

Interviewer: We are there with John Allen who served in the Navy during WWII and we are going to be talking a little bit about his experiences. Let's start off Mr. Allen when were you born?

Allen: I was born March 6, 1924.

Interviewer: 1924 and where were you born?

Allen: Nashville

Interviewer: Nashville?

Allen: Nashville Tennessee northeast Nashville Tennessee.

Interviewer: Did you spend the better part of the growing up years in Nashville?

Allen: Yes

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Allen: He was a street car motorman back during the time they had streetcars.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Allen: Yeah

Interviewer: Wow did he take you for free rides?

Allen: Oh we got a few free rides. See he hit we hit the five years later we hit the depression and he got laid off lost his job. We intern ended up in Covington Kentucky.

Interviewer: What brought you up there?

Allen: A job my mother had to go to work up there. I was only like five years old six years old. She worked as a seamstress for and I think the store is still there Maybelline and Cruise Store. It's a big department store in Cincinnati which is right across the river from Kentucky. So we stayed there approximately a couple of years then we moved back to Nashville. And we lived still in northeast Nashville and the depression was rough very rough. A lot of people lost their jobs of course it tore up my family my dad became a drinker. And as a result we ended up when I was about nine years of a age maybe a little older 10 or 12 my mother divorced him because he wouldn't work drunk you know. Bad business so my mother raised me and my brother and I went to Highland Heights School junior high school in Nashville then I went to East High School in Nashville on Gallatin Road which is now East Middle School. I was called into the Navy in July of 1943 and actually I was called it was either going to be the Army, Navy or Marine Core. But I did have a choice so I chose the Navy.

Interviewer: Okay did you enlist for that choice or were you drafted and then chose?

Allen: I was drafted for the Army or for service. And then I enlisted in the Navy.

Interviewer: Okay

Allen: I didn't care for that Army business. No I always did like the Navy. So anyway they sent us to, I guess you want me to continue on?

Interviewer: Sure I'd like to back up just a second though. December 7th 41.

Allen: Okay oh yeah.

Interviewer: The day that will live in infamy. Do you remember your reaction and where you were and what you were doing?

Allen: Yeah I was in school and I was working part time as a messenger boy for Western Union. Which back then was very popular you know I mean everything was delivered message wise. And I walked in the Andrew Jackson Hotel at 6th Avenue and any way it was right there on 6th Avenue. Right near the Hermitage it's torn down now but at that time it was one of the major hotels. And as I came in the door I heard them talking about the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And of course I didn't think too much of it because I didn't know Japanese from Indians or anything else. And of course I was only what 17 and so anyway I thought you know this would last a couple of months. And my mother said something about how worried she was because of it and I told her I said well they will clean them up in a couple of three months. Of course I didn't realize at the time they had wiped out the fleet there in Pearl Harbor. Anyway do you want me to continue?

Interviewer: Sure

Allen: I like I was saying I went into the Navy and they shipped me with several hundred others form Nashville on a train down through Texas right by the Rio Grande hot man hot as you know. And no air-conditioned no way to take a bath. We was on the train I think it was three days and four nights. And everybody there I guess by the time we got there we looked like a bunch of scroungers which we were. The only thing we got we got we did get food and we got water no bathing water you know you could wash your face and hands that was it. And we had all of the windows raised up when you raised the windows up the smoke would come in and you had to lower the windows to keep the smoke out see. It was a heck of a going it was a rough ride.

Interviewer: The smoke from the train?

Allen: Yeah it was an old steam engine you know. And of course those cinders come out of there too you know. This John Warner was with us is the reason I mention him. He was also from Nashville and I knew him real well and went into the Navy and he was in the same boot camp that I was in boot company. But anyway we got to San Diego and I rem ember I believe it was on a Saturday morning and the first breakfast I ever had in the Navy was white beans with ketchup.

Interviewer: That would be hard to forget.

Woman in the background: That's my dad's favorite food.

Allen: Every Saturday the Navy has navy beans cooked in red lid they called it they don't put the stuff on after they are cooked they cook it with it. And it taste like red lid and so that's the first thing I remember

about the navy. But from then on you know they run you through and give you uniforms and wash you up. And put you in a company and my company is that one right up there the one on the right had side. There are two pictures up there the one on the right hand side with all of the men in it. I was in that company.

Interviewer: What was the name of the company?

Allen: What is it up there it has a flag there see up top.

