

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
LAWRENCE B. ALLORD  
Seabee, United States Navy, WWII  
1996

OH  
131

**Allord, Lawrence B.**, (1915-2001). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

Allord, a Tomahawk, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the Seabees as part of a Naval construction battalion. Allord touches upon his pre-war work at the Badger Ordnance plant and his decision to enlist in the Seabees. He relates enlisting at the same time as his wife, basic training at Camp Perry (Virginia), weapons training at Quonset Point (Rhode Island), and his trip to New Guinea. Allord talks about constructing piers and roads, seeing Bob Hope give a USO show, and building a hospital on Mindoro Island. He mentions his transfer to Panama where he transferred pontoon dry docks from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Home on leave when the war ended, Allord describes a VJ-Day celebration around the Wisconsin capitol building in Madison. He also touches upon recurring service-related medical problems, finding work after the war, settling in Middleton (Wis.), and joining the American Legion with his wife, Lorraine Allord.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Allord (1915-2001) served with a Navy construction battalion during World War II. He was discharged from service in 1945 and eventually settled in Middleton.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Nathan King, 2003.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

## Interview Transcript

Mark: And then we'll start with some questions. OK. Today's date is November the 13<sup>th</sup>, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Lawrence Allord of Madison, a veteran – of Middleton, excuse me – of Middleton, right next door – a veteran of the Pacific Theater, U.S. Navy, World War II. Good morning. Thanks for coming in. I appreciate it. I suppose we should start at the top, and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Allord: I was born and raised in Tomahawk, Wisconsin.

Mark: That's way up north.

Allord: Yep. That's where the north begins. And in 1941 I was working as a welder out of Badger Ordnance.

Mark: How'd you land that job?

Allord: Through the vocational school in Madison, where I took a refresher course in welding, and finally ended up out there at Badger Ordnance.

Mark: I would imagine that the wartime buildup had already started in 1940, and there was plenty of work for you to do. It's sort of defense related – why don't you tell me a little bit about the Badger Ordnance work and what sort of work you were doing there.

Allord: Well, that was all construction work, building and laying beams for the pipelines and stuff like that, because everything was overhead and not too much underground. And they were using a lot of lead pipes, so they had to be supported with a metal seal.

Mark: And you were doing the construction work.

Allord: I was doing the construction work.

Mark: And so how long did you do that, and when did you eventually join the service?

Allord: I was out there, I think it was about 18 months.

Lorraine Allord: I don't remember – it was when the plant was nearly finished when the Seabees opened up.

Allord: Well the plant was – but there was still plenty of work out there.

Mark: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure.

Allord: And fellas were being drafted, so we decided one day that we weren't going to wait for a draft. We were going to volunteer. So we came to Madison, and I volunteered in the Seabees. My wife joined the Marines that same date. We both ended up in Milwaukee on the same day.

Mark: So, if I may stop you for a second here, there were plenty of service options. You could have chose the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps. I'm interested in why you chose the Navy specifically.

Allord: Well because I wanted to stay in construction. I wanted to follow my trade, and it looked like a good opportunity. And so I went in the Seabees.

Mark: I assume there were plenty of openings for Seabees?

Allord: At that time there were a few – quite a few left.

Mark: So, why don't you just walk me through your induction process. Again, you enlisted from Madison, you went to Milwaukee, you had to go to training somewhere. Just sort of walk me through your introduction to the military.

Allord: From Milwaukee, we went out to Providence, Rhode Island, and went to basics out there.

Mark: Which consisted of what? Did you do rifle training? Did you do classroom materials, that sort of thing?

Lorraine Allord: You go to Camp Perry, Virginia first.

Allord: It was near Providence Rhode Island. Yeah, Camp Perry in Virginia, pardon me. That was wrong, I gave you Providence. It was Camp Perry in West Virginia where we went basic.

Lorraine Allord: Virginia.

Mark: How much of that was marching around? Did you have rifle training?

Allord: Well, we had rifle training there – some rifle training there. Most of it was [unintelligible] drill. Getting used to one another, and getting used to taking orders.

Mark: Yeah. Sometimes young men have trouble taking orders and getting adjusted to – to sort of regimented military lifestyle. How did you fare with that?

Allord: No problems at all because we were a little older than the teenagers that were coming in, so we knew what we were getting into before we got there.

