

Virgil Allison

Interviewer: So what is your name and when were you born?

Mr. Allison: Willie Virgil Allison born October 1, 1913 in Montgomery County.

Interviewer: So you were born here and is this where you grew up Montgomery County?

Mr. Allison: Yes

Interviewer: What was it like growing up in Montgomery County say in the 1930s?

Mr. Allison: I was grew up on a farm farming rocky hill sides all the way through the 20s and 30s very hard times through the depression. There wasn't any jobs of course farming of course it was pretty had no money we didn't hardly know what money was. Fact is I guess I think I always told a few people this I think I worked probably for the lowest salary of anyone you ever heard of. I worked for a country doctor once the whole year for \$100 for the whole year and room and board. That was seven days a week on the farm taking care of the live stock and farming all of that. So I think that's a pretty low wage.

Interviewer: So your parents were farmers?

Mr. Allison: Yes

Interviewer: What kind of crops did you raise?

Mr. Allison: Corn and tobacco.

Interviewer: Did you like living on a farm?

Mr. Allison: Did I like it?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Allison: It's all I knew. I suppose so I thought a lot of times then that I didn't like it but afterwards I could look back and see that it was better than I thought it was. I farmed until the last crop I raised was 1939. And I got my crops all out corn and tobacco what not and sold it early and down here in Montgomery County Clarksville Lake down here probably you've heard of it. That's where I was down there in fact is I helped build the whole lake clear it off build the dam and all that and everything that year. And sold my crop out early and I think maybe I had \$150 or better all left after all expenses so I thought I was rich. I took off and went to Michigan with money in my pocket thought I had it made and there wasn't any jobs in Detroit of course the money didn't last a terribly only time if that. But that's the last crop I raised.

Interviewer: What was your schooling like?

Mr. Allison: Schooling I never finished completely finished high school. In fact I went to high school at what used to be the old Lodfellow Building in Dotsonville and I went to high school there and way later

on I got more education I could after the service and everything which is a long story between all of this. I became a preacher Baptist Preacher and then I attended Belmont College and Austin Peay at night and got as well educated as I could but never so many things I never finished just had some courses.

Interviewer: So how was your family affected by the depression?

Mr. Allison: Well just don't know how we made it but we did. Very meager but and they was I had one brother and a sister and the three of us and my stepdad which my mom got married when I was ten years old and looking back on it I think he did a real good job. And by the way I had to finally put him in a nursing home when he was about 100 years old and he finally dies at 114.

Interviewer: During the depression did you follow the politics of President Roosevelt at all? Were you a supporter of President Roosevelt?

Mr. Allison: Yes we thought he was the king I suppose. Don't know why can't hardly exactly remember but I got my social security number some how sometimes 1938 whenever it started I can't recall I didn't look back but 38 or 9 I got my social security number. The reason I know cause I applied for work at the Clarksville lake and I presented my social security number and he said beings you've showed me your number now, he was working a lot of men down there clearing off the whole territory of the lake you know everything, and as I said jobs there wasn't any. And he was paying he said I've got to pay you 30 cents and hours but don't you tell because everybody else here is making 25. So that's the reason I remember I had my number.

Interviewer: Now why did you decide to join up with the Navy?

Mr. Allison: Presably I thought about that lots of times I did there just wasn't any money wasn't any jobs and they looked appealing to me and I wanted to get in. And I knew I would have a living I would have a place to sleep and plenty to eat and \$21 a month. So I went in the Navy August 8, 1940.

Interviewer: Now were you thinking about making it a career or just a temporary kind of thing?

Mr. Allison: Yeh I intended for it to be a career. I can still tell you my service number.

Interviewer: No you enlisted in 1940 were you aware of some of the developments that were going on overseas like the rise of Hitler and that sort of thing? Were you concerned that maybe you might actually get into a war?

Mr. Allison: I don't know can't recall what I actually thought that they would get in a war or not I was aware of what was going on. And later on after being pretty soon I began to realize that one of these days I might get in it.

Interviewer: Now where did you do like your basic training at?

Mr. Allison: Norfolk, Virginia.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Mr. Allison: Most lonesome time I ever had in my life. I had one boy that I was with a whole lot and he and I both wanted to join the Navy and go together and then it was you had to pass a pretty stiff written examination of what all to get into the Navy. And I don't know how come but I made just a point or two very little higher than he did and I got in first and was about finished training when he finally come in so you can imagine I was there you know never hardly been away form home too far and what not. I was lonesome and homesick it was pretty rough time for a while.

