

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Allen H. Haas
Signalman, Navy, World War II

2007

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Haas, Allen H., (b. 1926), Oral History Interview, 2007

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono..

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Allen Haas, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his experiences as a signalman in the Navy on the Pacific front during World War II. Haas was born to a farm family in Roxbury, Wisconsin. He describes being the first person in his family to attend high school and college. As a freshman at Sauk City High School, Haas recalls learning about the bombing of Pearl Harbor while rehearsing for a play. He comments that he was one of the few students to graduate high school before joining the military. In 1944, at age seventeen, Haas enlisted in the Navy to avoid being drafted and because he “thought the gals liked sailors better than the Army guys.” Haas describes boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Base (Illinois) and amphibious training at Camp Elliott (California). At Camp Elliott, Haas learned hand-to-hand combat techniques and was trained on landing barges called P-boats. Haas discusses at length the features of the P-boats, which held 120 sailors and Marines, and their training maneuvers in the choppy waters off Coronado Island (California). Haas explains he served on an attack ship, the *U.S.S. Bowie*, which carried 500 sailors and twenty-six P-boats. Haas served as a “deck monkey” and a signalman. He outlines his deployment to the Pacific from California via the Aleutian Islands and Guam. Next, Haas discusses in detail the Battle of Okinawa. He remained onboard the ship during Okinawa and recalls taking three days to unload all the P-boats in difficult waters. So many casualties came back that the *U.S.S. Bowie* was converted into a hospital ship. Haas mentions wounded Marines and sailors were housed in the officer’s quarters while the crew performed “nursing procedures that we never even heard of before.” Haas graphically describes treating some of these casualties: one man’s right buttock was shot off when he sat on a grenade and another survived gunfire to the head. Haas witnessed many kamikaze attacks during the Battle of Okinawa including many “suicide swimmers” who pushed mines into battle ships. To confuse these Japanese swimmers, Haas reveals the Americans would circle their own ship in smaller boats and shoot Thompson machine guns into the water to create clouds that acted as camouflage. He calls this technique “smoking the ship” and tells of the artillery aboard the *U.S.S. Bowie*. Haas expresses relief that he was not involved in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He touches upon military life and tells an amusing story of the “deck monkeys” disobeying a direct order from the captain by rolling up their sleeves while they worked. All fifteen of them were thrown into the brig for about one hour for disobedience. After Okinawa, Haas states his ship made several landings in the Philippines, in Tacloban, Leyte, Lingayen Gulf, and Manila. He also claims that his ship “invaded Sasebo, Japan...but nobody shot each other.” Haas clarifies that his ship picked up 2,000 Marines in Manila and headed for Japan before peace had been declared. They entered Sasebo Harbor, but they did not pull ashore at first. Haas describes mutual curiosity when the

Americans encountered some Japanese soldiers and civilians on the docks at Sasebo, stating “they wanted to see what Americans looked like...we wanted to see what Japanese looked like.” Haas frequently describes tensions between the Navy and the Marines. He mocks Marines for getting seasick on the P-boats and recalls with bitterness that a Marine prevented him and some other sailors from taking “souvenir” artillery from a cave in Japan. Haas mentions he did take a Japanese Navy helmet as a souvenir as well as a shell that a friend in the Army later identified as a U.S. mortar shell. Haas also goes into detail about his duties as a signalman: he used semaphore and flashlights to communicate with other ships in the convoy. Haas claims that “only the signalmen...knew what was going on,” and he reveals that signalmen frequently communicated unofficially, comparing notes on where they had been. Haas recalls one conversation with a signalman on another ship who claimed that American sailors had pushed overboard a Japanese pilot who survived a kamikaze attack. In 1946, Haas returned to Norfolk (Virginia) via the Panama Canal and was discharged at Great Lakes Naval Base (Illinois). He mentions his family did not have a phone on their rural Wisconsin farm, so he surprised them when he came home. After the war, Haas attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison on the G.I. Bill. He discusses student life in the dorms and financial management of his monthly G.I. stipend. At first, Haas majored in chemical engineering because a Navy friend of his had been a chemical engineer, but he jokes that he was not cut out for engineering so he switched to Business. He also mentions he bought his first home using a Wisconsin veterans home loan.