Woman in the background: 264

Allen: 260th?

Woman in the background: 264

Interviewer: Okay

Allen: 43264 I think.

Interviewer: Okay

Allen: It was the year 43 264 was the company. So we were under a fellow who was a chief and evidently he was probably a coach from some college or you know. Because they took the coaches and made chief petty officers out of them because they knew they could keep you in better shape and push you further than anybody else. That's supposition but I think that's true. But any way they put us under a chief by the name of Brown and of course we had all the good names for him you know. And he was tough but he was fair and I know one time we had people from Tennessee we had people from Louisiana New Orleans and we had some from up north all of us mixed together. Now the ones from New Orleans we had some of them down there that didn't like to bathe. So there was several old boys that came from East Nashville high school with me and one of them name was box head stone. And the reason he was named box head was because his head looked like a box. He was a darn good basketball player about 6 – 2 you know high school. He and another boy by the name of Swop and there was two or three other ones in the company and had one old boy that was named Owen Howell. Incidentally Owen Howell in Nashville later became president of General Shoe Company. And then later died after that but anyway they got this one ole boy from New Orleans and told him you are either going to take a shower every night or we are going to get your butt every night into the shower and we are going to scrub you with a kiap brush a scrub brush. Well he said you go to hell and you know a few other good choice words. Okay tonight's the night sure enough he didn't show up and sure enough they went and got him. And fortunately I wasn't in the group I'm glad I wasn't. But they got him and they dragged his butt in the shower room and they scrubbed him until he was a pink as he could be. This actually happened and he was the first one to the shower room from then on. Then we had another ole boy who was, in the navy it's a very clean outfit they train you to be clean and of courser you've got the facilities to do it. We had what they call a king post and halyards coming down that king post to another post down here. And on all of these posts they had lines rope and you had to take your skid shirt you always had two holes in the side of your skid shirt and you have a little deal in the white hat a little butterfly things. And you have what they called stocks I think they called them stocks. Anyway it was a piece of white line about yea long metal camps over the end of it keep it from fraying. And you had to line your halves up washed with your two fingers between each half. Oh it was and of course your initials were in

your hat you know they were stamped on everything. They did undershirts the same way they did pants the same way everything that's the way you did it. That's just a way to train you that you are going to do what we tell you to do. Now they probably all send it to the laundry and they go down there and kiss each other bye bye. I shouldn't say that.

Interviewer: A friend of mines in the Navy he might take offense to that.

Allen: But they did have we had good bunks good mattresses good sacks we called them sacks mattress cover and good barracks we had darn good barracks out there. Of course the weather out there is excellent you can't find better weather anywhere than San Diego. So then of course every morning I think it was around 5 o'clock everybody they kicked you out of your sack you know. And we had this one ole boy who didn't he didn't like to wash his hats and he didn't like to wash his skinnies. So the ole chief went in one morning and he was doing an inspection and he looked up under this guy's mattress and there was all of this dirty gear. Skinnies, pants, hats you know you get about three hats four hats. And this ole boy had half of his laundry under his sack. He brought all of it out front and I remember we had what you call a butt bucket which was a about yea big. And of course it's full of spit and cigarette butts and anything else you want to throw away. He took them one piece at a time and threw them in there. And he said now you get your ass down there and you take all of those out and you go down there and you wash every one of them.

Interviewer: Were you normally expected to wash your own clothes you didn't get to throw them in the washing machine?

Allen: No washing machine in boot camp. Now later on when we got aboard ship yeah. But no in boot camp the put you through the misery of it. And of course they run you through the line and give you your shots and they hit you in both arms at the same time and all that business. Then all of your inspections and everything they go through that then they put you on the drill field and they drill you. Then on Saturdays they would compete us with the Marines which was down the pike a while away. They had marine barracks down there different camp and everything. But they would drill us against them a little competition you know of course most of the time they won. Then they sent us on the riffle range a couple of times and fired that old WWI riffle which I never was any good at. You may have you been on a rifle range?

Woman in the background: Oh yeah

Allen: You know they call that Maggie's drawers or do they call it that anymore?

Woman in the background: Not anymore they don't.

Allen: When you miss it.

Woman in the background: Oh really.

Allen: Yeah when you miss it they wave this Maggie's Drawers.

Woman in the background: Oh it looks kind of like a flag.

Allen: Yeah

Woman in the background: I didn't know that's what they called that.

