

Interviewee: Allen, C. Everett
Interviewer: David Gregory
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Gregory: Now Mr. Allen, let's begin, if you would tell me where you grew up and where you were when the war started.

Allen: All right. I came to Florida in 1938 from Tennessee, Nashville, Tennessee, and we settled in Hollywood, Florida. And I experienced the collapse of the banking system in 1928. My dad was a farmer and farmed at Belle Glades, Florida. And when the banks crashed, we moved to Lake Worth, Florida, because the only money circulating in Florida back in those days was the millionaires that lived on Palm Beach, and he thought he would get a little of the residue from them. So I basically grew up in Lake Worth, Florida, during the Depression. And that's where I learned to love my state and I also learned the beauty of sailing and became a lifelong sailor. So naturally when I went into the service, I had to choose the United States Navy as my choice. So all during this time, my very dearest friend – and still resides to this day – that friendship started in the third grade in Lake Worth, Florida, and we are still fiends to this day. We went in the Navy together. I have recently talked to him and he brought me current with what he's doing; he has retired and is still living, he's living in North Carolina. Now all during the Depression years, we learned to sail – he had a Sharky sailboat, an 18-foot Sharky sailboat, and that was my first experience with sailing. He taught me all about sailing, and I spent my youth sailing up and down Lake Worth between _____ [??] Island and Boynton Inlet.

Then I attend Lake Worth high school, and then we started, my friend and I, started discussing building a sailboat of a certain size and were looking forward to the day to retire from school, graduate from school and take off in the West Indies. Time went along and the economy started to pick up a little bit and Ed moved back to Hollywood, Florida, and then I graduated from high school in Broward County and all the years I had been dreaming about building this Sharky sailboat – I went to work in the construction business. I was building this sailboat at night and in my spare time. I was working for 20 cents an hour in those days and glad to get it.

My friend was playing football at the University of Mississippi and I launched my boat. I finally finished it and launched it December the 15th, the week after the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Then Monday morning I sailed for Palm Beach – and my friend lived in Lantana – and he quit school and came home and we started stocking the boat to sail off to the West Indies. The following week we sailed to Miami. We didn't have a dime in our pockets. Money wasn't the important thing, food was the important thing. We knew that we could live off of fish and we scraped together a bunch of rice and canned tomatoes and was sitting at the docks in Miami, getting ready to sail down to the West Indies, and the Germans sunk a tanker in broad daylight, about 9:30, right off the Governor's Cut. The whole island shook. George and I were stunned and bewildered, and after a few days of digesting the incident, we decided it wouldn't be safe out

there and the country was at war. At that point I was just before becoming – my birthday is January the first and this was December the twenty-eighth that the German sub attacked. I said, “Well, let’s go over and enlist in the Navy, George. I’d like to enlist on my 21st birthday.” I was born on January the first. So we went to the recruiting office, and it was closed since it was a holiday. So we went back on the second and went in the Navy at that time and volunteered our services without our parents knowing it. That seemed to be the only proper thing to do.

My biggest fear was not being able, physically, to pass the examination because I didn’t want to be a “4F-er.” Two weeks later we was in the Navy. I went in the Navy as a 3rd class carpenter’s mate – I’d had three years of experience as a carpenter – and was shipped to Mayport, Florida, a section base out at Mayport, Florida, out at Jacksonville. The base was not commissioned; I was living on an old tug boat, getting subsistence for living on the boat. And they were building a space at the time – it wasn’t completed, they had no sewage in, they was building the barracks. My first experience in the Navy was at Mayport. I stayed there eighteen months. My friend, he went to Banana River and ultimately he wound up in Alaska and I wound up going to the South Pacific after spending eighteen months at Mayport. I was on a ship – the only ship at that time – it was a DE, a destroyer escort – it was the only ship at that time in the navy named after a colored man who was a mess attendant at Guadalcanal and he saved his shipmate, fell on his shipmate and saved him from being killed, and the ship was named the *Harmon*, the USS *Harmon*.

