vapaa: As long as you've mentioned this business about ah, spraying over the crop. Do you do any of this work on Papen's corn for example? I--

Johnson: Yes. We do some ah, emergency work for their corn. We do quite a bit of work for Papens in a years time.

Vapaa: Because in ah,--for--we--corn ear worm control you have to get this ah, material down between the ear and the leaf.

Johnson: Right. Well you try to put it on the silk on the corn. And we have no problem putting it there. We do a tremendous amount of sweet corn work for ah, Campbells Soup which is W. L. Wheatley in Clayton.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: And we--we do a regular program for them.

Vapaa: You mean it used to be W. L. Wheatley.

Johnson: Yeah. Right. It's--right--the old W. L. Wheatley Company. It's now Campbells Soup--Jo--Joseph Campbell Company. And we do ah, ah, all their sweet corn--their late sweet corn work on a regular preventative ah, program. They seem to be well satisfied with it. We just go in on a 3 spray deal. Wha--we're not trying to completely keep the worms out because you'd have to go on about a 6 spray deal.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: Ah, what we're talking is minimize. Ah, they don't--they have the least amount of damage in the factory. And it seems to be working very effectively. Now we use as I mentioned before--you--you mentioned flagers. We use an automatic flagman which is ah, a piece of
toilet paper about 19 feet long or 18 feet long with a piece of cardboard on the end. And it drops out right underneath the center of the airplane ah, where the airplanes' path was. And we also tie that in with the new system we've just developed and just installing on the airplanes. It's called the smoke. And it's nothing but a sky writing outfit. And we actually lap off--let off plumes of smoke. People think we're on fire sometimes. But ah, we're letting off a plume of smoke to learn where the drift is, where the ah, spray is going to do so we know where it's going, and at the same time in deep crops it is also used as a marker because it will lay there while you make your turn.

Vapaa: You've never done any plane writing or anything like that?
Johnson: No. Skywriting?
Vapaa: Skywriting.
Johnson: No. The only skywriting we do is right in the field (laugh) laying a plume of smoke across there for drifts.
Vapaa: Um-hum. Well. Well, we've talked about helicopters; we've talked about ah, (unintelligible); what have we missed?
Johnson: Well, we haven't missed too much, I guess. Ah, this is--this covers pretty much all aspects of spraying and ah, fertilizing. Ah, we--there is some ah, larger planes used in other countries like in ah, Russia for one. Speaking of Russia you might be interested to know that I'm going to Russia next year as part of ah, an FAA trip.
Vapaa: When will this be, Al?
Johnson: Ah, it's supposed to be in October sometime of next year ah, when they've still got crops--
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: ...coming off. And ah, it's to be swap tour. Twenty or 25 ag operators are going from this country and 20 to 25 from Russia are coming to this country to tour different operations. And-- and we're basically to swap ideas and swap methods and so forth. And in Russia they've got 8,000 ag planes and all the same kind. Where in this country we've got probably about 10 or 12 different kinds.

Vapaa: Do you know anything about the Russian plane itself? Have you ever seen one?

Johnson: Ah, I've seen pictures of it—the AN2. And at our National Convention this year—as I mentioned it's an international meeting—

Vapaa: Yes.

Johnson: ...there's supposed to be ah, ah, an AN2 there. Ah, but the last we've heard it's still not coming. But it's like anything we do with Russia we don't even know who's coming from them til the last minute. And it's been in Canada. We're hoping it will be there. It's a big airplane and a kinda interested in seeing it.

Another problem we've got it on industry is ah, the engines that we've been using on these certain ag planes like the Grumman Agcat and the Thrush Commander and a Weatherly and I think it's an E—E—E—A—Aimair (sp?) ah, EM1. Ah, they all use radio engines in their—. And there hasn't been a—a radio engine built for these airplanes in 30 years. They're all old ah—ah, obsolete military engines that have been kept going remanufactured parts. But there is no engine being remanufactured today. And our problem has been trying to find engines for these airplanes for the future. And we have got a Polish
is going to be there--called the Pedatel (sp?) engine. And ah, they are still building it in Poland. It's a 800 horsepower engine. And it looks like they might be trying to work out arrangements to have them to ship over to this country to put on these airplanes of the future.

