

Mr. Allen: I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on 27 July 1921.

What branch of service did you serve in and what was the primary unit that you served in?

Mr. Allen: I served in the Army in the infantry.

What were your parent's names and what were their occupations?

Mr. Allen: My mother's name was Mrs. ____ Sue Allen from Indian Territory in the Cherokee Strip in Oklahoma.

Do you remember her occupation or anything like that?

Mr. Allen: Mother.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Allen: I got one sister.

How long did you remain in school?

Mr. Allen: I have a graduate degree.

Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression?

Mr. Allen: I lived through it.

How did it affect your life?

Mr. Allen: If you are just going to run down the list now what are you looking for?

How did the Great Depression affect your family and yourself sir?

Mr. Allen: May I suggest that when we are talking about this it has to be something specific. How did it affect your family? Well let's see, no one had a job and the bank's closed and they foreclosed on my mother's house and all of a sudden her and her two children are out on the street. This was in 1933. So how did it affect us? Horribly!

Did you have a job before you went into the service, sir?

Mr. Allen: A job; well I was a roughneck in the oilfields. Do you know what a roughneck is?

No I don't.

Mr. Allen: When I was 18 I was working. As a matter of fact before that during the summertime I worked at a bank but I always wanted to be a soldier. When I graduated I went into the Army. I went into the Army and I stayed four months and then they found out that I was underage and that I had signed my brother's signature to my enlistment records and they sent me home. When Pearl Harbor came along they lowered the draft age to 18 ½ and I was in, it wasn't March, Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941 and in March 1942 I was in the Army.

You were _____?

Mr. Allen: Yes sir. I have the certificate of _____ from ROTC that when I became 21 years old I would then be commissioned. When they lowered the draft age to 18 ½ they lowered the commissioned age also. So I came out smelling like a rose.

Do you remember where you were when you heard of Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Allen: Sure, in Oklahoma.

Do you remember what kind of emotions you felt when the Japanese attacked?

Mr. Allen: I think that is kind of a wild character type question simply because in those days no television, limited radio and we didn't learn about it until it was a day old practically. When we found out, the man that I worked for my immediate supervisor had been a flying Sergeant in World War I. When he heard about it on the radio he lined us up and informed us of what was taking place and that he would support any of us that wanted to go and serve; so three of us left.

Did you hear Roosevelt's speech a couple of days after that?

Mr. Allen: Oh sure, the famous speech of this day in infamy.

You said that when you went back there in 1942, you got commissioned in 1942?

Mr. Allen: Yes, March 1942.

Where did you go when you got commissioned?

Mr. Allen: The interesting thing about this since we are telling war stories is that when the results of Pearl Harbor were announced and they lowered the draft age they ordered all draft eligible people to go to the registration. In this case the post office in Oklahoma. I signed up and there was one question that said, "Have you had any military experience or training, i.e. reserves, National Guard, regular Army, that sort of thing." I put down that I had four years of ROTC at a little military school in Missouri. This man told me he said, "Don't even unpack your bag." 24 hours later I had a telegram and not the type that you have ever seen before. It had the tape that was glued to the paper that said, "Report to Camp Walters, Texas, immediately!" That was in Mineral Wells, Texas, which is about 500 miles away. That is when it all started.

Is that where you had your officer training in Texas? That is where you reported you said?

Mr. Allen: No. I was commissioned. I had already had four years and was fully trained. I went to Texas to begin; I served in what was known as the 13th Regiment 58th Battalion of a training center. My first responsibility was conducting basic training for about 200 recruits, draftees I should say. I was a brand new 2nd Lieutenant. I was in the company about a month. They shipped out the company commander who was a 1st Lieutenant and suddenly I was a company commander and I was 20 years old. I got a good first start. I was a company commander for four days I should say because they shipped me out again.

What were your impression of the draftees that you were training in the company?

Mr. Allen: Impression? At the risk of being critical questions like this are... really... what was my impression of a draftee? Normal human beings. They got brought in to something that carried them so fast

that they didn't have time to breathe. Such things as getting their hair, skin and turning in all their civilian clothes and having their uniforms fitted are now thrown at them and learning how to go squads east and west overnight, an amazing bunch of people.

Do you think they received enough training to be successful in a war?

Mr. Allen: Were we successful in the war?

Yes I do sir.