My career in the navy was in the South Pacific and my first base of operation was at Nouméa, New Caledonia, off of Australia. From there we just went all the way up the slot. In the meantime I had become a 1st class carpenter’s mate, and the most important job I had aboard ship was ship’s repair and damage control. Orders came through for me to be transferred back to the States, but by this time we had worked our way up to the Philippines and that was my last invasion, it was the Leyte Gulf, and unbeknown to me it was the largest naval engagement that the world had ever known. It was there at Leyte Gulf that the Japanese introduced our country, to suicide planes. After the invasion of the Philippines we went to Linguyen – not the invasion of the Philippines, but after we finished the invasion of Leyte – we bypassed Corregidor and went up to Lingayen and they set up the beachhead there to take back the islands of the Philippines. From there I was transferred back to the States and missed the invasion at Okinawa, which ultimately that was the last major battle fought in the Pacific besides dropping the bombs.

In the meantime I was back in the navy and I got married and was assigned to a new ship called the USS *Diamondhead*, which was an ammunition attack ship, and never saw active duty on it. I was politely told when I came aboard the ship to report for duty and requested permission to come aboard and salute the flag – and I was politely told by the officer on deck that he was glad to have me because there was only five of us aboard this ship that had any sea experience. He wished me well and reminded me – I shall never forget this caution that he gave me, and that was, “Young man, you are welcome aboard this ship. I want you to know this is an ammunition attack ship. You will be allowed one mistake and you’ll never live to be able to tell about it.” [laughter] Shortly thereafter I was discharged from the navy and went back to my beloved home in Hollywood, Florida, and settled back down to building and developing and here I am now.

Gregory: When were you discharged?

Allen: I was discharged at Jacksonville Naval Air Station.

Gregory: In '45?

Allen: In '45, out at Jacksonville

Gregory: Let's go back, if I may, tell me about December 7, 1941. Where were you? Do you recall that?

Allen: Yes, sir. I remember that very clearly. I think all of us that were involved in this great war, World War II, would remember exactly where we were and shall never forget it. I was in Dania, Florida, going down the marina there, a new marina in Dania, Florida, making arrangements to get a four-wheeler trailer to launch my sailing boat, the *Matacour I*, and I heard the news come in over a radio in a fishing boat tied up at the docks there. Needless to say, I was dumbfounded and my whole life changed from that point on.

Gregory: Did you and your buddies talk about it?

Allen: My friend wasn't with me at the time.

Gregory: George?

Allen: George was not with me.

Gregory: Now you said that you had not gone to basic training.

Allen: No, the navy had a program at that time – when the war broke out we was in – let me back up a minute. What I am trying to say is that our country was totally unprepared for this war. Roosevelt had campaigned that there would be no war. We was just trying to stay out of World War II. The navy had this program that if you had any experience in civilian life, you would go in a program called V-6, and you didn't have to be trained, you were fairly well trained without any basic training, which speeded up the effort. It took our country about two years to really get things rolling, and once we started rolling there was no power on earth could stop us.

Gregory: So after you enlisted, they ran you up to Mayport, is that what I remember?

Allen: Yes, I was shipped to Mayport.

Gregory: And you were there eighteen months?

Allen: Eighteen months.

Gregory: Living in a boat part of the time.

Allen: Lived on the boat until they got the barracks built. And I never moved into the barracks. By that time there were quite a number of carpenters from the state of Florida that checked in at the base there and we had bunks built in the carpenter shop out on the dock. That is where we stayed.

Gregory: Right on the dock out in the open?

Allen: No, it was in the building.

Gregory: Now what did they have you doing there for eighteen months?

Allen: Well, my primary duty was repairing old shrimp boats. The navy had taken over shrimp boats – they'd only do about six knots – and put a 50 caliber – I believe it was a 50 caliber – it might have been a 30 caliber – water cooled machine gun on the bow of these shrimp boats as a weapon, to fend off submarines, I guess. The young officers had never operated boats and they were banging them up and I repaired the boats mostly, the whole time I was there. And then I rebuilt the officers club, remodeled that, and I did all sorts of repair work and construction around the base.