Allen: That's what they called it in the Navy now. Of course we did a lot of things different from other people we were kind of strange you might say. But anyway they took us through 12 weeks of it I believe was the amount of time. Normally during peace time it's 16 weeks they cut us down to 12 weeks.

Interviewer: Twelve weeks of training. What other in what other areas were you trained?

Allen: Okay then they gave you exams all during this time and they grade you and they were pretty tough on their grades. And then they pull the people they want for certain jobs out of that company and the others the balance our balance was that they sent them to destroyer based. Which is the worst just about the worst ship you can get on it's a suicide mission. They would send them over there as replacements of other men that have been killed or for new ships coming out and so forth. Then the ones that's pulled out they would send to schools and I was fortunate enough to go to this quarter master's school. So I spent I guess it must have been 8 or 10 weeks in quarter master school.

Interviewer: In addition to the 12 weeks of training?

Allen: Yeah which is I guess they must have trained us anywhere from 8 to 10 hours a day in quarter master school, they push you.

Interviewer: Describe a typical day in quarter master school.

Allen: Okay they wake you up send you to the mess hall.

Interviewer: About what time?

Allen: They wake you up at five they send you to mess hall about 5:30 and you eat breakfast they feed you well not great but well. And I guess they give you probably 30 to 45 minutes for that then they put you in school and you're either learning semaphore flashgun light in classrooms and you then they will take you and give you a written course on navigation. And that's not too deep it's not deep enough for that/ But anyway and they do that day after day after day five and a half days a week. I guess yeah it must be five days a week because we did get a liberty day in there. But now in boot camp we didn't get any liberty for good grief six weeks.

Interviewer: Now for quarter master school you were still in San Diego is that correct?

Allen: Yeah San Diego just from one barracks to another barracks to another they call them camps you know. And the after that they take the two highest rated highest graded men in the group and they make them a third class petty officer. The next five to ten percent they make seamen first and then the others stay seamen third class. Now they usually try to take the two POs you know they break the company up into two segments and they'll usually try to take those POs and make them third class because they do a little bit more. Now one of these POs he was a smart kid little about your height little blonde haired kid and he was sharp he should have been in officer's school. And the other boy he wasn't so bright and his name I'll never forget his name was Bakey. But anyway rather than to see him to go sea without a third class rating they held him over for another time because he was a good PO and I understand he made it but anyway. I became a seaman first by the way.

Interviewer: So you were in the five to ten percent?

Allen: Yeah fortunately.

Interviewer: It sounds incredibly competitive.

Allen: It is it is

Interviewer: Did you feel did you feel the competition in general or was the average mindset we're drafted we're here we'll do what they make us do or did you feel the competition?

Allen: No I think the depression brought that out of a lot of people. You know a lot of people now they're so darn complasive with what they have there is no competition. They just well you're going to college you're going to college you'll get jobs and I'm going to sit here and let you pay me and you pay me you feed me. But back then you were competitive most people now you've always got some that will never do anything. Now we felt competition but not tough competition. I mean we didn't go around cutting each other's throat or anything. But yeah you feel it and they will team you up with one other fellow and if your reading light see if you're reading light you can't write it down while you're ready you know. You called it out to this fellow behind you and he writes it down. And I'll never forget this when I first went in in Tennessee the language was such that it was either for for or for. In other words it's far over there the fire down the street and you come to me because for I want you to. You know in other words there was not distinction it wasn't fire, far and for it was all for. So anyway I'll never forget this I'd call this word out to this boy in the back of me and say that you're getting a message telling you to fire on the enemy you'd say fire on the enemy and he would write it down for. Because he wasn't from Nashville so anyway I'll never forget that it does it causes you and makes you want to speak more properly plainer and clearer. And I really believe that helped a lot of guys especially from the south because a lot of them good grief if you think it's bad in Tennessee you ought to get in Georgia and Alabama. But anyway we had a lot of competition and it was I made good grades.

Interviewer: So after your ten weeks are up you're finished with quarter master school what did they do with you?

Allen: Then they assigned you and they tell you that you're going to well we'll say the USS Henley I just remember that because I was on that ship at one time. Or you're going to Portland Oregon, that's where I went, and you're going to pick up a ship there and Cools Bay Oregon and it's spelled just like it sounds. Let's see I've got a little diary and this little thing is ole and it don't tell a lot.

Interviewer: Did you have to hide the diary?