Mr. Allen: What's the question?

No, I'm saying do you think they had enough training.

Mr. Allen: Of course. There was no such thing as having a... well here I go going off on one of my old soldier stories. We had 160,000 people in the Army when World War II came along. It went up to 12 million. Now if you stop and think the pace in which that all moved, that was 12 million in a period of about four years of a momentum of all of that. Were they trained well enough? The only thing I can say is we were successful. You couldn't have had as a standing Army standing by waiting to go to war. You had to build from a small group up rapidly and we did. We did a marvelous job of it.

Did you yourself participate in any maneuvers stateside?

Mr. Allen: Sure, a bunch of them.

Do you recall where all you went, sir?

Mr. Allen: Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Georgia, Wisconsin. Yes I participated in a few maneuvers.

When they took you out of that basic training company where did you go? Did you go straight to Europe?

Mr. Allen: No. I made the mistake of making a 1st Lieutenant mad at me. He asked me why I hadn't volunteered to go to mortar maintenance school. When they put it on the bulletin board it said, "All Lieutenants, attention. We have these courses and we need volunteers for the mortar school." None of us volunteered, about 20. He lined us up; he was a big ole heavy set guy. He put his belt buckle over my chest and he said, "Why didn't you volunteer?" I said, "I joined the Army to be an infantry platoon leader." That afternoon at 5:30 I went to the mortar maintenance school which lasted about six weeks. From then on I had orders to go to Camp Vandorne, Mississippi. You have never heard of it and you can never find it in the history books unless you went in the Army records. This was a tar paper shack camp. They put 22,000 of us in it around a town of about 400 people. It was out in the middle of the shrub oak and you name it in Mississippi; Centerville, Mississippi. It's a little bigger now. We activated the 99th Infantry Division in September 1942. From then on I was in that outfit there until the end of the war. In the infantry division we maneuvered, trained constantly. We were considered to be a green outfit. We didn't go in to Normandy. We came in three months later but we got to go through some very serious fighting like the Battle of the Bulge, crossing of the Rhine River in Rheumegan, the Ruhr pocket area, the Ogden's. We ended up in Czechoslovakia. Now does that answer that broad question you asked?

When did you leave to go overseas sir?

Mr. Allen: We left in August of 1944.

What port of departure did you leave from?

Mr. Allen: The port of embarkation here was at Camp Miles Standish in Rauten, Massachusetts, up near Boston. We departed from there for England.

Did you guys go on troop transport ships?

Mr. Allen: 50 of them. If you have ever seen 50 troop carriers out in the ocean you can't see from horizon to horizon from all of our ships.

How long was the voyage?

Mr. Allen: About 11 days.

How were the living conditions?

Mr. Allen: Rugged. If you are prone to sea sickness you are going to get it. You ate two meals a day. The biggest problem was lack of exercise. We were physically fit and rugged from training in a field and everything and to go aboard one of those and not being able to do anything. We had to take turns going up on deck and down because there was just no space and stuff like that. Traveling on a troop ship is not a pleasure cruise.

Do you know approximately how many soldiers were on each ship?

Mr. Allen: I was on the USS Marine Devil and we had about 3,800.

When you were up in England what city were you in?

Mr. Allen: We landed in Plymouth, England. We offloaded there and they took us up into Dorchester County. We did nothing but physical fitness training in preparation for going on over. We went over in the latter part of September. We departed from South Hampton and landed in LaHavre, France. We swung north and to our left and went up to northern France to Belgium and Germany.

How long was that you said? You landed in August you said?

Mr. Allen: We left the states in August and went to England. We were in England for about three or four weeks and then we went on over because they were pushing troops through there as fast as they could push them.

You went with the same unit right? Did your unit get mixed up or did your unit stay intact pretty much?

Mr. Allen: We stayed intact from the day I; when I took command of my company in September 1943 I stayed there until I got promoted in March 1945 when I got promoted to Battalion.

What kind of equipment and arms did you and your soldiers train with, sir, and how well did they operate?