Interviewer: What are some of the things they teach you there like what were some of the things you trained on and do?

Mr. Allison: Princible exercise how to obey orders how to march or I can recall I've thought of that many times there were some that just couldn't hardly keep step and what not. The fact that I didn't have to go out but for a little while somehow or another I guess I must have passed what who was teaching it. Had one or two boys that just couldn't get with it you had to perform certain exercises and know exactly the sequences and they couldn't get with it and I can recall that for a lone time there I finished up doing all the exercised at my barracks instead of out on the field with those that couldn't catch on to it teaching them exactly and that all of the sequence of the whole thing. Did pretty good I thought I was real fine.

Interviewer: Were you trained to do like a specific job in the Navy?

Mr. Allison: No they don't teach you that other than being a seaman how to cope on the ship for instance we slide the ship at port and which it star ward and left and forward and in all of the Navy terms and a whole lot of things like that until you decide what branch of the that you want to get into. I was a Gunners Mate.

Interviewer: Now you got to choose that or is that where you got assigned?

Mr. Allison: Yeh I got to choose it.

Interviewer: And why did you choose that?

Mr. Allison: I don't know exactly I just thought well of course my duty ship my first duty ship was a battle ship and I was kind of carried away with all of those big guns. And I guess that's one reason I got in I was wound up actually later on on machine guns I was gun captain.

Interviewer: What does a gunner's mate do what is that position mean?

Mr. Allison: It means actually it was general over all you'd have nest of machine guns or whatever I was assigned part-time to the five inch thirty eight which is a little larger gun actually on the destroyer when I got into battle and all that. Then you had machine gun crew and I had a crew of about four or five and your duties was to keep that gun well oiled, reamed and put away where the sand wouldn't get on it keep your ammunition be sure it was ready to go at all times all like that. And to instruct the men I can recall one little incident that to show you what I mean by the men I had one young boy he wasn't but very young just got in the Navy hadn't been in but a little while and he was real young about 18, 19 years old. And the first battle we was in and he lost it he just like he went to pieces and I just I was

amazed at myself I told him said your in all this I said just calm down now you remember we've been we've taught you this and I've told you this and this and this time was going to come and it's here now and we're going to get them before they get us and the ole boy calmed down and made did a good job.

Interviewer: Now which ship were you initially assigned to?

Mr. Allison: The USS Idaho.

Interviewer: Okay that was a battle ship?

Mr. Allison: Battle ship yeh.

Interviewer: What were your impressions when you first got on the Idaho?

Mr. Allison: Biggest thing I ever saw I never couldn't imagine a ship like this having seven or eight hundred telephones on it and visiting all over it when I would get a chance for instance on Sundays or sometime. And I would visit and explore and I'd ask sometime I'd ask men that had been on there since the sip was commissioned 20 years ago he had been on there all that and he said I never knew that was there. I just it was amazing and how they did and if its got head gears and its supposed to have a hole here and what not and what to do and you'd show there all what they do how they balanced and how they keep the ship on even keel so many many things amazing.

Interviewer: What were you assigned to do on that ship?

Mr. Allison: I was a gunner mate.

Interviewer: And how long were you actually on that ship before you were transferred to the other ship you were telling me about?

Mr. Allison: Let's see I was O got on that ship in I don't know exact dates but I know that after when they took us around and they put me on the ship I spent Christmas Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in Honolulu and I thought I was in paradise. And remember writing back home how beautiful it was there and all these kind of things you know and that was of course December of 1940. And I stayed on that ship until about well not too terrible long I stayed on there until sometime in 41 must have been early fall of 41. And then I had my gunnery officer which was a fine man and he thought that I was a good gunners mate I don't know why but he did and he had a buddy that he had been through Annapolis with and on this destroyer that needed an experienced gunners mate so guess who got the job, I did. Transferred on to it while I was in Iceland in all that rough water so instead of going out you know big waves higher than two or three houses and plowing threw them I got on one and road them.

Interviewer: Now which destroyer was this?

Mr. Allison: Hammann, Hammann 412 Hammann.

Interviewer: What was the transition like going from a battle ship to a destroyer were you disappointed or?