Biographical Sketch

Haas (b. 1926) was born on a farm in Roxbury, Wisconsin, and graduated from Sauk City High School in 1944. At age seventeen, he joined the Navy and served two years on the Pacific front during World War II working as a deckhand and a signalman. He is a veteran of the Battle of Okinawa, and he also served in the Philippines and Japan. After the war, Haas studied chemical engineering and business at the University of Wisconsin. He has six children and currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2007.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2007.
Transcript edited by and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009.

Interview Transcript

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives, and today is February 7, 2007. And this is an oral history interview with Al Haas. And Al is a veteran of the United States Navy in World War II. We are doing the interview at Al's house in Madison. And Al, thank you for agreeing to the interview.

Allen: Well, thank you.

John: Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Allen: Well, I'm an old farm boy. I was born and raised on an eighty acre farm right on Highway 12, near Sauk City. Actually, Roxbury. And we were a very small farm. What we called grub farmers. We never had a tractor. Worked with horses all the time. Never had a milking machine. Milked by hand. But I am the youngest of five brothers and sisters, none of whom went beyond the eighth grade, because it was everyone's contention, certain my dad's, that you don't need high school to work the farm. And that is what you were destined to do. Anyhow in 1941, some guy came along and bought the farm, lock, stock, barrel, all the animals including the dog. So dad agreed that I could go to high school one year. And during that freshman year, we moved into Sauk City. Might as well finish high school. But I am the first one in the family on either side that ever went to high school. Then I got in the Navy, and run that education bit. I stood watch many nights with a guy from Nebraska who was a chem. engineer. You know, you stand out there for four hours in the dark, and you talk about everything. And talked with him those many hours, I'll be darned if I didn't start at the University of Wisconsin in chem. engineering, and I don't like chemistry. But I did switch to the school of business, and got a BBA, but it is surprising how things influence you when are destined not to go beyond eighth grade, and a fluke comes along. And you might as well go to high school and finish. And then, if I had to go to college, it wouldn't have happened. Anyhow, so the long and the short of my military career is kind of compressed, in that I joined the Navy when I was seventeen.

John: That was when?

Allen: That was in 1944. June of '44. And I had a battle star when I was eighteen, and I was a discharged battle-star veteran at nineteen.

John: Wow.

Allen: So we had a compression of maturity there. But that is what most of us guys were.

Eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year-olds. Kids.

John: You were born when?

Allen: 1926.

John: So you were...

Allen: Seventeen when I joined the Navy. Eighteen when I was at boot camp.

John: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Allen: Oh, yes. Very definitely.

John: Tell me about that.

Allen: Well, a freshman in high school. We were doing a rehearsal for a Christmas play, at Sauk City High School. I was in the play. And that is where we heard about it. It came over. Of course, it was all the news on the radio. What is surprising, Sauk City High School, a very small high school, I was in the graduating class of twenty. But there were some kids. I remember them by name, who hadn't heard about it the next day. Monday. They didn't have a radio.

John: I remember my dad saying, "Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?"

Allen: Nobody knew. It was out there someplace.

John: Then you finished up high school while the war was on?

Allen: Yeah.

John: What was that like? Being at home, being in high school, during everything that was happening in the war?

Allen: Well, most, a lot of the guys, now, understand, this was a very small high school graduating class. But a lot of the guys went into service at the end of their junior year, so they didn't finish high school. We were kind of destined to go in the service. I mean, that is what all the guys were planning. And it was a matter of choice where you wanted to go. I didn't want to be drafted, and I thought the Navy was cool for a seventeen-year-old. I thought the gals liked sailors better than Army guys. Yeah, so it was a natural choice. And I went to Great Lakes for boot camp. And then was transferred into the Amphibious Corps, it was called. The end result was these landing barges. So we had those aboard ship. But prior to that I went

from boot camp at Great Lakes to Camp Elliott, which is a Marine training camp in California. And we had a month of strictly hand-to-hand combat. Judo. Because we were going to these, they are called P-boats. Landing barges. And day after day, the same thing. And nothing but. And, I remember, we had the Marine boots for shoes. And in real soft sand, all day. And the idea was to do conditioning, and to learn hand-to-hand, strictly killer stuff. Because we are taking these guys in on boats. But I could still kill a man four different ways with my bare hands. We were taught the Japanese death lock, and the Chinese neck breaker. And other hand movements. So after a month of that, I remember well the instructors saying that, well, the amateur does something until he gets it right. You guys are going to be pros. You are going to do it so often that you cannot do it wrong.