Vapaa: It's not--it'll not be a radial engine though?
Johnson: It'll be a radial.
Vapaa: A radial engine.
Johnson: It's the only radial that we know of that's being built. That's the reason--that's a piston engine.
Vapaa: Piston engine.
Johnson: Right.
Vapaa: Now these are all ah, 4 cycle engines still? Any 2 cycle?
Johnson: No. They're all 4 cycle engines. Ah, radials run in usually odd assortments like 7, 9 or 14 something like that. Fourteen is a double bank composite of two 7's.
Vapaa: Right. Right. Well, we still have a good 15 minutes or more here on our ah, recorder and I'd like to talk a little bit more about your convention, if you want to talk a little bit about it. 'Cause I know you're all tied up in the plans for it.
Johnson: Yeah. Well, the convention is ah--if you'll open that magazine, you can see ah,--. Here I'll show you. There's a--a schedule of the ah, speakers and so forth who will be at the convention this year. Ah, towards the end here somewhere. Ah, in fact, here's a display of all the aircraft and exhibitors who are gonna be there.
That's most of 'em. I'd say all of 'em. It's not quite all.
But this is the ah, speakers who are gonna be there. We're gonna
have ah, starting December the 3rd we got the ah, Honorable Michael
Callahan, Governor of Nevada, who I introduce and--to the group. And--

Vapaa: We had Barry Goldwater in Tucson.

Johnson: Yeah, right. Well, Barry is ah, good. We tried to get him a couple
of years ago.

Vapaa: (unintelligible)

Johnson: We seemed to run into a lot of problems getting ah, government of-
ficials. So we've kinda given up on 'em because at the last minute
they'll--

Vapaa: Cancel out.

Johnson: ...cancel out. And it's really annoying to run a convention this
way and have 'em cancelling out. So we're gonna look to the future
and not bring 'em--too many--government officials. We did have one
cancel out. And I'll mention about him in a second here.
Oh, that's Owen Maleski (sp?). These are insurance people. The in-
surance is actually big in our (?)--ah, industry.

Vapaa: Do you have any trouble getting insurance?

Johnson: No. None at all. I carry A.C. Records (?)

Vapaa: What do you carry?

Johnson: We carry liability--that's around a million dollars. And we carry--
ah, haul insurance we don't carry but in very limited amounts. We
don't--we work on--our safety record. And haul is very expensive.
And I feel as though we--we've already bought a few airplanes by not
insuring 'em. And of course, Jerry Litton--. You've probably heard
of him—the Democrat from Missouri. He's a very good speaker.
I heard him speak at the Madison (?) meeting—I think it was last
March at the National Association for State Department of Agriculture.
Like your Martin Isaacs and these types.

Vapaa: Um-hum. Yeah.

Johnson: ...people form to. And ah, he's a very good speaker. He replaced
Senator Benson—Be—Benson who just cancelled out about 2 weeks ago
at the last minute because they got this mini convention coming up
here. And ah, this is kinda why we lost a few of our speakers.

Vapaa: Well, Benson's from Texas isn't he?

Johnson: Benson. He was one potential president in the future.

Vapaa: Yes.

Johnson: Um-hum. And he ah, dropped out at the last minute. And we've also
got James Al—ah, Agee (sp?). He's the ah, Assistant Administrator
for the Office of Water and Hazardous Materials. Eh, ah, he's from
the EPA. He's the big guy in the EPA that's inspecting our industry.

Vapaa: Do you find that the people go to the meetings that attend the con-
vention? I mean--

Johnson: Yes.

Vapaa: ...attend sessions?