Mr. Allen: Can't you be more specific? Do you want to talk artillery pieces, rifles, machine guns? From my standpoint as an infantry guy I was exposed first to the Springfield Model 11 which was a World War I piece of equipment. We exchange that for the ground rifle or the famous M1. Of course we had side arms. I carried a 45 we also had the carbines. We did not have carbines before the automatic fire, ours

were semi-automatic. That didn't come up until we were in Korea. In an infantry outfit at that time the largest weapon we had in the infantry battalion was an 81-mm mortar. The company levels had a 60-mm mortar, battalion level 81 and then at the regimental level we had a thing called Cannon Company. This was a Howitzer with a tube about that long. It shot the same round that a big 105 Howitzer shoots. Those are the kind of weapons.

Did ya'lls operate pretty good? Were some of the others better than others? Did it give you any trouble, any ones in particular?

Mr. Allen: Once again, asking strange, how judging. I mean what are you looking for?

Did they function pretty well in the field?

Mr. Allen: Obviously, I mean to look back 50 years and ask was that rifle any good, it's kind of hard to do. I can remember when we had the single bold action rifle versus the eight shot semi-automatic, it worked great. Trouble? Sure we had trouble. You have trouble; if you got the finest weapon in the world you are going to have trouble in the field. Not trouble that defeats you. You either win or lose. If you win, everything worked great didn't it?

Where was your first experience of combat?

Mr. Allen: Northern France. It was the first time I had a casualty in my company. That was sometimes about the end of September or early October.

What kind of reaction did that put on you and your company?

Mr. Allen: I would say that it scared the hell out of us. That is a pretty reasonable thing. There is no great hero's in combat. Most of the people are thankful that they can do what they can do and do it well. I think most of us our main concern was we wanted to support our colleagues and our men. We didn't want to look bad or let any of them down so that kept us motivated to hang in there. My company out of 148 men or something like that I didn't have a soul to try to get out of it.

Pretty tight unit?

Mr. Allen: Absolutely.

Did you guys have much free time?

Mr. Allen: Where?

Out there to write letters and stuff like that home or not too much?

Mr. Allen: Mail call usually came up with morning chow. Morning chow was 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and if you had mail you stuffed it in your field jacket until sometime you got to a place to do it. But if you are talking about free time, there isn't no such thing. You were either cleaning your equipment, training, or resting; anticipating moving on. I'm talking about combat conditions. I'm not talking about sitting back in the rear area waiting to go someplace. If you are in a rear area you are going to train.

You guys were constantly pushing forward correct?

Mr. Allen: Absolutely.

What kind of chow, how was the chow?

Mr. Allen: The food?

Yes sir.

Mr. Allen: Combat rations. If you are going to be commissioned you know all the classes of rations I presume. In the old timey days we had A & B rations. The difference was fresh food, fresh vegetables or fresh meats, that sort of thing. When going into combat you are going to the hard rations. Those are the K's and the C's and the ten and ones. We spent most of our time on ten and ones K's and C's. The biggest thing about it while it was healthy you could get 3,000 calories is what you get out of it. It comes awfully tiresome. You get so much that you don't want see it again. You also become very innovative. We could take all of the stuff out of a K-ration. The K-ration was in a box about 4 inches wide and 1 ½ inches thick and 9 inches long. You wore three of them in your pack and that was your three meals. We got to the point that we would mix the coffee to lemon powder, salt and pepper; mix it all together in a canteen cup. If you are talking about the quality of the food, the quality was fine but typical. It's monotonous. It's like being in a prison and being served every day three meals a day like it or not. What we call rations compared to what they have now; these guys are living at the Waldorf. We had C-rations. There were three menus: meat and beans, stew, and hash. That is your three heavy cans and that was the evening meal, one of those. In the case of the K-rations we would get a little can of eggs. There is nothing like a can of eggs. Canned scrambled eggs are just as marvelous. The troops I think used them to throw at whatever they could throw at.

I assume you guys were sleep deprived. Did you guys get much sleep out there during combat action?

Mr. Allen: I think what you better do is define combat. Combat is not something that is a schedule. When you go into combat and active firing, active fighting, you are being shot at and you are trying to find the enemy and you shoot back and stuff like that. You don't think about anything other than saving your butt and killing the enemy. If you are talking about free time and did they relax and did you get this and that, don't put that in the same context with combat. You can say in a combat zone how did you live, comparing in combat, out of combat, movement towards combat; it's a much broader range than just to say, "In combat did you get much free time?" My first answer was we didn't have enough time anytime.

Were you promoted, you said you were promoted during 1945?