Gregory: Well, you must have been having a good time then?

Allen: I enjoyed that very much, but that wasn't my idea of fighting a war.

Gregory: No, that's for sure.

Allen: That was the reason that I enlisted – or volunteered for sea duty.

Gregory: So at that point you said, "I want to go to sea"?

Allen: Yes.

Gregory: What did they do next?

Allen: Well, they shipped me to Massachusetts, to pick up the USS *Harmon* that I spoke of. The USS *Harmon*, her number was 678 —

Gregory: Destroyer escort.

Allen: Destroyer escort.

Gregory: So you went to Boston, and did you get some training there?

Allen: No, I waited for the ship to be commissioned. And when it was commissioned, then we went on a shakedown cruise to (what's that island off the coast – English island) – Bermuda. Went to Bermuda, and then from there we came back to Massachusetts and then sailed down through the Canal to San Francisco and then across to Honolulu and then on out into the Pacific.

Gregory: Gotcha. Well, what does a carpenter's mate do on a destroyer escort?

Allen: Well, as a matter of fact, they don't have a carpenter rate in the navy anymore. But that was one of the main, very important rate to have during the days of the old tall ships and wooden vessels. Carpenter's mates, boatswain mates, and sail makers were very important back in those days. But basically, a carpenter's mate aboard the modern navy is in ship repair. All sort of repair work on the ship and a complete knowledge of what makes the ship tick – the fire mains, damage control, and doing what small amount of work that has to be done in carpenter work, but very little of that, and stand the regular watches, but mainly ship repair.

Gregory: What was that cruise like from Boston to San Francisco? Uneventful?

Allen: Well, it afforded me an opportunity to go through the Canal, which was very exciting, and we spent two or three days on the Pacific side at Balboa . I think we spent about three days there and then we set course for San Francisco and spent a few days there and then to Honolulu. We landed in Honolulu on December 8, two years to the date that it was bombed. And from there we were taking the *Nashville* to Australia for some kind of repair and we got within fifty miles and they changed orders on us and we went back to Nouméa, New Caledonia.

Gregory: What was Pearl like when you saw it? What was your impression?

Allen: Pearl Harbor was – my first impression that the whole operation was taking place out of Pearl Harbor and there was lines of sailors blocks long waiting to get on the planes, waiting to get back to ships, just beaucoup sailors everywhere. And servicemen of all types, everybody all excited about getting into the conflict.

Gregory: Did you get any leave time at Pearl?

Allen: No, I got liberty for a couple of nights.

Gregory: What did you do?

Allen: I can't tell you.

Gregory: You can't tell me? [laughter] Why not?

Allen: That's another thing that impressed me, there was some female – I forget her name – ran all the whore houses and controlled it all, and there was a line blocks long waiting to get in. And that scene will stick in my mind forever. I think she got a big writeup in *Life Magazine* after the war was all over. She was also one of the leading citizens as far as selling war bonds and all kinds of stuff she did for the service people over there. I never got to see much of the island, just went up town to the victory bar, I remember that – right outside the navy base. I believe it was on Hotel Street. And that's about all that happened. I never got out to Waikiki, I didn't get to do any sightseeing at all while I was there. Didn't have time to sweat the lines out.

Gregory: Did you get much leave time while you were in Boston?

Allen: Nah, just regular liberty.

Gregory: Same thing, just you and your buddies go to the bar?

Allen: No, we was out chasing women – of which I fell in love.

Gregory: You fell in love in Boston?

Allen: Yeah.

Gregory: Tell me about that.

Allen: I met this little girl, Eileen Lacoury [spelling??] down in Nantasket Beach. [laughs] That was it.

Gregory: That was it? Love at first sight?

Allen: Yep, I guess so. I ultimately married her

Gregory: Well, when did you get married?

Allen: Oh, I came back from the South Pacific.

Gregory: Very good. So you were writing to her while you were in — ?