Allen: Well I didn't go around showing to everybody put it that way. But it only tells where we were. Well for instance here on February 21, 1944 incidentally before I get to this I did get a leave for two weeks I think out of Portland Oregon came to Nashville. Then I was put in a barracks up there in Portland and then we put to put a ship in commission on February 21, 1944 at 10 o'clock that ship was put into commission. And that was an ATR 80 ATR 80 now that stands for auxiliary tug rescue it is primarily a rescue ship.

Interviewer: Specifically what would you be rescuing?

Allen: Alright we had this happen two or three times in fact in Okinawa we had to go along side an LST that had been hit with a suicide plane. And there was 99 Marines on that LST and we got all of them off fortunately. In fact I've still got some of the metal from the Jap Zero that hit it. So anyway getting back to this on March 4th see we just fooled around in this Cools Bay. We'd go out and come back in go out and come back in shaking it down so to speak. So March the 4th we got underway for Aberdeen Washington which was up the coast still shaking it down. Then we arrived up there the next day then two days later we went from Aberdeen Washington to Port Hueneme it's a Spanish word I suppose Port Hueneme. And we arrived there on March 12th.

Interviewer: And where was that?

Allen: That was in California I'm sorry. Okay

Interviewer: And this is all 44?

Allen: Yeah this is all 44. Then we got underway for San Diego maybe I ought to skip some of this because there's a lot of up and down up and down. So anyway we fooled around California we went to San Pedro, Santa Barbara, and San Climenti then on April 15th we got under way for Pearl Harbor Hawaii.

Interviewer: You left April 15th when did you arrive?

Allen: We arrived 13 days later.

Interviewer: Thirteen days?

Allen: Yeah we were a slow ship and we were pulling a barge. So we arrived there on the 28th of April.

Interviewer: So you remember your reaction seeing the seeing maybe the ships that the Arizona was still submerged.

Allen: Yeah well of course I saw the Oklahoma I went aboard the Oklahoma after they raised her. There were others there that were still incapacitated you might say you couldn't move them I don't guess. But they did move them later all of them the Tennessee was there. I remember they got one ship underway I believe it was the USS Nevada and I believe it was a quarter master that got it under way I believe that was the story behind it. But anyway I went aboard the Oklahoma and they had just raised here and I went into that ship and there was still bones in it. Of course all of this is during the war you know and you don't go out and clean something up today because it happened last night. You do it when you get to it but anyway we played around Pearl Harbor and around the various islands we were in Maui.

Interviewer: And you were still on the ATR?

Allen: Yeah stayed on the ATR my whole WWII was ATR. We went to Oahu lets see Maui, Kaua we went there the Hawaiian Islands you might say. Then we set sail when I say set sail we got underway for Quadulan Atol you may remember that name because I think that's one place I may be wrong it may have been one of those little Atols down there they set off that bomb that bomb that they used on Nagasaki. We went there and that was on the 12th of June 44 then we went back to Pearl. Then we went to Johnston Islands on September 1st 44 we arrived there that's just a little dinky place to fuel. And then we went to Anti Wetak now that maybe where they set that bomb off but anyway it was

Interviewer: Did you see the results of the bomb?

Allen: Oh no this is way before the bomb was ever used. That was in what 45.

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Allen: Okay but I went swimming in Wetak or Quadralene maybe both of them and you know they allow you to go swimming if you didn't have anything to do you could dive over the side and go swimming. And in those Atols you know the Atols were nothing but a bunch of little islands they kind of make a circle and keeps the ocean out and all of this in here is more or less a lake or similar to a lake. Some of the most beautiful coral I have ever seen in my life was in those Atols but anyway as Tom would say I'll die of rest he tells me that every day.

Interviewer: When was your or if did you experience or hear of any major engagement or major battles?