Johnson: Yes. The—we've kept it very interesting. And we do get a tremendous
turnout at the meetings. Ah, one of the most informative ones that
we have for the operators in the industry is the ah, ah, the ah—
they call it concurrent sessions. And in the concurrent sessions
you'll have an airframe manufacturer, an engine manufacturer and
they'll describe their ah, problems with their products or infor-
Johnson: Information or anything that's important that the industry should know. And of course, we also have chemical seminars or chemical concurrent sessions the same way. And they'll also discuss their chemicals and any hazards that we should be alerted of.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Or anything interesting about the chemicals. And then of course, we got this general ah,--well, as a matter of fact, here it is right here--airframe and engine sessions. There's a Piper Aircraft sitting there. Bell Helicopter and round engines (?). And each one is in a different meeting room at the same time. We try to--to organize 'em so that we're not too--conflicting with anyone. And then you've got chemical sessions that afternoon. And then the next day you've got the same thing--chemical sessions and airframe and engine manufacturer sessions. Ah, like I said there's a 156 booths on display there with everything from ah, chemicals on up to ah, modern jet engines. And there'll be a PT6 on display again I'm sure. They're looking to the future of putting PT6 turbine engines in the ag plane of the future. They're talking about airplanes in another few years costing $100,000--ah, spray airplanes. Ah, and of course, there'll be 27 airplanes on display.

Vapaa: What will this high cost mean to an individual operator like you? I mean ah, one--. You consider yourself a relatively small operator don't you?

Johnson: Ah, I'm about a average operator in the County.

Vapaa: Average?
Johnson: Yeah. Average runs about a 3 plane operation.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Little over an average. Average runs around 2½ - 2½.

Vapaa: Who are your biggest operators?

Johnson: The biggest operators that I know of in the country--there's a couple of 'em. I don't know who's the biggest. I think George Mitchell who was last year's President in ah, ah, Beaumont, Texas. As a matter of fact, there he is there.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: Ah, he operates 27 airplanes. He kinda fell in his operation. His father was killed when he ah--on a very freak type of an accident. It wasn't an airplane accident. He was just learning the business at the time. And ah, they had a gas--some sort of a high--highly toxic gasoline break. And it settled in this low spot on the road. And he was running out to the field early in the morning--him and another fellow--where he was gonna work that day. And when he flew over he saw 'em both slumped over in the truck. And he run through this highly toxic gas there and it killed 'em--right there.

Vapaa: Humph.

Johnson: It was a very freak type of accident. But he took over the business. And there is another operator--ah, American Dusting Company ah, which is operated or just been bought by the fellow--originally his son, Ray Fry (?). Ah, matter of fact, I just talked with him about 3 days ago out in ah, ah, Denver, Colorado.

Vapaa: That's 2 names--Ray Fry?
Johnson: Ray Fry.
Vapaa: Ray's his first name?
Johnson: Right. Um-hum.
Vapaa: OK.
Johnson: And ah, he--they used to have as high as 80 airplanes going at one time. But right now I don--I think they're probably operating somewhere around 14 - 15 airplanes. And ah--fact, he was at my annual party this year again which I have every year for my growers and people. And we had about ah, 25 operators--30 operators from all over the country at my party also.
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: Three out of California and Texas and--
Vapaa: Yeah. I'm well aware of these parties because the potato growers still have their parties too. And--
Johnson: Yes.
Vapaa: ...and some of these over the years have been kind of interesting I thought.
Johnson: Yeah. Well, this is the--basically the same as involves all my customers and a good portion of potato growers do it and--
Vapaa: Right.
Johnson: Fact, this year at my party one of the potato growers did mention that ah, ah, it seems kind a funny but the potato growers they--well, there's 2 different ones that they had in the area--Tom Moore and Joe Lamberta have kinda gone smaller and you've gone bigger each year. (laugh) I feel like that's telling you something. (laugh)
Vapaa: Well--

Johnson: Of course, they're in the brokerage end of it and in that too and chemical end. They've kind a gone downhill on that mainly because it's more ah, acceptable to me to be applying the chemicals.