Mr. Allison: Yeh very much ready I was thinking about the gunnery officer he was a fine man did me a lot of favors on a whole lot of things but I thought about it but he didn't do me one here. HE put me on this thing and it just well I come to find out the best duty in the Navy the larger the ship the better you were. We it was for instance in that Northern Atlantic and I was on just transferred on to it and where I had been able to sit at the table or somewhere in the mess hall on the battle ship we've gone as high as weeks at a time that we never could set down to eat. See we was patrolling and convoying those ships and it was ruff all the time it just didn't let up. In fact it was so much of the time and it would get so ruff that you was forbidden to go outside if you went outside they would court marshal you. You know if you was lost out there you was just lost.

Interviewer: So what's life like aboard a war ship was it cramped did you have any privacy any free time?

Mr. Allison: Oh yeh not a whole lot of privacy on a small ship however you did have a few moments at a time. You was pretty well cramped you know. I've known a time that we would be caught forward maybe on watch at a certain time on your guns or whatever and this certain worse storm would come up or something and you weren't allowed outside and you'd have to stay there all night. I've stayed in the mess hall which was a room about twice the size of this or something and the ole everyone that would have to be forward would be there and you sleeping on the floor maybe almost on one another it's not much privacy, closeness. Everybody knew everybody.

Interviewer: What was the food like?

Mr. Allison: Good food good food. The only thing was on this destroyer like I said about this eating not being able to sit down, you was given a bowl you first of all your food was on a table in large pans and they were strapped to the table. And you were given a bowl and you would put your arm around the extension which was you know like pillars and get this food and that and put it all in that bowl and find somewhere you could hold to while you ate it. It was so ruff you know ordinarily you would go to the little mess hall sit down eat and it was alright. I'll never forget one time I we had been I don't know it had been weeks since we had been down to the mess hall set down to eat and this time it was as calm as it usually ever got so they had us all eat in the mess hall that day. And we all went down there and everybody got just about ready to eat all of our plates served and what not and then we had a submarine contact. That means that a sub out here somewhere and naturally we all had to run to our battle stations. And you talking about a mess when we come back that mess all of the dishes all of the food broken dishes and all in that room you can imagine the mess they had.

Interviewer: So if you could describe for me what a typical day would be like on a war ship like what time did you wake up what kind of job did you do and that sort of thing?

Mr. Allison: Some kind of funny thing about on a battleship for instance of course you get up I don't know early early in the morning you had revelry I don't remember the hour. First of all I was assigned a ship about 80, 80 or a little better in that division when we managed number 3 turret it was 3rd division on the ship and about 80 of us. During this time and all this happened all the time with all of the other divisions throughout the ship certain ones someone within that group was assigned the duties to get up a little earlier than revelry and go to the mess hall to get coffee to serve to the for the whole crew. And

that was that would be about 30 minutes before chow time, breakfast, and then you would get as you finished with that by the time you did all you needed going to brush your teeth and this and that your hygiene stuff everything. Then you got the time to for your duties now of course our duties on a battleship you had all these water tight doors and well I don't know if you know what I mean or not out on deck they just doors where you had to go down into the other places you know. Well on all these we had the hardware on these doors that fasten them down their water tight you know we called them dogs I don't know what their full name is but anyway they was all solid brass. And I can remember the times when of course we had your job on that ship was to keep this whole side this whole division in tip top shape that meant the deck and all that hardware and everything else that was showing. And I've shinned that stuff up and all those we call them dogs they come apart here and their fancy and they a screw screwed down on them and time would come for lunch and you would think well that looked like a pile of gold it was all of them were clean bright polish up on and I'd have a whole pile of them. Well I knew that just after chow you had to do something you had to be doing something all the time so all I would do just as I when they would sound show time I'd take me up one of these cans of bright worth polish and pour it on them and it would turn black you know black looking. So then afternoon I'd have to shine them all again. So I mean you to do you had to do you done something all of the time you had to clean the floor they had a way of everyone line up and line up that stacking it was wooden deck of course hard wood I reckon I don't know exactly what it was but any how you had a brick a little side of brick and you a little hole in the brick and you had a little stick you put down in that brick everybody everybody all of the time all 80 of us everybody and you shine that floor you know with that brick clean them off and then wash it down all that stuff and everything. Of course it was up to you to keep everything everything tip top shape. I mean you couldn't find a stop of dust no where on the railing no where on anything you touch you know so it was quite a job keep it. And as well the gun the number 3 turret was our responsibility and that meant that the guns here actually the guns themselves and all the powered the shoots where the powered comes up all the way down to the bottom which was about probably 6, 5 or 6 decks below where they come up from way down there all of the powder and everything. And it was up to you to keep it and everyone of these where all of these powder bags you see these well there was guns that took 50 pound of black powder and so forth all the powder you put about 150 pound behind each on each gun here and you had all of these trees that this went in there they was all solid brass and you had to keep all of them shined. So there was something to do all the time you had to do something you didn't just sit around and do nothing.