Allen: Yeah, I was writing to her. And became engaged when I was in the South Pacific

by mail.

Gregory: How did you do that?

Allen: Just by mail.

Gregory: Did you send her a ring by mail?

Allen: Oh yeah, I sent her a ring and some money to buy a hope chest. [chuckles]

Gregory: Very good. Did you try to tell her where you were when you were over there? Did you have any kind of code? Some guys used codes.

Allen: No, no, all of our mail was censored and anything that wasn't apropos was cut out. They guarded that very closely, especially, no one could mention anything about kamikaze pilots because the country was afraid that that would demoralize Americans. They didn't want the Americans to know anything about that. And about the only thing we could say was "somewhere on the high seas and everything was fine." And that was about it.

Gregory: Now did you have experience on your ship with kamikazes?

Allen: No, they didn't bother the small ships like that. They went after the bigger ones – troop ships or battle wagons or aircraft carrier.

Gregory: What does a carpenter's mate do on a destroyer escort during a battle environment?

Allen: Well, my position was mainly damage control and to make sure – to be able to handle fires or any kind of damage that was done to save the ship in the event that it needed repairs or whatever the occasion called for.

Gregory: Where you ever hit?

Allen: No, the ship was never hit.

Gregory: That's good. So you didn't have to work the damage control, at least too, too much.

Allen: No, no, I never got into anything. My orders came through before the invasion of the Philippines to be transferred back to the States – I was rated in excess of the conflict. They got these orders to go to the Philippines and my skipper asked me to stay aboard, that he needed damage control, didn't tell me where we were going but said it would be a very important

mission, and naturally I felt obligated to stick with the ship.

Gregory: Now you are still on the *Harmon* at this point?

Allen: Yes

Gregory: So what was your part in the Battle of Leyte Gulf? What sort of things was the *Harmon* doing?

Allen: A DE would escort – its primary duty was escorting and submarine warfare. We carried depth charges and torpedoes and hedgehogs. And we would screen the convoys and circle the convoys and try to search out the submarines. That was the main duty.

Gregory: You said that after Leyte you were transferred? What happened after Leyte?

Allen: I was transferred back to the States to be reassigned.

Gregory: How did you get back?

Allen: Came back on an old transport ship that picked up a whole bunch of jungle rot cases in New Guinea.. That was a virus that the soldiers and marines picked up on the beach from something, I don't know what was. It wasn't contagious, but they would break out like they had mange. That's what it looked like. Flesh would all be raw flesh all over their arms and ears and the back of the neck and under their armpits. And they said that the only treatment they had for it really was sending them to a colder climate to get out of the heat.

Gregory: Did you talk to any of those guys?

Allen: Oh, yeah.

Gregory: What were their experiences like?

Allen: Oh, the typical jungle warfare, nothing pleasant about it.

Gregory: Did you have any weather experiences while you were in the Pacific? Any bad weather situations?

Allen: Yes, after the invasion of the Philippines, Admiral Halsey took the fleet out to the North China Sea to refuel, and being the gung-ho admiral that he was, he wouldn't let the ships take on any water for ballast. But we hit a typhoon and all the ships had expended their fuel and were traveling with no ballast in the tanks, and we hit seas that were 50 to 100 foot high. Of course, we didn't have the weather reports and sophistication that we have now, and according to the

rumors we were heading right into the typhoon that was out there for about 10 days and none of the ships could take on any fuel, it was too rough. And I think they lost two tin cans out there, destroyers of the Dewey class that rolled over. We took at 38 degree roll and by all the laws of the sea we should have rolled over, but another wave came and hit us and knocked us back on keel and we was able to salvage that. But ten days we had nothing to eat, couldn't eat; it was so rough we just ate oranges – that's about the only thing we had to live on. But I thought that was the most awesome experience that I've ever seen and the force was terrific – battle wagons that go completely under water, aircraft carriers that the overhang was all tore off. It was quite an experience; I never want to go through another one.

Gregory: No sir. What's it like going through that roll? Were you slamming around inside there?