Vapaa: Well, Joe tells me that he doesn't plan to grow a tomato--potato next year.

Johnson: No. He's been talking about it for a few years now not raising any. So I don't know.

Vapaa: But he is gonna sell 'em. He loves to sell.

Johnson: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He's still gonna broker 'em I'm sure.

Vapaa: Um-hum. And ah, of course, that's a separate phase of the business entirely and you're not involved in it at all.

Johnson: No. I'm not involved in brokeraging at all and don't even care to be. I've got enough just keeping the ah, chemicals going.

Vapaa: Um-hum. What else do you have here for the meeting that you think would be interesting to us?

Johnson: Ah, well, of course, we'll have our natural--national election out there which ah, we'll pick a new set of officers--slate of officers.

Vapaa: Who's coming up for President? Or will you have a new President?

Johnson: Yes. The ah, the nominating committee had our Board meeing in Washington in October ah, 16th, 17th have ah, nominated this year's Vice President to run as President which will be James Maxwell from ah, Mississippi. He's got an ag operation down there. He's an elderly guy. He doesn't fly himself anymore. But he is also

Oral History Project of the University of Delaware
George K. Vapaa, Narrator
President of the Cotton Council. He's a big cotton farmer also down there.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: And the ah, Vice President will be James Vetter a man from California who I know very well. In fact, I've got him interested in the organization because I-- I do want to see another California President very shortly.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: And he's the most potential one we have. We have 2 from California who I think will be very good. The other is an Everett Pingray (sp?) who flew his little airplane all the way out here to the Board Meeting and to my party in October. So that was a long trip clear across the country.

Vapaa: Sure. How long did it take him?

Johnson: Well he--took him about ah, 4½ days because he was going different places visiting people. He likes to go up to Idaho and then down ju-- just going around visiting people that he knows.

Vapaa: Do most of you take your wives with you when you go to these national meetings?

Johnson: The National Convention a good portion bring their wives. Ah, of course, I've only had a wife recently so I hadn't been bringing one. (laugh) And I suppose the way it looks I'm gonna be the fir--first President that went into office single and then came out married. Most of em go in married and come out almost single because it is quite a--a task to run as President because you are running all over the country.

Vapaa: Yes. Sure. Now, Al, you've been married twice though actually haven't you?
Johnson: Well, this is actually my third time.

Vapaa: Third time.

Johnson: Um-hum. My first one was just an early young one that didn't last very long. I've got a--

Vapaa: What was her name?

Johnson: Betty Lou ah, Cooper--ah, Betty Lou Johnson--I mean ah, Darling originally.

Vapaa: Un-hun. Was she a local girl?

Johnson: Yes. It's Ronnie Darling's sister.

Vapaa: Oh, yeah.

Johnson: Ronnie Darling the ah, ah, Representative.

Vapaa: Representative of the Legislature.

Johnson: Right. And ah, and the second one was a girl out of Pittsburgh who--I don't know if you knew--she wound up having a lot of mental problems and everything and--and I'm still--. That--eh, I've been divorced from her for 7 years--or 6 years I guess. Anyway, I'm still not through because she's been remarried for 4 years. And as a matter of fact, I was in the attorney's office again this morning. We're still having problems. Jus--just about a year ago last November the 5th I think it was or 6th she came back here. Her husband didn't know where she was or anything. Just came back and moved right in over night. You know, just all of a sudden boom she's here. And wound up she was here for about 3 or 4 days. And ah, finally we didn't know what to do or how to handle this thing. The next thing I know she was gone. And she--we had the law looking for her clear
up in to Canada because nobody knew where she was for over a week. And ah, she's had a lot of problems. And as you know, ah, we're still fighting custody and support and so forth on this child--mainly the custody. And yet getting arrangements made on it.