Mark: You mean the Seabees, who were –

Allord: Yes.

Mark: OK. And you also mentioned getting used to each other, and that's one of the sort of hallmarks of basic training is that it often brings people together from all different parts of the country. How did you all eventually get used to each other? How well did that go?

Allord: Well, very good. We were put into companies and then broken down into platoon.

Lorraine Allord: May I interject? Their instructors were Marine instructors.

Mark: Were they kind of tough on you?

Allord: A little bit.

Mark: Yeah.

Allord: But of course then, most of it was done by your commanding officer, and what he wanted, and what he got.

Mark: Now these were all Seabees you were training with.

Allord: Yes.

Mark: What sort of backgrounds did they come from? Did they come from sort of construction background like you did?

Allord: Yeah, most of them came from a background on construction.

Mark: So they had some civilian practice and occupations already.

Allord: Oh yes. Their occupations were electricians, plumbers, you name it. And what they didn't have, they trained, like corpsmen, they picked 'em out and trained 'em.

Mark: And as I think you mentioned, they were a little older than the average recruit?

Allord: Yes.

Mark: So at this time, you were how old?

Allord: Hmm.

Mark: You were already married, and –

Allord: Late 20's.

Mark: Yeah. So, after this basic training, I would imagine you had to go somewhere to learn the construction trade the Navy way. You had to train –

Allord: Then we left Camp Prairie and went down to –

Lorraine Allord: And up to Providence. Up to Providence, then Mississippi.

Allord: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah, that's where Punkwanset(??) is, isn't it?

Lorraine Allord: Yeah, Quonset. That's where –

Allord: By Biloxi.

Mark: And what sort of training did you do there? I imagine this was more technical than –

Allord: There we had our – we were put into platoons, we still had close order drill, but we were also on the rifle range. We were issued our ammunition – I should say our pieces – and mine was a Browning Automatic. Most of them were carrying rifles.

Mark: And you went from Providence, then, to Mississippi, did you say? Somewhere?

Allord: Gulf Port, Mississippi.

Mark: So how long was your training overall? How long did it take for them to get you overseas? I know there was a rush to get you over there – they didn't want you to get over before you were very well trained.

Allord: Ah, let's see. I was there within a period of about eight months. I left ahead of the battalion. We went from there out to California.

Mark: And your trip overseas – you left from California, then where did you go?

Allord: Right. Well, ended up in New Guinea. But my job was to go out with the equipment on a liberty ship. And when we got there, then we had to unload and put the equipment in what they call was a stockade or a pen, and our job was to make sure all our equipment got moved and stayed there so when the battalion caught up with us, they would have the things to work with.

Mark: And you went to New Guinea – how long did it take you to get there? I would imagine you had to stop a couple times. That's halfway around the world.

Allord: No, we, uh – you're going to say something.

Lorraine Allord: 38 days.

Allord: She knows that because I wrote a letter.

Mark: [chuckles]

Lorraine Allord: Every day.

Allord: And it was not mailbag, it was brought back by the fellas on a liberty ship. Couldn't possibly get it through censors. [laughter]

Mark: I shant pry.

Allord: Well, I can say it now. [laughter]

Mark: Now this was your first ship voyage, I would imagine.

Allord: Yes.

Mark: Some people complained about seasickness and that sort of thing. Liberty ship's a fairly big ship, but it's not that big.

Allord: No problem with me.

Mark: No problem?

Allord: Some of the boys onboard had it, but I had no trouble.

Mark: And so what sort of quarters did you have on the ship? What sort of quarters did you have on the ship?

Allord: Uh, I was quartered on a little building that they had built on the deck. We didn't have enough quarters for everybody on there. That's why they had these buildings up there with bunk beds in 'em. Going out of San Francisco, we couldn't take the pilot with us – we had to leave him off at the bridge because it was so rough. And there was for three days you couldn't get on the bow at all. It was that rough. We had jobs – sentry duty – what we called was gun watch. It didn't amount to a hill of beans because we didn't know what we were looking for, anyway. But we were there anyway.

Mark: And when you got to New Guinea – why don't you just describe your initial impressions. It's very different than Tomahawk, Wisconsin, I would imagine.