Allen: Okay we went to we went well for one thing we were in the Philippines and we went to Leyte in the Philippines and we were in Ewagema we went there on Thursday the 22nd of February 45. And then in so we invaded the Philippines and we invaded Ewagema. I've got a good friend who got killed on Ewagema. Then we went on March the 25th of 45 that was February 22nd on Ewagema. On March the 25th of 45 we got under way to go to Okinawa to participate in Love Day operations. And we arrived and the things I remember about Okinawa, incidentally Okinawa was the biggest operation in the pacific are. And we lost more men in Okinawa than any other operation and that includes Ewagema. We went in on one side of the island and they know named it Buckner Bay after some general that got killed there. And while we were going in there was ac cruiser sitting in behind us or outside us see we were going closer inland the cruiser laid back out there you know two, three or five miles and shoot. And they were firing right over our heads man it sounded like all hell had broke loose. And that's where we ran into this LST that had been hit by suicide plane. And like I said we took those marines off and we took them to a place called Keramaretto it's a little group of islands small islands to the south east of Okinawa. And what we did we would bring all of our damaged ships into that area so you could keep them from getting hit out there again. And we took these marines to another ship and we transferred them to this other ship. The next morning the captain marine captain came along side our ship and wanted to know where his men were. And of course our skipper was on the wing of the bridge and I was standing right next to him. And our skipper told them said captain I'm sorry but said we don't have your men we've transferred them to so and so and so and so. And this guy was in a wheel boat had a navy man in there steering the ship steering the boat. And the captain said I came to get my men and our skipper said I'm sorry captain but like I told you we don't have your men. The captain the marine captain pulled his 45 out pulled the shell out and he fires at him. He went completely bananas that guy did the marine he was a young guy.

Woman in the background: Did he hit anybody?

Allen: No fortunately the old man just stood there and grinned at him you know I guess he thought he was pop gunning him or something but it scared the hell out of me I got back out of the way. But then the captain the marine captain told the Carson said take me back to my ship. And of course Carson was glad to do that because he was scared too. Took him back over there and in the meantime I signaled that ship I can't remember what that ships name was.

Interviewer: How did you signal? How did that work?

Allen: Well you've got a flashing light it's as big around as that thing there is and it has shutters. And I know you've seen it on television.

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Allen: And they you know they'll take their right hand and they'll put it on that lever and you know it's like well international code is what it is. Like dit dit dit da dit and all this stuff you know. You raised that guy over there you know he was like three miles away on that other ship. And I finally got the signalman over there and I told him this guy was coming and he must be nuts. So the guy signaled and said yes he just came aboard and shot the OD in the ear. So I mean these little things I mean these goofy little things like these come up you think that couldn't be you know. So anyways that happened so we were in this Keramaretto and we went to another ship that had been hit with a suicide plane and it was the USS Hinsdale I don't know why I remember the name but I do. And it was loaded with soldiers army and they were all out on the deck and they had crippled themselves in you know I mean gotten into Keramaretto. I guess they were going to land them and then when they got hit with this suicide plane they had to get out of there. And there was only two men that was injured aboard that ship that suicide plane they were two sailors. And they were both in the boiler room and both of them died that night aboard our ship. And when they brought them aboard our ship they were as black as that thing is right there they were just nothing but crust. And I remember one of them said something about Momma and one of them said can you give me a glass of water and we finally got him some water down him some way or another. Of course it stuck all over him they both died that night. I don't know whether they buried them at sea or whether they took them over on one of the islands or what. But they was they were just cooked you know that was live steam that came out of those boilers. And that steam is so hot that you can run your hand down it and it will just cut your hand off you know it's that hot. And it just cooked them but anyway that did happen. Then from there we went back to the Philippines again we went through two typhoons.

Interviewer: Oh you went through two typhoons what was that like?

Allen: Mean we were I believe it was at Okinawa we had great big anchors because we had to pull we would have to back into a ship that was high and dry from landing. And we'd have to hook onto it and then we'd hang these two anchors out here before we got in there and string them out as far as we could. Then with the power from the propellers from the ship and pull it and the anchors at the same time we'd pull the ship off the beach. But anyway that's the reason we had big anchors. We got in a typhoon the first one out there and they sent us out they told us to go out so many yards from shore because we'd go high and dry if we didn't you know coming in. And we pull laid both anchors down dropped both anchors and we were going one third speed into the wind. And we were just barely hanging on and that wind and water was so strong see it would come the wave would come in and it would be taller than this house. It just looked like a mountain coming you could look out and see it scare the heck out of you. It was just like a wall coming at you and fortunately we had those heavy anchors and we could build up speed. And I know one little landing craft little LCT I think they called it yeah LCT I guess it was. He was signaling over all the time and I answered him and of course if you answer you have to hold your hand up like this to keep the wind from blowing all this stuff in your eyes. And he asked for a line a rope so we threw him one and it snapped that line just like that and you know those lines are bigger than my arm. Great big jobs and of course as soon as he got it he slapped it over his gismo on the deck there. And it just snapped it just like that he still went high and dry anyway I saw destroyers up there that was high and dry I mean you could see everything under then and it would scare you to death.

