

Information gathered by Judy Allen August 22, 2022

Johnnie Joe Bench

Army, Artillery 3 years went to Okinawa 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division

Johnnie Bench is a veteran of the United States Army. He served from April 14, 1953 to March 31, 1956 and received an honorable discharge as a Corporal. His basic training took place at Camp Chaffee at Ft. Smith, Arkansas. "I served during peace time in Okinawa and also served a year at Fort Hood," said Johnnie. His job in the service was a gunner. "We spent time on alert when the Chinese people were shooting across Formosa," said Johnnie.

He was proud of service to his country, but preferred to discuss memories of his youth and non-military adult years.

"I started to school at Owl Creek, went to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, moved to Stonewall and went there a year, then moved down to Eubanks, a little one room school north of Tupelo. We were only down there because my Uncle Clay was sick with Leukemia and we had to take care of him. I went through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I had to pick cotton and work so I didn't go to any more classrooms. Some of my best memories were getting away from home and getting out of that cotton patch."

Johnnie said, "We did a lot of squirrel hunting when I was little. They were good cooked in bacon grease. We didn't have a lot of places to fish when I was growing up. We lived pretty close to a creek, but I never caught anything from it!"

Johnnie said, "In the summertime, I used to go to California and bale hay for my uncle. We would get caught up (with work), and go deep sea fishing. That was fun. We would fish for albacore," said Johnnie. "One time we went fishing by San Diego and the fish we caught were yellow tail."

I had four brothers and one sister. At Christmas, we didn't have a big tree. Halloween we would go around a little bit, get a treat here and there. When we were kids we would hunt Easter Eggs. The last time I remember Easter egg hunting we lived up by High Hill north of Lula and friends come up from north of Owl Creek by wagon and we had an egg hunt. They gave me the whooping cough. Of course, I don't think they knew they had it! I had everything, measles, mumps, chicken pox! The worst thing I had was problems with my tonsils growing up."

First automobile my family got was a 1936 Ford, and I think it was a dark gray. There weren't many colors back then.

Johnnie was asked to describe himself. He said, "I guess for 88 I am not in too bad of shape – my old brain is probably as good as it ever was. My old back and legs are sure beat up. Too many years standing and lifting on concrete."

He said he had heard of the historic Choctaw Code Talkers of WWI and WWII. "I don't think I ever met a Code Talker – if I did, he wasn't talking Code!" he laughed.

Johnnie did have an old Choctaw to English language dictionary with Chief Gardner's photo in it, gifted him many years ago. He said the problem was to learn to pronounce the words right. One word of Choctaw he said he could always remember – *Oka* – water.

“My best memories from my youth were on the farm, hanging out with other boys, fighting wasp nests, playing Tarzan in the trees. I thought I broke my neck once when a limb broke with me!” said Johnnie.

“One time we caught a skunk – hemmed it up in the barn. She had a bunch of little ones. Talk about smelling! If you get skunk on your clothes, even after they have been washed, they still smell if you get close to a hot stove!” said Johnnie.

Talking about US Presidents of the past, Johnnie said, “I think Jimmy Carter was the most moral President we have had.” His favorite President was Ronald Reagan. “Reagan was down to earth and knew what he was doing. He knew something about economy. He got us back on what he called trickle down economics - that means advancing slow. That is the only way to go.”

And a last word of advice regarding the economy to young people from Johnnie, “Buy your needs before your wants.”

~~Interview collected by Judy Allen August 22 2022 at home of Johnnie Bench, Allen, Oklahoma~~