Interviewer: So where were you at when you first heard about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Allison: Rakovic Ford Iceland we happened to be in port and it was my duty as I mentioned before there to deliver the mail to all of the other ships the official mail from one officer to all them and that's what I was doing when the Japs the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor. I was they had assigned me a boat and I'd go from ship to ship to ship and deliver that mail and that's what I was doing. And by the way a side line on that this I don't know whether you ever saw a battleship or something like that or not the turrets are round its steel and this is unbelievable and I tell it to the battle I don't know whether they ever believed it or not but I know what I saw and I saw what I saw. We had been out for quit a while and one of these battleships that I went on carrying the mail to that steel that's around there you know its round I

mention this particularly because you would think its round the waves it that and its supposed to come around that steel had been so ruff out that it was torn in a lot of places that long that wide from the just like you had taken a piece of paper and torn it that's how that shows you how ruff those water is when that ship would dive under and take on the water. It's unbelievable to think that it would do that but it did.

Interviewer: So what was your reaction to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Allison: I of course we hated anything like that happened and we all of us everybody in the whole (the phone rang).

Interviewer: I'm sorry you were telling me about your reaction to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Allison: I'm ashamed to admit it we wasn't glad they hit Pearl Harbor of course we hated that worse than anything because naturally you know but at the same time we was glad that something happened to get us out of the North Atlantic. We weren't glad they hit Pearl Harbor don't get me wrong but and we was hoping sometime or other we was going to get out of there because we had rather fight a war than stay on that North Atlantic. Its absolutely oh you wouldn't believe some stories I could tell you about how ruff it was of course that's across the arctic circle all up in there we went all up you know chasing German battleship and hoping we didn't catch them I did.

Interviewer: So what happened immediately after Pearl Harbor what did your ship did it return to the United States or did it stay in Iceland?

Mr. Allison: We left Rakovic Ford Iceland the next morning immediately after we got the message we came by Charleston, South Carolina and had I think five or six days or something or another it was supposed to have been a layover there to put certain machine guns equipment new radar and different things or something or another because we were heading for the South Pacific we knew it you know so we had we I hadn't been home in a long time see but sometime before we got to Charleston different ones put in for leave to go home for those two or three days or whatever we was off. And of course I put in to go and the ship didn't much more get tied up good until I was off of it and headed toward home you know. And that was quit a thing I mean so many things happened along the way. I remember they put me in they put us on a there were so many sailors and everybody was ready to go home you know. And a big Greyhound bus and so many on there that a few were standing up and we came to I don't know where some bridge somewhere we had to cross it was a load limit on it and anyway the bus driver had us all to get off the bus so we walked across the bridge and then we got back on the bus and I thought to myself your making a big mistake buddy something is going to happen and it did because when we got ready to get back on the bus everybody particularly those that were standing up were going to get a seat. And when we got back on there they broke that door so that that bus driver had to sit there and drive with one hand and hold that lever with the other one cause the door was broken. Anyhow we was coming home I came home and stayed got back to the ship on time just as soon as I walked up to get on the ship the gunner officer told me said I wish had got you the word said we're going to have to be here three or four more days and you could have stayed longer. I'd done spent I knew we was gone so I don't think I had a nickel or nothing so anyway all of the others wanted to go to

Savannah, Georgia for Christmas and I didn't have any money but one of them called me to one side and gave me a twenty and somebody and wanted to go so anyway I went with them.

Interviewer: Now so after you left the United States where did you go then on your ship?

