

Francis Marion Meason and my dad, Bert Lynze Johnson, (born William Henry Johnson) were cousins, although when they first met and my dad hired Marion to work for him in pharmaceutical sales, neither was aware they were related. They both shared a grandmother, Rebecca Francis (Williams) Johnson. Rebecca was born in Tennessee in 1853 and married two cousins, Issac Sydney Johnson, a confederate veteran, and after he died, Marion Alfred Johnson, Issac Sydney's cousin. Dad was descended from Issac Sydney and Marion from Marion Alfred. Rebecca birthed at least 11 children from those two marriages. The first in Kentucky in 1872 and the last in Tennessee in 1902. Then sometime shortly after the turn of the century and probably just after Rebecca's 50th birthday the family moved from middle Tennessee to Granite, Oklahoma in the newly opened Indian Territory. I interviewed Marion about that side of the family shortly before he died sometime around 2005. My dad had died many years earlier and had not imparted much about that side of the family. Dad's father, William Louis Johnson, left his mother early and so Dad did not have much information to pass on. However, Marion's mother was still living and gave him a bunch of facts and stories to pass to me. And one of the stories illustrated the toughness of Rebecca Francis (Williams) Johnson. Marion spent a few years with his Grandmother when he was a boy and described her as one of the toughest persons and unyielding taskmasters he ever met. Marion wasn't any wimp when it came to toughness. He had been a 101st paratrooper in WWII. He made several combat jumps, including a jump into St. Mere Eglise in Normandy, wherein he jumped out as a corporal and landed as the First Sergeant of his Company; a jump into Holland where he was wounded by a propellerless aircraft that strafed his unit; and he remembered a December fight in Bastogne, where he described finding frozen cabbage heads in a bombed out building, and thawing out the leaves under their field jackets, so that they could have something to eat and continue the fight. Those were tough folks and tough times. However, Marion saw his Grandmother as something special when it came to toughness. Marion said that at some point after Rebecca Francis Johnson moved to Granite, Oklahoma, her arm became infected, blood poisoning, from a nasty cut. There were no antibiotics and no medical folk around. Untreated, her arm was sure to turn gangrenous and she would have died. Instead, she directed her children to hold her down on the kitchen table and cut off her arm with a kitchen knife. They did and she survived with one arm for many more decades and therein, passed her example of toughness down to another generation or two. Marion said after living with that woman for a while he found most of his Army training a picnic, his training cadre rather pleasant folks and even some of his combat experience as not much more frightening. Rebecca Francis had prepared him well for what he had to face.