Allord: Uh, yes. Quite frankly, it was very different. It was hot, it was humid. I didn't have too much time to think because they kept us going all the time. We ended up in Finchaven – that was the first place – about a week after the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Mark: And so once you got into the Pacific and your battalion came along, and you were all ready and set up to go, what were your duties specifically? Did you go and build airstrips? What sorts of things were the seabees constructing?

Allord: We didn't build – we started some airstrips, but most of our work was putting in piers for shipping and building roads. And the one we built was right along the edge of the ocean, but there happened to be a mountain there, and so we had to blast the mountain out in order to make a road through it.

Mark: Now in New Guinea, I would imagine you're just starting from scratch, pretty much. There are no roads, there are no airstrips. You're carving this right out of the jungle.

Allord: That's right.

Lorraine Allord: That was Hollandia, New Guinea.

Mark: What were the biggest problems you encountered in constructing these things from scratch? Crocodiles, dense jungles, mountains?

Allord: No, no, no, no, no. We were bothered with little snakes once in a while. Not too much on the buggy side, either. The drinking water was the biggest problem.

Mark: I suppose that had to be shipped in?

Allord: No, we had our own purification plant, but it took time to get it started.

Mark: I don't suppose there's much recreational activity going on when you're not on duty.

Allord: Had none.

Mark: How'd you occupy your time? I mean, I assume you were busy working most of the time, but –

Allord: If you weren't working, you were sleeping.

Mark: That was pretty much it, huh?

Allord: Yeah, unless a show came in. In that case, you were allowed to go down there and watch 'em.

Mark: Did that happen very often?

Allord: Maybe about once a month.

Lorraine Allord: Including Bob Hope.

Mark: Well, see, I was going to ask if you could drop any names for me, here. Bob Hope would be one that I would recognize.

Allord: Yeah, he came in. And the officers had their own club. The chiefs had their own gathering spot. And the rank and file had their little gathering spot. And there was no problem with beer – we could find it.



Mark: Now, I assume the Navy had to bring it to you.

Allord: Well the Navy didn't give me too much of a uniform, but the army furnished me a couple that I used to procure some things that we didn't have. Now, we didn't see them how we procured but we never sold them.

Mark: So this is like Radar O'Riley on *M\*A\*S\*H*. You're swapping things back and forth.

Both: Yeah.

Mark: What were the most popular items? What did you guys want the most?

Allord: Beer. Beer.

Mark: Now, we brought up *M\*A\*S\*H*, and they also have this distillery on there, and some World War II guys will tell me that they would have such a thing. Did you have such a thing?

Allord: A what?

Mark: A distillery.

Allord: Oh certainly.

Mark: Did you make your own?

Allord: Certainly.

Lorraine Allord: Seabees, of course.

Mark: Well, you guys are pretty handy. You can come up with things.

Allord: We had people that came from the Blue Ridge Mountains, and they knew how to do it, so –

Mark: Well, see, I don't, so why don't you – can you tell me a little about –

Allord: I don't remember how we did it, either.

Mark: I don't know what you'd make it of.

Lorraine Allord: I don't either.

Allord: But I do remember making a coil for a guy, but just how he worked it out, I don't know.

Mark: Now you got to New Guinea fairly early. It was 1942, if I'm not mistaken.

Lorraine Allord: Three.

Mark: Forty-three. Did you stay there long, or did you move?

Lorraine Allord: No, wait a minute. Actually by the time he got over there it was '44. I had just gotten out of boot camp when he went, and I was in control tower school the whole time he was shipping over, so that was '44, early.

Mark: Did you move on from New Guinea?

Allord: Uh, a hundred of us left our battalion to go to the Philippines to build a base hospital. And there was – first of all they were going to build it on Leyte. So when we got there, they decided no, they weren't going to put it there – they were going to put it up in Mindoro, which was about thirty-five air miles from Manila, which we didn't have yet. So the fleet went out, and we were along with 'em. We got to the island of Mindoro, but we never landed the ship there. They kicked the heck out of us. I never got my feet wet, but I was on five or six different ships that day. The Japanese torpedoed it first, then crash dived it with an airplane. That was the second hit – that was the one that did us in.

Lorraine Allord: That was on [an] LST.

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Allord: Then the commandant of the 17<sup>th</sup> Naval Fleet, which we were under, decided we should go back to New Guinea, and then take a survivor's leave for thirty days.