Mr. Allison: We went to immediately went on by and stopped at Honolulu Pearl Harbor for a very short period of time I forgot can't remember to be sure it seems like it was a day and a half two days. And then we went on in to down to Coral Sea we had all of that. And you've heard about I suppose you've heard the Ghost Fleet of the South Pacific well I was a member of that. We would troll up and down a certain straight there all day today and when it got dark we'd turn out all the lights and we went way over yonder somewhere or another in another straight be patrolling there the next morning and the Japanese thought we had two fleets. And it messed me up cause it was one of my duties to keep a log on the temperature in all of the powder magazines and you can image what kind of book what my book looked like when we crossed the equator maybe two times in 2 hours. And you know certain times I would have to you were required a certain time hour or minute each time to check the temperatures on those powder magazines couldn't get too hot you know so you had your normal book looked like it showed today as the 9th and tomorrow would be the 9th and the next day you know cause you were crossing the equator and it was day every time you know.

Interviewer: So your ship was involved in the Battle of Coral Sea?

Mr. Allison: Yes

Interviewer: Okay

Mr. Allison: Then we were lost a Cara Emprise.

Interviewer: What what are some of your memories of that battle?

Mr. Allison: Oh well a whole lot of that along in there of course that battle was May 8th of 1942 that's when the actual big battle began. On May the 7th night they showed a movie on our ship and it just little oddities along it meant a whole lot to me it might not to you or whoever may see this I don't know but in this movie I seemed like it was I don't know who it was now any how there was a certain scene in that movie that it showed that whoever this actor was asked what date is this someone said its May the 8th believe it or not and he said what's the time what's the hour and I believe it was 11:20 a big mirror wherever the scene was being made he wrote took a cake of soap and wrote up on it that mirror May 8th 11:20 and I remember the time and told the other boys said you know tomorrow is May the 8th wonder if that means anything to us. And mind you exactly to the minute the next day May 8th at 11:20 they came after us 108 Japanese planes all at one time worse than any bumble bees nest you ever got into in your life. Some was diving some was strafing you know that was a and that was our first actual war action. And of course they went princely after the carrier which and that was the most spectacular thing you ever saw at night oh by the way we took our ship was designed for a little less than 200 personnel and we had about 250 or something on it anyway over we had more than actually it was applied for and we took on 500 survivors off of the carrier. Of course we getting away from that night

these explosions were still going on on this carrier and in the night in these big steel plates on the runways on the carrier and everything they was about all there bigger that I guess a 4x8 plywood or something they reminded me of that anyway these steel explode those ridges would go you would see them blast and go way up in the sky you talk about fireworks. You know its nothing like and the thing of it is that carrier finally I think I'm not sure but I think we had to put some torpedoes into it to be sure that it would sink of course all of this was kind of left inside and the ship was still floating lifting but. Real ruff times you know so many that's where I said these planes come in some diving some strafing and they were flying almost down to the water almost some of them are and I never and the one and I'll probably have some telling this again now nightmares that I've had about I can still see that pilot he came by and as I said he was so low to the water he almost bit the duck. Because the reason what he was doing he was flying between my ship and another ship over yonder and he figured I guess nobody wouldn't fire at him but I fooled him I fired at him anyway and I don't know you might have to know something about a ship when you going you ship and you make a turn that thing comes up like this you know and I was firing at him ever other my ammunition the way I put it in the magazine and everything every other one was a was a tracer so that made it a solid line of fire. And someone some other one over here told me said Allison here comes one and I swung around and there he was coming real low and he grinning coming right straight at me and grinning and I started firing just about that far over his head and I just kept following around and this ole boy whoever it was told me then he said he told me here he comes he said get him get him get him got him blew his head plum off and that's not good that's not good and anyways that's just something and that's the way the battle went. Real real ruff time.

Interviewer: What was your reaction to being in battle the first time was it what you expected was it kind of a refleif that it was over with what were your emotions?

Mr. Allison: Always in each battle I was in you know somehow or another of course there's a lot I couldn't remember to tell you exactly about but generally my attitude was that I had been trained to and what know I knew it was coming and I'm going to get him before he gets me. And I don't remember ever being scared at all not at all I completely had that idea all the time that I'm going to get you before you get me. I don't know it turned out it worked pretty well for me. You have to have something to sustain you I guess.

Interviewer: Was your ship damaged during the Coral Sea battle?

Mr. Allison: No wasn't touched that I know of not even a single touch or anything. And the thing of it was our commander his name was Tru Commander Tru and I can recall this and you can imagine with all and your firing at all these things and he is giving orders up there as to how that you was going an what not and you said hard right rubber and he did that and he ship hard left that's the way he was doing dodging bombs and everything so you imagine how we were here you are trying to get that plane and everything and here you are and your gone so but it worked.