Vapaa: What ki--I mean ah, how old is the child? And is it a boy or girl?
Johnson: Seven. She's going to be 8 in January.
Vapaa: I see. And her name?
Johnson: It's a girl. Lucinda Dawn Johnson.
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: In fact, when I--when you called me that's where I was. I was at the Vital Statistics getting her birth certificate--
Vapaa: Um-hum.
Johnson: Because her mother has now registered her in a--in a Catholic school up in Pennsylvania under their maid--under their married name. And not the name of Johnson, but the name of McHenry which she's not. So I had to get the birth certificate and send it on up to try and get this clarified. We've constantly got problems with the woman. And I don't know why the Court just let her have custody of the child again, but they've got this mother image that think that mothers should be the ah, ah--the child should live with the mother. And ah, the Judge just didn't know I guess what we've got to go through to try to--
Vapaa: Well, Al, we've been talking a lot about ah, marriage here and now. Does this present any problems for a--an operator like you? Do you--or to your wife do you feel?
Johnson: Yeah. It— it's not a good business to be married. And ah, I've seen it. Ah, eh, it's awful hard because you—you're very busy in the summertime. And in particular both my wife—my second wife and my present wife were school—are school teachers. My—my second wife is yet. My first wife is no longer—or second wife. Put it this way—let me go back again.

Vapaa: All right.

Johnson: My second wife is no longer a school teacher 'cause she's married and lives in Pennsylvania. But my third wife and present wife, she is a school teacher at Allen Frear School. And she enjoys it. A very good girl. I— I—

Vapaa: What grades she teach?

Johnson: She teaches sp— eh, social and emotional eh, special education.

Vapaa: Special education kids.

Johnson: Um-hum. And ah, but she's a very understanding woman. And she— I explained all this to her in the beginning. Ah, ah, about what my business curtails. Ah, in the summertime it's very demanding. That I could make an appointment to go somewhere with her— a dinner arrangement or anything—and something come up that I just can't go. Well, she understands this.

Vapaa: That's like the problem we had last Friday.

Johnson: Right.

Vapaa: When I'm sure that meeting lasted a lot longer than you thought it would.

Johnson: Right. It went into much later and by the time I got out of there
it was--it was too late to even consider doing anything else.

Vapaa: Right.

Johnson: And this happens. And like I say this girl's very understanding. She's known me since she was 13 years old. She's had a crush on me believe it or not that long.

Vapaa: Um-hum.

Johnson: But ah, she was a friend of ah, a good customer of--of mine, Jim Bounds. He used to be with King-Cole.

Vapaa: Oh, yes.

Johnson: That was--she was a friend of his daughter, Pam Bounds. And ah, she's known me--she's known enough about me because I've dated her for over 5 years before I married her so she would get very familiar with what I do. And it doesn't bother her at all because she's just as happy staying right here. She's not a traveling girl although she does love to travel with me.

Vapaa: Did I ask you her--her maiden name yet?

Johnson: Yes. Lehmann.

Vapaa: Lehmann.

Johnson: Yeah.

Vapaa: That's right. Yeah, well, we're about at the point I think ah, Al, where we can think of winding this thing up.

Johnson: Um-hum.

Vapaa: And ah, there is about 3 or 4 minutes on here if there's anything more that you'd like to add. I--

Johnson: Well, I don't know what it would be about ah--

Vapaa: You're going to be busy at this National Meeting--
Johnson: Yes.

Vapaa: ...ah, trying to keep all the things going smoothly.

Johnson: Yeah. I've got ah, either moderate or--or give a talk to 5 different ah, meetings out there. 'Course I give the ah, welcoming speech and--

Vapaa: Yes.