Mark: So did you go to Australia or something like that?

Allord: No, come back home.

Mark: Oh! That's not bad.

Allord: And head back to San Francisco, then the unit kind of broke up because people from all over the United States. And they had a choice of whether you wanted to go back to California or whether you wanted to go on the East Coast. So I decided to pick the East Coast.

Mark: Why was that?

Allord: Well, my wife was there.

Lorraine Allord: [laughs]

Mark: Of course, I knew the answer – I just wanted you to tell me [laughs].

- Allord: That's definitely – I didn't want to go back to the Pacific. Because I knew if I went back, I'd never get back in my unit anyway, which was basically true. So then I ended up back in Providence, and I found out that there was a duty that I could pick up for six months in Panama.
- Mark: Doing what?
- Allord: That was turning dry docks over and taking them through the ditch and then righting 'em again. So I decided to go down there, rather than go to quartermaster school and go back to the Pacific.
- Mark: I'd imagine the Panama Canal was a busy place. This has to be 1945 by now.
- Allord: It was very busy. If you didn't have your ship registered, you couldn't go through it.
- Mark: And so in the Panama Canal, you helped the ships get through, then?
- Allord: No, we were taking dry docks. The dry docks – we wanted to get 'em to the Pacific side, but they were on the Atlantic side, so we'd take pontoons and put 'em on a [unintelligible] and then pump 'em full of water, and then turn 'em upside – so that the bottom was a side. And that's the only way we could get 'em through the locks.
- Mark: That's sort of an engineering feat, I suppose. The canal's only so big, and the dry docks have to be –
- Allord: Well the dry docks were too wide, they couldn't go through – that's why they had to turn 'em. They tried to take 'em around South America. It didn't work.
- Mark: it's kind of stormy weather down there.
- Allord: Yeah.
- Mark: And you were in Panama for how long?
- Allord: Six months.
- Mark: And the war wasn't over yet by that time.
- Allord: No.
- Lorraine Allord: Mm-mm.
- Mark: And so what'd you do after Panama?
- Allord: Well then – well, my father was ill for one thing. I came back home, and at that time the war was over.
- Lorraine Allord: Well, we were home on this emergency over VJ-Day, so we were in Madison celebrating.

Mark: I imagine they were fairly joyous celebrations.

Lorraine Allord: Ah! You might say that.

Allord: We tried to take movies kind of that night, but the sun was down. The movies didn't – it was an 8mm camera. It didn't come out too good.

Mark: Why don't you just describe the scene to me, and what's going through your own minds. I mean, you were both in the military. You had been overseas and in combat some. Just describe the scene, and your own thoughts on the matter. Is it joy? Is it relief?

Lorraine Allord: Both.

Mark: All – [laughter]

Lorraine Allord: Well, we were up on Capitol Square in a car, and everybody was going around the square blowing horns, churchbells were ringing, whistles blowing, whatever. Confetti coming out of the Tenney building. And I was driving, he was sitting on the roof taking movies. So –

Mark: So the war is over, but you're still in the service – both of you are still in the service.

Both: Yeah.

Mark: How long was it until they let you out finally?

Allord: Well, I went back to Panama, and immediately they put me on another ship and sent me back up to Charleston, which I ended up in, then in Great Lakes. They said, "Goodbye, we don't want you anymore."

Mark: Yeah. And were you out of the service by this time, ma'am?

Lorraine Allord: Hmm-mm. No. He got out the last part of October, and I got an automatic discharge the first of November.

Mark: Because they terminated the Women Marines, if I'm not mistaken.

Lorraine Allord: Well, I got out automatically early because of him, and he then drove down and picked me up and came back.

Mark: And so the war's over and you're both are out of the service now. Now, you were a little older than the average recruit. When it came to getting your life back on track – finding work and that sort of thing – what were your priorities, and how did you go about doing that? I assume you wanted to get back in the construction trades.

Allord: Oh, I went into partnership with another man, and we started a welding and repair shop.

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Allord: Uh, it didn't work out.

Mark: Just –

Allord: Well, we couldn't compete because we were new. And I'm gonna say – you brought a pickup truck in, and you wanted a new bottom put in there. Well, what we would have to charge you – the guy next door could do it for half because he was getting a better break on the metal he was buying than what they would give us. So, then we had a chance to sell the building to a man that wanted to start a Ford agency, so my partner went out to being an electrician, and I went out as a salesman. But I stayed there with him until he had the building up, and then I left him. Then I started as a salesman.