Interviewer: Did it make you particularly sea sick?

Allen: Well it didn't me because I had been out there a long time. We had a couple of guys on there that had just been sent over to us and we talked them into getting sea sick talked to them telling them about greasy pork chops you know. And you know things like that just to see if we could get someone ole boy said no you're not going to make me seasick. Next thing I knew he was headed for the rail. But it is its really strange.

Interviewer: So you're in the Philippines and you go back to the Philippines and you experience a couple of the typhoons.

Allen: Yeah and then they sent us to Lithia which is another lato and then form Lithia they sent us to let's see we went to Okinawa twice in fact. But the second time of course it had been squared away. On August the 4th we went in Leyte on the 18th we were in Leyte and we came down from Leyte and then sent us to Mantis Island which is just south of the oh what am I trying to say not the International Date Line the round thing.

Woman in the background: Equator

Allen: The equator. It's just below the equator so we had we held Shell Bag Day and Polly Wog Day. You're a Polly Wog until you pass the equator. When you pass the equator you get the hell beat out of you and they wire you down with salt water hoses and throw slop at you. You know just something to do.

Woman in the background: They still do that today.

Allen: I'm sure they do yeah. And I mean some of it really gets mean. We were fortunately for us we weren't that big a ship because if you've really got a big ship they will take canvas and sew it into cones I'll say that long and they'll pack it with cotton nobody ever and then they will soak that with sea water. And it's just like swinging a ball bat and what they do they just whip your butt with those big shellalies.

Interviewer: Whose they?

Allen: The shellbacks that are already aboard ship.

Interviewer: Kind of an initiation?

Allen: Their going to initiate you as a Polly Wog and their going to make you a Shell Bag it's fun. Especially of you ever get to give it back its fun I never did get to give it back. But anyway I got whipped and we were down in Mantis Island and we got the news that Japan had surrendered so it was on the 15th.

Interviewer: What was your reaction?

Allen: Well oh everybody got drunk everybody. We were down there with a bunch of officers there were some Austrian ships down there. And the Austrians they loved the Americans you know because we had saved them. And they invited us over to this I think it was a destroyer for a celebration. And when you

came aboard ship they gave you can of cheese and big bottle of I guess it's more rum than it is beer. Potent I mean knock your head off. Then the crew proceeds to get drunk their crew and they take all of their officers up on the bowl of the ship and throw them over the side. That's the honest to goodness truth it's unbelievable.

Interviewer: It wasn't a mutiny was it?

Allen: No it was just fun and games and the officers just take it that way and they know they're going to get it whether they like it or not so they take it. But anyway that's and then I began coming back to the states then after that.

Interviewer: When you got back to the states did you come right back to San Diego?

Allen: No we went to San Francisco under the Golden Gate and I was then they gave me leave and I came back to Nashville then they sent me to Memphis and I was discharged.

Interviewer: Okay where did you go did you come home immediately when you were discharged?

Allen: Yeah I came on home and then I re-upped for Navy Reserve and they recalled me for Korea.

Interviewer: What was your reaction when you got recalled?

Allen: The very worst because I think Truman lied to us he told us we wouldn't be called or they told us we wouldn't be called unless there was a national emergency. Well Korea was never declared a war it was never an emergency but they called us back anyway. But I mean you know he's commander and chief and he can do whatever he wants to. But I was on that destroyer up there the one on the left up there.

Interviewer: Which you mentioned earlier was the worst.

Allen: Yeah USS Henry.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier that being on a destroyer is about the worst thing.

Allen: It is.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Allen: Well first of all on that ship I forget how many feet that ship is how long it is I'll say it's something like 350 feet long. You got on there in a navy complement you go ton there in about 320 men. Well if you put 320 men on a 350 ship you've got one for every foot you might say. Plus they put you in bunks there three high. And I was in the quarter master part of the ship and we were three high we were with radiomen, quarter masters and something else I forget what it was. But you were just like that crammed in there and you know if one guy gets sick the whole bunch notices it. And the heads on that ship that I was on man they go back to the Middle Ages. You know what I mean by heads don't you? The restroom. They'd have a maybe I shouldn't say this in front of you.

Woman in the background: No that's fine.