Allen: No, we just took the bunks and chained them up to where we would lay against each other down in a sort of a "V" to keep from being thrown out of the bunks.

Gregory: Did you see some other ships roll over?

Allen: No, you couldn't see. We was all buttoned up, you couldn't get outside.

Gregory: Not a good experience, is it. Well now, you lost track of George, did you? Were you and George writing?

Allen: No, George went to a different branch of the Navy; I don't know exactly where he did wind up. I know he went to Alaska at one time; I think the ship he was on was the *Redwing*, some kind of a tug, I think it was. I really don't know what kind of a vessel it was.

Gregory: Did you write back and forth?

Allen: Oh, yeah, we wrote occasionally.

Gregory: Well, they say the navy gets the best food, is that right?

Allen: Well, I wouldn't say it was the best, I think that was one of my main bitches [laughter]. We had reasonably good food. We had a deal with Australia, with Lend-Lease we got a whole bunch of muttons, sheep, full-grown sheep, and we certainly got tired of eating that stuff all the time.

Gregory: They gave you some sheep, did you have to butcher them?

Allen: No, they came all butchered up, skinned, and carcasses came aboard.

Gregory: Ok, and then you ate a lot sheep, a lot of mutton.

Allen: A lot of mutton, and Spam.

Gregory: Okay. Tell me about coming back home then. Let me go back though – you said something – when you said they had taken you off the *Harmon*, something to do with your classification. You were over-classified or something?

Allen: Yeah, I was rated 1st class, and the ship wasn't big enough for that type of a rating, so I had to get back to a ship that I could qualify on so I could go on up the ladder.

Gregory: So then they shipped you back home on a tanker – or a transport – and you were reassigned to an ammunition ship?

Allen: Yes, an ammunition attack ship.

Gregory: And that was where, San Francisco?

Allen: No, the ship was being fitted out in Baltimore, Maryland. It was a merchant marine ship that the navy had contracted to convert into an ammunition ship, for carrying ammunition. And an ammunition attack ship is a ship that goes with the fleet.

Gregory: What is its role? Obviously carrying ammunition.

Allen: To keep all the ships stocked with the firepower that they needed to operate the cannons and so forth.

Gregory: So are you moving from ship to ship for that purpose? Is that how that works?

Allen: Yeah, they'd come along side and we'd load em up with projectiles and powder and all that stuff.

Gregory: And hope you don't get hit, huh?

Allen: And hope you don't get hit.

Gregory: Because there probably aren't many second chances with that. Are there?

Allen: None at all.

Gregory: Now you're back in the East then where your fiancé is, right? When you went back to Baltimore?

Allen: Yeah I was married then when I went —

Gregory: When did you get married?

Allen: Right after I came back from the South Pacific.

Gregory: Where would you have been married? In the East?

Allen: I was married in Boston.

Gregory: In Boston, okay. That was when you came back to the East to be reassigned.

Allen: Right

Gregory: And were you separated then – she stayed in Boston and you went on the transport?

Allen: No, we had an apartment and we were still working out of Baltimore and I was able to see her on different nights when I was off duty.

Gregory: What would you say your most memorable experience was during the war, Mr. Allen?

Allen: I would say my experience in the South Pacific. I wouldn't want to do it again but I wouldn't have missed it for all the tea in China. It was quite an experience.

Gregory: Yes sir. Now, when you were in the Pacific, it sounds like you're a planner. Were you making plans for what you did when you got back?

Allen: Oh, I sure was.

Gregory: What were you going to do?

Allen: Well, when I was in high school in Lake Worth, as I had mentioned it in the beginning of this interview, that I got interested in a Sharky sailboat. And I was reading all the Florida history I could get my hands on, discovering whatever I could about the role the Sharky sailboat played in the development of Florida. The Sharky sailboat was used – it was a flat-bottom sailing vessel that was used quite extensively in the early development of Florida because you could run it aground in real shallow water. I remember reading that Florida had several major booms, and one of them being after the Civil War there was a boom of people coming to Florida and then also during WW I there was another boom that took place in Florida and I just knew, and I couldn't get out of the service fast enough, to get back home and get in the developing and

building business, because I knew that Florida was going to bust wide open because of all the service bases they had built in Florida. Then this all took place, and I had a very lucrative career in building and developing.