Mark: Was finding work a difficulty after the war? There were a lot of G.I.s flooding back.

Allord: No problem.

Mark: No problem for you?

Allord: No. Anybody who wants to work can work.

[tape cuts out]

Allord: You mean, get what you want right away, but if you're patient you'll get it.

Mark: And you did.

Allord: Yes.

Mark: In terms of medical and psychological readjustments to civilian life – having been in New Guinea, did you contract Malaria or any type of thing like that? Did you have any health problems that were service connected?

Allord: My biggest problem is my hearing loss, and that I got onboard that ship, which I never could get compensated for.

Mark: Did you file a claim? Did you explore that sort of thing?

Allord: I tried to file a claim, but they disallowed it.

Mark: Now, having been on a ship that was torpedoed, I'm wondering if you had any lingering emotional effects from that.

Allord: No.

Mark: The nightmares and some of that thing that combat vets –

Allord: Oh, I had a few, but they left.

Mark: About how long after the war?

Allord: I think about four or five months. Something like that.

Lorraine Allord: He had malaria, got fungus in his ears, which to this day will come back.

Mark: But still, no VA –

Allord: No.

Mark: You found work, no major medical problems. The last thing I want to cover involved some veterans organizations and that sort of thing. When you first got back, did you join any groups?

Allord: No.

Mark: Like, say, VFW, or anything? Is that because you were too busy –

Allord: Not at first when I got back.

Mark: Is there a particular reason for that? You're too busy? You didn't like 'em?

Allord: No, it just never occurred to me to join, and nobody asked me, so, and I don't volunteer.

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Lorraine Allord: Remember in Tomahawk, the Legion asked you to join.

Allord: Oh. Your father asked us to join the Legion.

Mark: Was he a World War I vet, by some chance?

Lorraine Allord: One.

Mark: World War One, yeah.

Lorraine Allord: Yeah. John asked you to join the Legion and asked me to join the Auxiliary, not the Legion. I said no, thank you, I'll join the Legion, which kind of set him back. But we did eventually join the Legion.

Allord: But I never attended a meeting. I guess that's why I forgot it.

- Mark: So, as you got later on in life, you've perhaps got more spare time, perhaps not [laughs]. I suppose that depends. Did you later become more interested in these types of activities?
- Allord: Yes. Yeah.
- Mark: About how old were you?
- Allord: Oh heck.
- Lorraine Allord: He joined the VFW almost 50 years ago, and I joined a auxiliary.
- Allord: Yeah. That's when I moved out of town for a while.
- Lorraine Allord: Yeah.
- Mark: Have you attended any sort of reunions and seen people you served with during the war?
- Allord: Um, I went to one CB reunion. What they were talking about was things that happened after I left the outfit.
- Mark: Hmm.
- Allord: And I just had nothing in common with them was all.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Allord: I was still a member of the 113<sup>th</sup> and CB, and paid up to the year in 2000, but as far as going to a convention concerns, doesn't turn me on at all.
- Mark: Um, we've pretty much gone through my routine questions. Anything you would like to add? Anything you think we've skipped over?
- Allord: Yeah, I think Wisconsin as a whole were louse up on their veterans. They did nothing for them.
- Mark: In terms of benefits and that sort of thing?
- Allord: Benefits. Well, they had a lot of promises but no results.
- Mark: There was no bonus, for example. Some states had a bonus.
- Allord: Yeah.
- Mark: Would that have helped, do you think?
- Allord: Well it would have helped anybody getting out of service when they first started in life again.

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Allord: If you were a drunkard and you didn't try to get ahead, you could go and borrow money from the VA, but if you were attempting to do something with your life, stay away from them because they wouldn't do anything for you anyway.

Mark: You mean like business loans?

Allord: Like a business loan or anything. That always kind of griped me a little bit.

Mark: Is that something that you thought of a little later in life, or like when you were first out?

Allord: Oh, it was right after we were out.

Mark: Interesting, actually. Um, well, thanks for coming in.

Allord: Yep.

Mark: I appreciate it.

[end of recording]