Interviewer: Now right after Coral Sea like where did your ship go or what did you do?

Mr. Allison: Our if you remember back we told you we took on 500 survivors we went I don't know what island it was one of the Tonga Islands we just kept them over night but they ate up everything we had you know that many people taking on an extra 500 they about and the only way they had the Navy would try to feed you and what we had to do with all those 500 they was everywhere everywhere a little green pew give them a whole gallon of pears gallon of tomatoes gallon two gallon of this and can you know and let them divide them you know that was the only way you could there wasn't no way to prepare meals for them. So they just ate up all the to where we had to eat Australian Jack Rabbits and everything else.

Interviewer: Now you were involved in Midway what was the role of your ship during Midway what was your job as far as your ship?

Mr. Allison: The ship and our principle duty was we was classed as the playing card for the Yorktown Carrier. And that's exactly what we were we would actually if it took it if it come to that we was protecting that carrier at all cost even to we would take a direct hit from a torpedo or whatever if it became necessary to protect that carrier. It's better for this little ship here and these few men to get blown up than to hit that carrier. So our main principle duty always was plain guard for Yorktown that was our duty. And that's what I can recall one instance in one of the battles we were in a Japanese bomber going to bomb right down on the forward part of that carrier that's what he was aiming at and I aimed up at him and he just kept coming and I hit his motor on the front end of the plane and what not and he still tried to man angle somehow or so he could hit that Yorktown and he just missed it a little ways and crashed into the sea.

Interviewer: Did you realize at the time you know significance of the Midway because it was one of the most important battles of WWII did you actually realize at the time it was going to be that important?

Mr. Allison: No we really didn't have it going on really thought about it a lot yeh it was the turning point of the midway. If we hadn't of succeeded in our efforts there they would have marched right on in to California if they wanted to there wasn't a thing to keep them from it. It was very very important but we didn't wasn't any way of knowing you know at the exact that time. And they didn't either of course naturally what was going to happen. When they sunk my ship we were tied up to Yorktown we didn't have a Chinaman's chance at nothing. It was our ship and we were its plane guard and all of this and were trying to salvage for instance we was taking on all of the cash monies and had just gotten most all of it and then they hit us and they sunk it any way see and we lost see. I've thought about that I lost everything there except my life and I almost lost it. I can recall of course I was injured so seriously I didn't know didn't care about nothing or what I remember of course as I told you back in the beginning in 1940 even 1940 there wasn't any money. And I had about \$250 in my billfold that I had saved up and that was a fortune and I can just slightly remember I was unconscious part of the time after this explosion got me and all that then I'd know then I wouldn't know a thing in other words it was three days and nights before I got to a hospital in Honolulu and I count's tell you whether it was three hours or three weeks or nothing you know. But anyway they had a big sheet there they was so many of us they asked everybody put your billfold everything in here you'll get them later but later never did come I had lost all my money and everything else of course.

Interviewer: So how was your ship sunk during midway what happened?

Mr. Allison: Submarine torpedoes it wasn't too long after we had eaten lunch we had had a late lunch and anyway I was up on my machine gun and I saw these torpedoes in the water you can see the wake of them in the water and we was always taught there is a good possibility if they are not running to deep that you might explode them if you fire at them you know. So I saw these wakes coming and I whizzed around with my machine gun and I just let loose and I fired about 60 rounds or more right in front of these wakes without any orders or anything I just saw them. And the result of this see we will never know exactly what transpired but there were so many men below doing this and that and all you know but when they heard that gun fire they run out and there's a possibility that maybe that saved some people see we lost about a third of my entire crew in that when they sunk that ship. And anyway I fired and that didn't of course it didn't work and we were hit by at least two or three torpedoes. That thing just picked that ship up seemed like and sat it back down. I think the official time was four minutes from the time it hit it was already sunk.

Interviewer: And you were wounded when this happened?