John: Wow.

Allen: That training was so ingrained that it becomes instinct. Because defense, and this was strictly defense, not offense, hand-to-hand defense. But obviously we had the responsibility to take twenty-five Marines on a boat, so if we were attacked, we got to defend. But after that, I went to Coronado Island where we had boat training. Now, the landing barges, the P-boats, are thirty-six foot boats. With a 225 horsepower diesel. We had two of them that were larger, that were called M-boats, fifty-six footers with twin 225 horsepower diesels. These were primarily used to haul light tanks and that kind of thing, although they did use them for personnel, too. But that is how we handled them. We did a month of that, but interestingly enough, when we got there the first day, we all went down to the beach to see how it was that these guys were going in and out. The first day four guys got killed in one of the boats that broached. So that was a good introduction to that kind of training camp.

John: Oh, wow.

Allen: But the reason we went to Coronado is Coronado had the highest breakers in the United States. They would go fifteen feet high. On real rough days. And in a thirty-six foot P-boat the only way you can go through it is to back through it. You cannot go forward into it or it will flip you over, and you better not broach, or it will flip you. So the only thing you can do is back through it. Now, you have got about two feet of freeboard in the stern of your boat. Which means you've got waves coming up over you.

John: Oh, Yeah.

Allen: But, of course, you've got bilge pumps and everything else in the boats to work that out. But that was the only way you could do it, was to back through the breakers, get out, turn around and head back to the ship. But our ship was called

an attack transport, made by Kaiser, I think. In California. But, the ship was 454 feet long with a 60 foot beam, and we would carry 2,000 troops, primarily Marines, and we had 500 ship's company, of which 120 of us were boat group. So we ran the boats. But we had 26 boats aboard. We'd drop them over the sides with Welland davits and hoists, and then drop the nets. And the troops would march in and then we'd go circle to assemble till they all got loaded. Then we would go in as a wave, so that you made less of a target. But, surprisingly enough, the troops would all get sea-sick. Of course, we Navy guys don't. Oh, I remember one trip, we picked up a load of Marines in California someplace, hauled them, I think it was, to Guam. We were lone wolfing it with a convoy, within a thousand miles of the Aleutians. Real rough weather. And those guys that got sick. We'd have two thousand guys laying along the gunwale. And we'd say, "What's the matter with you wussies? You can't get sick aboard a tub like this! Oh, for breakfast, we're going to have biscuits and gravy. Nice greasy pork chops for dinner." Oh, gosh, these guys. The other Marines thought they were the real tough guys, and we swab-jocks weren't. Aboard ship, you've got your various disciplines. The boat group, we called ourselves deck monkeys.

John: Okay.

Allen: It was an apt description. We were climbing all over the rigging, and everything else. Over the side. And we were deck monkeys. But the biggest invasion we were in was Okinawa.

John: Okay.

Allen: That one, it took us three days to unload the ship, back and forth, back and forth. We were anchored. Then in to the beach. But it took us three days to unload that ship. That means we never got back aboard the ship. You slept from the time you left the beach until you came back to the ship. And they'd throw you a sandwich and water from topside down into your boat. But, interesting enough, Okinawa, it seems, there were about seven thousand deaths, or something like that. Tremendous amount of casualties.

John: Oh, Yeah.

Allen: And guys with, the guys I'm talking about, the troops, going inland and getting wounded. And they would just come stumbling back to the beach. They would just tie something to them from a pack. They hadn't been to a first aid station, or anything. And then all the hospital ships were full, that were anchored out there.

John: Oh, okay.