Mr. Allen: Sure.

Did you make it to 1st Lieutenant, you said?

Mr. Allen: I was a 2nd Lieutenant in March 1942. I was a 1st Lieutenant in September 1942. I was a Captain in September 1943. I went overseas as a Captain. In March I got promoted to Battalion. In 1945 I was a Major.

Were you impressed with the qualities of the enemy, like their leadership, tenacity or bravery?

Mr. Allen: Oh sure. If you don't respect your enemy, unless it's just a rebel rousing mob that is just out of control, when you are fighting an organization like the German Army and their military capabilities, a lot more _____ than ours in the beginning. They damn near blew us out of North Africa. They damn near drove us out of Italy. (tape cuts out)... 32 battalions of artillery, you designate a target and tell them to fire for effect and wham you just got to shoot one round of each tube and it's like having an earthquake. That is how powerful we became on closing that thing off. This ___ that was poked back by the Germans

into France was nothing but a big penetration and we held this shoulder right up here which they never were able to break down. We went across just like this and wiped that ____ out completely. We captured about 200,000 Germans.

That's amazing.

Mr. Allen: I am telling you about the scope of the operation though. When you ask questions about, "Did you see any combat or did you understand what it was like in combat." Like I say so often, memories become very vivid and very vague at the same time. After once in a while I get what it felt like during the Battle of the Bulge because there was a distinct odor from the war part. My outfit from World War II meets every year. My company, one time I was in communication with 90 of them up to a few years ago. There are six of us left out of the group that started. Combat is a real thing. I went from that, I went to Korea, I went to Vietnam. My son went to Vietnam with me as a chopper pilot. Now does that qualify you as a Veteran? I don't know.

After the Battle of the Bulge was that your last mission?

Mr. Allen: After the Bulge, sometimes after Christmas when we started getting air support my son came out. They pulled us out and moved us back to a place in Belgium. Where my company was in was in a place called Clermont, Belgium. We moved out of there up to Aachen, the ____ Forest, ____, ____, ____, and then we hit the Rhine River. We swung from down here where the Bulge was, swung us up north between Dusseldorf and Cologne was where we finally headed. We hit the Rhine River at 3o'clock in the afternoon I think it was about the 9th of March. Things had settled down because we couldn't go any further and the Germans weren't shooting at us. It was a beautiful sun shiny day so we started working on our equipment and getting them spruced up again. We got orders to be prepared to move that a truck convoy would pick us up I think like 5:30 or 6:00 before dark. They shifted us south to the Remagen Bridge. Have you ever heard of the Remagen Bridge?

No.

Mr. Allen: The first time we had crossed the Rhine River this is how Germany was defeated because if we hadn't of gotten that God knows how long we would have been there. The Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen pushed five infantry divisions across that thing before it collapsed. They put in eight pontoon bridges and to give you a feel for that, that river was about as wide from where we are sitting clear across the parking lot and it is going a rate of about a little over 15 miles an hour. When you put a pontoon bridge in that it immediately swings because the river is so powerful. We crossed there at 10:00 the next morning. You were up on the high ground looking back toward the bridge, the Ludendorff Bridge and three days later the bridge collapsed. The Germans showed up and they gave us 24 hours to get back across the Rhine River or they would destroy us. Our pucker factor went up then because we were there and they had us but we didn't know it. We also knew that we had more power than they had. When you think of the air power they covered the top of that area with hundreds of fighter aircraft. This is the first time I ever saw a German jet. It was the first jet type aircraft that anyone had ever seen was at the crossing of the Remagen Bridge. From there they shipped us up into the Ruhr pocket which is further into northern Germany. We, the allied forces with us coming from the southeast we captured over 250,000 Germans. I had been promoted to Battalion Executive Officer in March of 1945 and the time I am talking about is the latter part of March. My battalion, we didn't capture they gave up, but we had 85,000 Germans for this little infantry battalion of about 800 men. One thing we would do is take one soldier and let him have two or three hundred Germans and he would lead them down the road. He would say come on just follow. We had them totally surrounded and they tried to escape but up here we were coming into Brussels. That was the _____. It was famous for the final collapse of the northern part of Germany. Then they turned around and swung us south going down on the autobahn. This is where we went to