Mr. Allison: In the water I wasn't wounded or anything falls on the ship but as soon as I fired those rounds and those torpedoes kept coming and when they hit it I was on the falling part of the ship that's where my machine guns were then I had to climb down on to another deck and go about as far from here to the door to another deck and go down on it to get to the actual part of the ship where it was that or jump off you know and rather to jump off a high place you know. Jumped in the water and I put my life jacket on and jumped in the water and started swimming and big Cook a black man weighted about 180, 200 pounds probably a great big man he jumped off the same time I did and I never knew what happened to him and something happened that I swam just a little bit faster than he did and they said it blew him all to pieces. What it did there was explosions in the water squeezed me to death just squeeze me and in fact the other said that I think it had maybe a couple of gallons of salt water where it just forced it up in you you know. And tore me all to pieces all inside I've still got a that they had to operate then they closed it up and then they opened it see oh that would be a long story on that. I can tell you all about hospital story.

Interviewer: How long were you actually in the water before you were picked up?

Mr. Allison: Like I said while ago I can remember some things I remember the only thing I can fully actually vividly remember was I was hurt so bad and hurting so bad that I just didn't care and I wanted to turn loose and go. And someone another sailor or somebody held on to me and I don't know whether he held on to me until another ship came along or what I don't know exactly not too long hours not days.

Interviewer: So where where were you like transported then after midway?

Mr. Allison: To Honolulu

Interviewer: Was that where you were recuperating from your wounds?

Mr. Allison: Until I could get you know until they transferred me to California. Yeh it was it wasn't at Pearl Harbor it was actually Honolulu hospital I was in everything was real torn up you know everywhere I had doctor chief surgeon there the one that did oversaw the one that oversaw the whole operation Dr. Pugh a full blooded Jew. And finally later on after so many instances I could tell you about finally I looked like I wasn't going to die and I told Dr. Pugh I said Dr. Pugh I want to thank you for saving my life he said I didn't save your life boy something higher saved you. So I've thought about it a lot of time him being a full blooded Jew it's a wonder he would remember a higher power saved you.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to actually recover from your injuries?

Mr. Allison: Well I got so I could like I say there you know all in this whole I gave these different talks to different students and all after I came back and everything I told you something about putting me on a ship sending me through the canal up the west coast the SS Washington luxury ship. And you can imagine an ole boy from a country hillside to Navy's like this you know I sure got it made you know a luxury ship. We had two hours between time you eat breakfast or lunch or dinner and set down where you one waiter just waited on one table and give you everything you want and everything. Well this I tell you that to get of course they took me to Long Beach, California and put me on the USS Colorado to send me up to Brimington, Washington to the USS Idaho and then I went back to I told you about Christmas and all you know well the curious part of it own down in the whole round come around to when I got able to move me back to the United States there was question to whether or not how to send me and then finally I remember them deciding if a large ship don't come along we'll have to fly him back to the hospital in California. And finally a large ship came by and they put me on it to send me back and guess what ship it was the same one that had been that luxury liner. But now it was USS Washington the Navy had taken it over and it wasn't luxury anymore. It had bunks and everything else on it so they brought back to there and that was I don't know when that was must have been sometime in November I don't know when anyway they brought me back to Treasure Island, California. Which was just a place that had had a worlds fair there and it was big barracks it was and believe it or not I walked into a barracks maybe half two thirds of a mile oh just great big ole long building and finally and I began they began to tell me then that I might not stay in the Navy. And so I met it and saw some officers and this and that and that was a training station you know as well as where the hospital was. So I thought I was everyone that was necessary contact everything and they assured me that I would have a job there for the duration of the war teaching gunnery. But in the meantime they sent me to Mary Island to a hospital and big shot doctors and everybody up there didn't pay no attention to them they said I was unfit for service. And I had to get out and not only one of them but a whole group of doctors and they told me to come on back home I had two to three years to live. And so they sent me back I got back home here I could tell you a whole story about that they bought my ticket and put me on certain trains to go her and there and all of that and when I got on the first train and they was going to transfer us I changed that whole thing I just told them I want to go this way I want to go that way and I want to get home for Christmas and I got home one day before Christmas I believe it was. And road even got to Guthrie, Kentucky and thirteen miles from home and couldn't get there wasn't no way to get home and that's the cross roads you know over there at Guthrie all trains have to stop both ways you know so a freight train came through there and I told the break man I said man I'm thirteen miles from home and I

came from San Francisco and he said you can ride down there with me if you want to so I got in there and rode that freight train to Clarksville.

Interviewer: So did they allow you to stay in the Navy then?

Mr. Allison: No

Interviewer: Got your discharge?

Mr. Allison: Yeh

Interviewer: What was the transition like back into civilian life was it hard to go back to that?