Allen: They had a trough that comes down about the length of that couch and they've got four seats setting there. And those seats are setting on pegs metal pegs so that you can pick those seats up now why I don't know but I know that's the way it was. So what if you get in a rough sea you can imagine one of those pegs come loose your down in there.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Allen: Fortunately that never happened. Anyway what they would do this was a dirty deal but this was done. They'd catch a guy that had just come in on a drunk of course he's hung over you know. And he's sitting there on that last down peg guy gets up here at this end gets him a wad of tissue toilet paper pulls it up into a cone lights the cone and lets it float down. You talk about somebody cussing and jumping that will get you sober quick. But they would really do those things. Or they would take shoe polish and they'd put it say that you were sitting there asleep or something put shoe polish and some other gunk some other flammable stuff right here around the sole of your shoe. And here you are you know your sacked out with your shoes on and some guy lights a match to that and you can't get that shoe off fast enough. I'll tell you that latrine was something else what they had.

Interviewer: You mentioned the middle ages it sounds like it goes more back to the classical times with the Roman and the sponge on a stick. And the army barracks latrines that's horrendous. So your how long did you serve in Korea?

Allen: Nineteen months I wasn't I didn't go to Korea they recalled me and fortunately they sent us to Europe to show the flag that's all it was for. Well first of all they sent us to Iceland and if you ever go to Iceland you want ever want to go again because the seas up there are so rough I have never seen waves that high all the time I was in the navy other than that typhoon. I have seen green water come completely over the pilot house and hit us in the face when I was at the flag basket.

Interviewer: In a destroyer?

Allen: Yeah a destroyer you're over one and under two that's what they call it over one and under two. And just you just think you're doing say you're doing 20 knots into a heavy sea and that darn thing is made of metal about ya thick steel about that thick and you can actually feel it quiver you can actually feel it quiver. But boy the will run and they are fighting ships.

Interviewer: So after your nineteen months service what happened did you were you released again?

Allen: Yeah they asked me if I wanted to re-up and I told them no I didn't think so and I got out and I went back to school for a while.

Interviewer: Under the GI bill?

Allen: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay what did you do?

Allen: I took up accounting and I took up tax and a couple of three other subjects. I never did graduate I had about two years.

Interviewer: Okay and where did you go to school?

Allen: I went to UT down on Broadway UT night school.

Interviewer: Night school.

Allen: That was before they built the one that the blacks took over.

Interviewer: Downtown Nashville?

Allen: Yeah

Interviewer: And what did you do for work after that?

Allen: Okay I went to work for Harvey's Department Store I don't know whether you've ever heard of it or not.

Interviewer: Yes sir

Allen: It was a department store that old man Harvey opened in 1942. Real it was probably at one time it was the biggest department store in Nashville. And I went to work there and I became credit manager and later on I became personnel manager and then after that I became store manager. In fact I was store manager of the one that was in Clarksville. And then I was store manager of the one here in Madison that's the reason I moved here. But that was about it and I was with them for 40 years.

Interviewer: Wow

Allen: So that is pretty much what I've done. I'm sure I left something out but.

Interviewer: You're always going to leave something. Out but juts in general looking back on your experiences in the war was there what was the one thing that you really enjoyed. If there was one thing that you enjoyed about being overseas?

Allen: Well I enjoyed meeting the other guys and I met a lot of them. Made friends with a lot of them and I got to see a lot of the world. I've seen everything in the central pacific practically and I got down to that Mantis Island down below the equator. And I had those three invasions that I wouldn't take anything for I don't mean that I enjoyed it at the time but I like to look back and say well I was there. And I know that one in Okinawa we there was the Japanese were getting to the point that they were desperate. Well they were they were very desperate and they were afraid we were going to attack those home islands and we were going to do it. But I seen ships there like a destroyer like that one I was on in Korea or during Korea the whole bowl of that ship was knocked off. Just like you would take a knife and just cut it off got hit with a suicide plane. See they would put those when I said they were suicide ships they would put those things up on what they called the point they would put them way up there toward Japan. So that their radar could pick up the planes as they were leaving the fields. Okay then they would radio that stuff back to the ships back here which was the Tennessee and several other battle wagons and cruisers all over the place. And they had these anti-aircraft cruisers anti-aircraft carriers and of courser what they do they shoot the darn things down. And they'd say 200 has left you know they would come over 200 planes have left Koresh or whatever it was and when they got there there would be 10.