Allen: So they designated our ship as one of the many other ships, they said, "Okay, you are a hospital ship. You've got to take these guys when they come stumbling back to the beach. So we started hauling guys back to the ship. And some of the guys we hauled back in said, "Hey we came over here on this tub!" We hauled the same guys out that we hauled in. I don't really remember how many wounded be had aboard. I would say a hundred or two hundred, something like that. And now there are no nurses aboard. I think we only had two doctors aboard ship. So these wounded would come aboard. And we would put them in the officers' quarters. The officers' quarters was up on the main deck. And they had mattresses, and what not. And so we loaded all these guys as casualties. And now you are a hospital ship. There aren't any nurses. There wasn't anybody to take care of them. So who takes care of them? We deck monkeys. And we did whatever was needed. We did nursing procedures that we never even heard of before. But something had to be done. One of the most interesting guys I talked with was in the section I took care of. The guy was one of these underwater demo guys.

John: Okay.

Allen: And anyhow, I was taking care of him, and talking to him. And they were doing a muster. Who is all aboard. Some guys with a clipboard. And here was one guy with his head all bandaged up. He didn't even have eye holes. He had a tube for his nose and a hole for his mouth. And I remember well. The guy off "Sears!" And the guy went "Unh!" And this guy I'm taking care of says, "Sears? That is my swimming buddy." He wouldn't believe he was alive. He said he wouldn't believe he's alive. I said, "What happened?" Well, this guy, they were swimming together, and he said, "We were swimming in so close that the Japanese were standing on the shore aiming downward, shooting at us. Bing! Bing! Bing! We were that close. Seeing the whites of their eyes was easy. But," he said, "you've got your head bobbing in the water, and that is a very tough, small moving target to hit." He said, "We lived. However, Sears and I were together swimming, and a 60 millimeter mortar," he swore, "hit him on top of the head." But water dispenses a lot of the power. And here was this Sears, that guy sitting up here, I remember him. So, we had these hundred and some guys that we took back to Pearl to the hospital who received minimal medical attention. Whatever we could do for them. Make it up, spur of the moment. Another guy comes to mine, again, they were Marines, who had his right buttock shot off. Blown off. There was just bone! And, of course, a raw wound. And they kept dressing it all the time. But I said, "What happened to you?" He said, well, he was in a foxhole, and the Japs threw a grenade in the foxhole. He said, "I don't know what possessed me, I sat on it." And it blew the cheek off his buttock. Did not bust any bones. And I said, "Well, what were you thinking?" And he said, "I wasn't. I just sat on it." And that probably saved the life of the other two guys in the foxhole with him. And it did not bust any bones or nothing. And I asked, "What were you thinking the minute

it was over?" He said, "Well, the first thing I did was felt if my genitals were still there. That was the most important thing." But this guy now had a big open wound, like a half a musk melon sticking out there.

John: Yeah, sure.

Allen: And when we would go to chow, when they would go to chow, he have to sit on the way right side of the bench. Because he could put his left buttock on the bench and lean over. But he was walking around. And he sat on top of a hand grenade, and lived. So those are some of the interesting ones. Missed Iwo Jima. Thank God we missed it. We certainly didn't want to be in on that. But we had a load of troops. I don't know where we picked them up. That we had to take back to Pearl. I think they were going back for recreation of some kind. And so we missed that. But otherwise, we were traveling in convoys all the time. But toward the end of the war, were doing a lot of lone wolfing, all by ourselves. And, oh, I remember one time, we were down around Ulithi, which is about seventy degrees above the Equator. And it was hot. Oh, God, it was hot. And the old man, the captain, passed the word that we all had to wear our helmets, and sleeves rolled down, because there were a lot of kamikaze attacks. Oh, now we deck monkeys were really sweating it out. We condescended to wear the helmets, but we rolled the sleeves up. But that was against the orders. So he rounded up everybody topside, and put them down in the brig. Now, we had three brigs next to the engine room a couple of decks down. And they were designed to accommodate one person. And he had fifteen in each one, sitting around the bulkhead in the brig, and stripped to the waist. And we said, "Well, the old man can't keep us here. Go get the chaplain." Well, pretty soon the chaplain would come down. And he said, "Now, you guys, when the old man passes the word, you got to do this. Even though it is hot and all that stuff. Well, you are not going to get out with the old captain's mast. But you guys got to go see the captain." So, we all get out of there. I would guess there were fifteen, twenty of us. We all go topside. The captain chews us out for about ten or fifteen minutes. "I don't want you guys ever to do it again! Now, there's not going to be anything on your record." But I was in the brig for maybe an hour.