Nuremberg, _____, Schweinfurt, Erling and over into Czechoslovakia. From there on the 8th of May we got the orders to cease all... I forgot two river crossings. If you have any experience of river crossing you want really get the impact of this but we crossed the Danube River under fire and we crossed the Nucker. When the 8th of May came we had just completed crossing the Danube and we had one company that lost 125 men. They got caught right out in the middle of the water in their boat with the Germans firing machine gun fire about that high off of the water. But then on the 8th of May, "Cease all forward movement" and black out restrictions were lifted. We had not had lights on for months except in the rear areas. It was interesting because as soon as we took off all the blackout covers off the vehicles and took the covers off the windows and put the lights on and the soldiers were all quiet waiting for something to happen. We thought that we are sitting out here with all of these lights on now they are going to knock us off real fast. The war was over. They moved us back in June because I remember celebrating the 4th of July in a village up on the touring border when the Russians invited me to come up. That is World War II.

Did you remember hearing when Roosevelt died?

Mr. Allen: Sure.

Did they give you that news up front?

Mr. Allen: Sure. They told us that and the best thing that ever happened was that nuclear bomb hitting Hiroshima. When they hit the second one at Nagasaki we cheered because the guys out in the Pacific were going to have a rougher job than we had. That is the worst place in the world as far as I'm concerned out in the heat of the Pacific because I have been there. I spent many tours out there.

After the war ended did they send you back home right away?

Mr. Allen: They were going to send us to the Pacific but they found that they had divisions that had never been committed so they were going to commit them. The infantry division had been chosen to remain in Germany. My division was going to be shipped back to the states and either be sent off to the Pacific or be deactivated. They started deactivating and the 1st Division interviewed a group of us and had a choice of officers and non-comms to stay with them. There were six of us that got selected to stay with the 16th Infantry so I stayed with them for two years. That is where I met my bride and got married and everything.

That was a good choice then.

Mr. Allen: Oh yeah. It was a career choice.

Would you like to add anything else for future generations that are studying World War II?

Mr. Allen: Just all about World War II?

Yes sir, World War II or you can add whatever you want.

Mr. Allen: I would suggest in these things since the World War II types are fewer and fewer right now but you got some people here in this town that have fabulous experiences in... well I want get into that. I was going to say I have some friends in the 101st and Bastogne and we still have fun over that. We used to call them the 1-0 worst because they would go down there and get them surrounded; anyone can get surrounded. That is soldier humor. It's one of these things when you start trying to talk about it there are so many things that are involved. You got a question that is broad and general. You don't know whether to start, stop or give up. I guess if I were talking about future generations I would tell the young and

incidentally I have been a PMS at a university, I have trained cadets, I've got graduates of mine that wore three stars so I have been around this part of it. The most serious thing that bothers me is that a vast majority of kids, Austin Peay is different. It's unique in the fact that it is closely associated with the 101st Airborne. That makes it unique in a sense. You get a cross feed from this. Like in your case how long have you been in ROTC?

Three years, sir.

Mr. Allen: How much time have you spent out on the post?

A pretty good time.

Mr. Allen: Are you involved in any special groups like the rangers platoon or any of that stuff?

Yes sir.

Mr. Allen: Well good. You are getting a different orientation. I know colleges that just as soon as Vietnam came along they wiped ROTC off the campus. The campus that I was on, they wiped it out even though it was one of the best sources of good qualified commissioned officers because you got people from all ranks and all walks of life and you have faculty doing all of their teaching. The only thing the military did was put it together and make them use it. Leadership was usually the towns, the knowledge and the experience passed to you. We made them use it. Most people not associated with the military will think of ROTC as just fun and games, drill field, coat of manual arms, run around in funny looking uniforms with ribbons that said you went to camp over the weekend and stuff like that. That is the vision. True vision is what you are seeing here. If you can get commissioned off of this ROTC unit you are not going to be lost when you go on post. You will have a pretty firm idea. You are going to be looked at as an unusual type and old non-comms are going to look at ROTC 2nd Lieutenants with utter disdain but they do recognize one thing, a new Lieutenant may be short on experience but he is long on ability and knowledge. It's that non-comm that turns that around and gives him the experience and the knowledge and works with him. Don't ever put your non-comms down but also don't let them walk on you. Sometimes they like to have fun and games with young officers.

(End of Interview)