Gregory: So you were anxious to get home and get to work?

Allen: Get home and get to work.

Gregory: Yes sir, very astute of you. Any other buddies that you developed friendships with during the war other than George? George was your friend from home. How about when you were overseas? Any pals?

Allen: Oh yeah, I had lots of friends aboard ship, and that was a great experience too, being able to live aboard ship and being in confined positions.

Gregory: Anyone in particular that was a special pal?

Allen: Yeah, I had a lot of special ones. One of them was “Gruesome Gravel” [spelling??] [laughs]

Gregory: Gruesome Gravel, [spelling??] why was he called Gruesome Gravel? [spelling??]

Allen: Well, he was ugly as sin [laughs]. Half Indian and half Arkansas – Arkansas and Indian – very smart, very intelligent, and I think he was a fireman and a machinist. Wrote the newspaper and a good cartoonist. I was just intrigued with his ability. He used to call me every Christmas and talk to me for hours, and I could tell he was drunk [laughs]. I don’t know what happened to him, I think he died. That’s the one that stands out the most. Then there was another named Doc. Doc was a pharmacist mate. He was the doc on board the *Harmon*. He was an ex-marine and I always liked old Doc. He was a good old sailor, took care of everybody.

Gregory: He ran the pharmacy?

Allen: Yeah.

Gregory: What would you guys do in your spare time? Play cards or write letters or what?

Allen: No, I had to promise my mother that I wouldn’t – she made me promise four things. No drinking, no smoking, no gambling, and no tattoos.

Gregory: Is that right?

Allen: Well, I don’t have any tattoos, and I learned to hate gambling, but it is impossible not to

drink and smoke, and I picked up a nasty habit of smoking cigars and did it until a month ago.

Gregory: Is that right.

Allen: This time I am quitting for good.

Gregory: Good for you. Were your parents kind of anxious when you told them you had enlisted?

Allen: No, people back then – unless you was born in that period and could see – all Americans became one and everybody was totally dedicated to get into the war effort. I'm sure my parents were very proud of it. My mother had four sons and we were all in the service at one time. None of us got hurt or mained [??] and came home. So I'm sure they were all happy about that.

Gregory: Absolutely, yes sir, they were proud of you. Living in those close quarters, did you have anybody you couldn't get along with? Got crosswise?

Allen: Oh that would happen periodically, but then it wouldn't last long.

Gregory: How did you solve it?

Allen: Oh, it just sort of took care of itself. You realized you had to live with each other and you sure couldn't have thin skin, you had to learn to take it and live with it. That's the best way I can put it.

Gregory: Did they have any boxing matches on the ship?

Allen: Yeah, we would settle some of the disputes with boxing like that.

Gregory: Any final thoughts for me, Mr. Allen?

Allen: Well, my final thought is that I, like everybody who was engaged in WW II, we figured that would be the last major conflict, but I don't think we achieved that objective. And the thing that sticks with me is the patriotism that everybody had during those times. The sacrifices that everybody made to bring that war to a successful conclusion and it took everybody. And then particularly in the South Pacific it took the air force, all the services, the air force, the army, the marines, and the navy to accomplish the feat; they couldn't have done it individually, it took us all to do it. We all played a major role in doing it. That was one of the highlights, I think, of the Pacific Theater of war. In particular, I learned to respect marines and the army who hit the beaches, and I thank God that I wasn't one of them. We had a nice drive-in and reasonably good food, nice showers, and I'm grateful for the navy and always will be. Wish I could do it again.

Gregory: Do you still sail?

Allen: Oh yeah — no, I quit that about two or three years ago . My old age got – lost my sea legs and had to quit.

Gregory: That's a shame. Well, I thank you, sir.