John: But you weren't alone.

Allen: I wasn't alone. So, we also hit a lot of the Philippines, Tacloban, Leyte, Lingayen Gulf. Manila.

John: Did you make landings there?

Allen: We made landings, but we did not get a battle star at Tacloban. It was declared secure when we hit the beach.

John: Oh, okay.

Allen: We landed everybody, but there was no fighting on the beach any more. So they considered it a secure area. But, the other remarkable thing about my tour in the Pacific. We invaded Japan. We invaded Sasebo, Japan. We picked up two thousand Marines in Manila, and we were steaming underway with a convoy, and we were going in to Sasebo, Japan, regardless. Peace had not been declared when we left. We were going in. They signed it while we were under way, so now we pull into Sasebo, Japan, and nobody shot each other.

John: Wow.

Allen: But we invaded her. The invasion would have been absolute suicide. The harbor, now, that is the fourth largest seaport in Japan. But the harbor was folded between mountains. We had to go in there in single file. And I remember they had guns mounted in the mountains. Sixteen inch guns. They were declimated down at us. I remember looking up at the mountain, and here is this big hole up there. "What are those?" "Those are sixteen inch guns." There was no way for the Navy to shoot them out. There was no way for the Air Force to get them. And we had a five inch gun aft. That is the only thing we had aboard, and forties, and twenties, anti-aircraft stuff. It would have been absolute suicide. We would not have made it.

John: If you had to invade the home islands, you would have been fighting grandmas and little girls.

Allen: Yeah. I understand so. We didn't go ashore at Sasebo, but we pulled in. What they had done, the Japanese soldiers, they just sent them home. Took their arms and sent them home, in uniform. Well, now, we pulled into the harbor, and, of course, there were a lot of docks. And as typical Asians, Japanese do, they sat on their haunches. And they would be lined up like seagulls all the way around all the docks. They wanted to see what Americans looked like. Now, we, aboard ship, we wanted to see what Japanese looked like. Including all the troops. Everybody on our ship was on the starboard side, on the port side, because that is how we pulled in. We actually had a port list going in there. Everybody was standing on the gunwale, trying to see. So, that was our invasion of Japan. We actually invaded her, but nobody shot each other.

John: Wow.

Allen: So that was kind of the story of it. I got mad at the Marines because we did not land the first night at Sasebo. We came in like late afternoon. But we sent a couple

of boats ashore just to see what is there. One of the things I remember was they had a machine gun factory, an assembly plant. And just right off the beach. And they had machine guns hanging in the assembly line, partially assembled. They just shut the thing down and left, apparently. Then, just a short distance down shore, here was a cave. And we went in there, and here it was boxes of ammunition. Pistols and everything else in boxes. All in Cosmoline. So there was just a couple of us sailors. And we said, "Let's get some souvenirs." "Ah, no, let's wait until tomorrow. We'll load it up, do a real good job. Let's get back to the ship. It's getting late." So we went back to the ship. Went back the next morning. Here they had a Marine stationed at the doorway. "Hey, what are you guys doing here? You can't go in there." "The hell we can't! We were here last night. We want some souvenirs." This guy, our own Marine, would not let us in there to steal souvenirs. What a disappointment. I've never forgiven the Marines for doing that. I did get a Japanese Navy helmet, you know, but what can I say? I had it in the basement and all the kids played with it. So that is about the extent.

John: How many men were on the ship?

Allen: Five hundred. The ship's crew, and a hundred and twenty of them were boat group.

John: This was an APA?

Allen: An APA. APA 135.

John: I spent twenty-six months on an APA.

Allen: Oh, you did? What number?

John: Oh, God. Three of them. The *Fremont*, the *Olmsted*, and the *Rockbridge*. They were Liberty ships. One stack, five inch gun. Yeah. Bunch of Peter boats and Mike boats.