Mr. Allison: Oh you know the Lord was with me all the way first of all go back just one notch or two there. When those explosions came in the water I thought well I've always wondered how I was going to die so this is it it seemed like I went under the water forever that terrible explosion. And first thing you know my head came back up out of the water and the thought came to me just as clear your not going to die I have something for you to do of course I said Lord. When I came back here he worked everything for me it couldn't have been any better in so many ways and I didn't recognize it at the time at all. I got off a while in a lot of ways but anyways it was exactly I think one month from the day I was discharged I started working for the U.S Post Office Department. And of course I thought that was really achieving something to be able to work at that post office I had always admired what it would be to work at the post office. And of course I wound up out at Fort Campbell at the Army hospital for awhile and then wound up at Memphis at the Veterans hospital for awhile and this and that but I was still attached to the post office and they finally said, they let me do anything that I wanted to do, see I was the first one from here that had been injured that came back from WWII. So and due to the laws that was passed disabled veterans which I am you could just about do anything you wanted to do you know. And they finally told me at the veterans that I would have to have a real easy job no strenuous this and that and I don't know what all so I come back to the post office and I told them I wanted to be on bookkeeping well they did and they put me in bookkeeping. Worst mistake I ever made in my life. And finally until I got the chance to get out of that and into something else and finally did thank the Lord and went on put my whole time in 30 years at the post office. And later on while I was at the post office I logged all my preach of course I hope you're a Christina you know what I mean know the Lord well I argued with him for a long time. I didn't want to do what he wanted me to do until finally thank the Lord I did and preached at small churches while I was at the post office and continued to preach fulltime. I retired from the post office in 72 and pastured a church until I was past 80 and I figured the church needed someone that could give more time, do more. And he brought me up to this house and everything worked so I lost my first wife I had my children the Lord gave me a brand new younger wife.

Interviewer: Looking back almost 60 years how would you say that WWII affected you in the long run just the way you think about things the way you see things does it give you a kind of unique prospective on things?

Mr. Allison: I think maybe being in battle some to the time almost didn't make it made me kind of realize we certainly need to love one another more. Made me more aware of the surroundings the head of our government and what not and a whole lot of things. I think about it a whole lot and I guess I try to keep from it but I see too many of what I think the mistakes they are making and shudder to think about sending someone to war. See you don't you can't tell anybody about war and make them really know what war is they've got to be there in it and I that's on e thing that's bothered me more than it would otherwise. If you've been you've experienced something been there done that and you don't want somebody else to have to do that you know. And I really shudder to think about sending somebody to war under whatever circumstances. And I could tell you a whole lot about my views on that politics and a whole lot of things.

Interviewer: Were you ever awarded any metals?

Mr. Allison: Yeh I have that right there happens to be a Purple Heart of course and. The thing of it is I had different certificates and things and some of the other things happened but you see when they sunk my ship I lost everything. And somehow or another we was in I want people to understand this the war we was in of course when I got our was just ragging good you know. And somehow or another I don't recon you had time to thing about this hardly I had a few other things a discharge and the service connected disability which means really a whole lot. Means your gonna have to have the services for instance when I was needed to go back to veterans hospital after spending two or three weeks in the Army hospital out here I wondered why they put me in the Army hospital that was the only one happened to be right handy you know government hospital. Then I need to go further and the hospital the Pan Am train was running here the Pan American I don't know whether you ever remember them talking about the Pan America used to be a Patton train that run through here all the was from Louisville to Memphis. And one night I went down there and got on that train and went into Memphis and got there way in the night and I walked into the hospital in Memphis and it was a veteran hospital and told them here I am I want to go to bed somewhere. We don't have a room no where not a bed no where nor nothing and I said of course that's where your service connected and what not come in and your disabled veteran. They said well and they didn't they didn't have any they had to put me on a cot they put me on a real nice cot and I never will forget that now nice it was then they put me out in a hallway until they could get a bed. And of courser I stayed there I forgot I don't know how long finally they I've done forgot now they dismissed me I can't remember now what all transpired.

Interviewer: Well is there anything else you would like to add or clarify or anything?

Mr. Allison: I don't know did I about cover it all Hun? (He held up a metal) On the back of this is says for military merit Willie V. Allison gunner mate 3rd class in state Navy. A whole lot of people don't have these. They had something here a while back recognizing people Purple Hearts what not I didn't get in on that but anyway being as your wounded kind of glad to get it.