Johnson: ...several--moderated several of the ah, meetings. And then also I've got ah, 4 receptions to be at. Ah, one of 'em is the President's reception. And of course, my wife will be out there for that also. And then the other 3 are--are general like insurance committee reception and the foreign dignitaries reception and--and then I forgot what the 4th one was--I think exhibitor's reception is what it is for all the exhibitors. So I've got quite a--quite a task out there.

Vapaa: Well, one other question or (clears throat)--you said you have exhibits. Now--and you'll have some planes there. Will those planes be in town or will they be out at the airport?

Johnson: They'll be right in the building.

Vapaa: Oh.

Johnson: They'll be right in the convention center.

Vapaa: You mean you'll knock em down and--

Johnson: No. They'll taxi right down the street. We've got a pretty good arrangement out there with the Sheriff's Department. And ah, we can taxi em right down the street and put em right inside the building. Now this is the first year we've been in the convention center. Other years we've ah--the last 3 years in Las Vegas we've had em in the
Vapaa: Hilton Hotel and had the airplanes set right up inside. We've knocked 'em down and set 'em up inside. And ah, it's beautiful. If you--I think somewhere I've got a photograph here I can show you what it looked like with the airplanes and ag planes in a carpeted room with chandeliers. And believe me it's a beautiful hangar.

Johnston: Yes, I'm sure it is.

Vapaa: But it is quite impressive--very impressive. And this year we will be in the convention center. It won't be quite as impressive because there is no carpeting or is no chandeliers, but the airplanes will be inside a building with the display booth. In fact, that layout I showed you here shows you how the airplanes basically will be laid out.

Vapaa: I might say that we're looking at--which issue is this?

Johnston: This is the new one that just come out. I just got it today.

Vapaa: What's the date on it?


Johnston: This is Volume 1, No. 9.

Vapaa: Volume 1, No. 9.

Johnston: No. 9 issue.

Vapaa: Well Al, I think I'm going to ah, consider stopping at this point. And I want to thank you for the use of your time. A--it's a project that I think the University'll be glad to have. I mean the information they'll be glad to have. And some student 50 or 100 years from now is gonna be glad to know what happened in 1974 in Magnolia,
Delaware.

Johnson: Well--

Vapaa: Thanks ever so much.

Johnson: Thank you.

Vapaa: OK, I'll let this thing run on out.

Johnson: All right ah, and give me your address on there--

Vapaa: All right.

Johnson: ...and I'll see that you get a copy of these. I'm surprised the man hasn't called me. He normally calls me about this time of the day.

Vapaa: I don't know what the best time of the day is to call you, Al.

Johnson: Well, it's really--the best is usually in the morning. Early.

Vapaa: By the way, are you a turtle?

Johnson: You bet your sweet ass! (laughter)

Vapaa: We got that on there. (laughter)

Johnson: I could say a little more but it'll go on tape. (laughter)

Vapaa: Well, it doesn't make any difference. (laughter)

Johnson: No, I've got a--

Vapaa: Do you know the Turtle Organization originated in Delaware?

Johnson: De--is that right?

Vapaa: 1957 down at ah, The Bottle and Cork down at Dewey Beach.

Johnson: I'll be darned.

Vapaa: A bunch of reserve officers from down--up in Delaware here were down at camp--at the summer camp and a good friend of mine in Wilmington--I might as well tell you his name. His name is Julius Reiver. I
went to school with him and so forth. And he had a reserve commission as Lieutenant Colonel. And ah, at night they'd go out and entertain themselves. And this is what they'd do. They'd initiate turtles. And--do you have a card?

Johnson: I got the pins. I think I've got a card. I--

Vapaa: If you don't have a card, I'll give you a new one.

Johnson: Did you ever see the turtles making love? I even got those.

Vapaa: No. Not like the porcupine--?

Johnson: In a tie clip.

Vapaa: Oh, in a tie clip.

Johnson: Yeah, Yeah. I wear it quite a bit.

Vapaa: Oh. (laughter) OK. Well, I think I'll ah, cut this thing off now.

THE END