These destroyers had cut them to pieces. The destroyer has five, five inch guns. They've got roughly 4 sets of 40 millimeters and then they've got a couple of sets of 20 millimeters. So their nothing in the world but an armament but see suicide planes are to try to get rid of them and they would hit them. And of course a destroyer is just like I said it's just paper thin. I know we passed one onetime that had a hole it looked like the suicide plane had just gone through the four part of the ship. And I saw you know were going along and I could see this chief lying in there with one arm. Been killed it killed him he was just lying there that's the way he died with his arm up you could see him just plain as day. And then we pulled one ship the one that I told you lost the whole four front of the thing the whole end of it we pulled that thing back to Quam rear end first. And they put the darn thing back on or another one on. And another thing I forgot to tell you kind of cute little thing we found this little ole monkey in Leyte out there in the Philippines. Little male monkey and they named him To Joe and I don't know if it will embarrass her but anyway we had this one guy who was a carpenter and To Joe would get up on these beams that ran across our ship so we could put towing lines up over them and so forth. To Joe would get up there and he'd sit there and eat a banana or whatever he was doing and he was sitting there this guy goes by and gets him by the balls and snatch them and the monkey would raise hell. And he did that poor monkey that way and when we went back to Quam and To Joe you know he'd get in bed with you and if you rolled over on him or anything oh man he'd let you have it squirt all over you. I'm telling ya'll I probably shouldn't be telling ya'll but her went abroad we went abroad we pulled a long side a floating dry dock and To Joe evidentially sensed that there was a female monkey over there. And he was the first one across that line and it wasn't three minutes until he came back so I know he didn't do anything and we always blamed it on Walter jerking on him all the time. But you ought to be ashamed of yourself but its things like that that you don't see any other place. They do it I'm sure in the army and they do things I know they do it in the marines they were always pulling pranks on each other. The Navy you know you're out our compliment onboard that tug was 65 men. Well everybody knew everybody and where you came from and all that stuff so you meet a lot of good people that way. And you meet some bad ones but most of them are pretty good guys. And back then you know I guess most people came right out of the depression right into that stuff and that's it was good for us. The best thing that ever happened to me personally was WWII.

Woman in the background: Have you ever gone back over back to the pacific or been on a boat since.

Allen: No I've never been back. Now this fellow that I was telling you about this John Warner he has a grandson that is on one of those big carriers. And they had given their crew the word that if you have relatives you can choose one relative to meet us in Honolulu and ride the ship back. So John went he was the granddaddy and the mother and daddy didn't care to go so he took their place and he rode that ship back. I forget which carrier it was it was one of the biggest ones but of course you couldn't do that in war time.

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

Allen: No I guess that's about it. I've burned her ears enough she'll learn it all though probably already has. But it was it was a lot of fun but there was a lot of scary details too. But it was the best thing that ever happened to me. And I imagine ole Tom would tell you the best thing that ever happened to him was WWII.

Interviewer: He had some experiences that he said were just incredible. Now at the time didn't seem very pleasant but looking back.

Allen: No it wasn't pleasant at all especially the depression of course fortunately I was too young to really realize that you know where is my next meal coming from. Because it got to that point people were in soup lines as you probably have seen we never did get to that point and we always had something to eat but it got pretty rough there. But so WWII brought the whole country out it was probably the best thing for the country. Now we seem to be going the other way unfortunately you know it's too good now. It used to be too bad now it's too good. Too many too many freedoms I know maybe you are first amendment buff I don't know I'll tell you the first amendment is going to kill us if we're not careful because you can do anything you want to do. Anyway that's it.

Woman in the background: I want to go ahead and take a shot of the wall. I want you to walk me through what some of these pictures are.

Allen: That was my ship that's the DD7 62.

Woman in the background: In Korea.

Allen: And this is the same ship this is the same ship. This is my discharge after Korea and this was some sort of letter from some joker up there. This is my boy's ship he was in the navy for a while. This is my class photo quarter master class in WWII. This is my boot camp segment where I was in that's the group I was in. This is the ship during WWII this is my discharge from WWII this is what they call the old navy battleship discharge that's what that is that's a battleship. Here are my ribbons this is crossing the 180th Meridian this is another something and this is the equator deal. And that's the order of the Golden Dragons crossing the 180th Meridian. And I have a WWII medal the Philippine liberation medal and two stars in my pacific medal and fortunately no Purple Heart. My brother had a Purple Heart. But that's it.