Allen: They were called Kaiser coffins.

John: Yeah.

Allen: A .30-.30 would go through the side. Some guy could go by in a canoe with a hunting rifle.

John: That's an awful lot of men on a small ship. Then you put a landing party, you put the Marines on it, that is an awful lot of men on it.

Allen: Yeah, we had twenty-five hundred men on a four hundred and fifty foot length of the ship. And of course, the troops all slept forward, in the bow of the ship. Which is the roughest part of it. The sailors were amid-ships, where the rocking effect was not as bad. As well as the roll and yaw. But those guys would be up there. It would throw them out of their racks on a real rough sea. But, ah, they were troops, so what? One of the things was our eating procedures, since, well, you know, our galley and everything was really designed for five hundred guys. And once we got twenty-five hundred, so what we did. The Navy ate three times per day, as per usual. And the troops were fed twice a day, in between there. And also we took the benches away and put the table up so you would have to stand and eat. Quick like an assembly line. Get them in and get them out. Yeah, ours was with the APA 135. The U. S. S. *Bowie*.

John: One I was on was 188. I can't remember the other numbers now. What was it like in bad weather? I did some time in the North Atlantic.

Allen: Oh, Yeah. There was a typhoon that hit Manila in about '45, early '45. And we were right in the middle of it. We were anchored in Manila Bay. And we had a number of guys, sailors, who were ashore. So, of course, we passed the word to everybody to come back to the ship. And I was running one of the boats back and forth, bringing the guys in. And we were the last boat to leave shore. Came back to the ship and we first of all tried to get alongside the gangway, where it was dropped over the side. We tried. Couldn't do it. There was no way to hang on to it with either the Welland davits. Certainly not with the Welland davits. And even there was no way on hoists to hook her up. You'd kill yourself. So what they decided to do. Another guy and I were involved. They said, "All right, in order to ride this thing out, why don't you guys go on the stern? We'll throw down a five inch hawser. And you attach that to your boat. And then you are going to have to come up that hawser." Now, there was about, in the stern, there is a good twenty feet of freeboard. So, we tied the boat up. Shut her off. And this thing is bouncing, I mean, like ten feet up and down. And when it would stretch out, this five inch hawser would go hmmm, hmmm. So, I thought, how the heck are they going to do that? These guys standing topside watching this thing. What are they going to do to get out of there. So I thought, I would stand on the ramp of the boat. And at the very top of the crest, I jumped as far as I could, grabbed the hawser, and hung on monkey style, arms and legs wrapped around with my back down. And then when it went taut, I just hung on. I made about two crawls when it went slack. We made it back up.

John: That was a miracle. Let me turn this tape over.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

- Allen: That was something for a farm boy who had never seen salt water. But that is who we all were.
- John: I could never figure, understand, coming alongside, even in calm seas, how that little Peter-boat, with one screw, how they could walk that thing sideways right up to the gangway. I could never figure that out. That took some seamanship on the part of the guy, bouncing those little things around.
- Allen: Yeah.
- John: We used them for utility. When we would go into a port and didn't tie up at the dock, and anchored out, we'd run back and forth for liberty in them. And to haul supplies, and for messages, and all that.
- Allen: But you didn't have guys aboard? You didn't haul troops?
- John: No. I was one of the troops.
- Allen: Oh! You were with the troops? I thought you were in the Navy.
- John: No, I was one of the Marines.
- Allen: Were you standing in front of a cave in Sasebo, Japan?
- John: Listen, that guy standing in front of the cave, they were probably stealing it all for themselves.
- Allen: Oh, there was enough for everybody.
- John: The Marines were the biggest thieves. I was a radio tech. I remember going, shipping out for a cruise on the Mediterranean, and there were a bunch of spare parts I wanted for my radios. And I went to the Communicator to get them, and he said, "What do you want spare parts for? You've got the whole Sixth Fleet to steal from."
- Allen: Why, sure.
- John: What was it like, being over there and hearing from back home?
- Allen: We didn't hear much. First of all, on our farm, we never had a telephone, so now my folks lived in Sauk City. But we weren't phone oriented. And, besides, it cost a lot of money. So, we wrote back and forth. But really I don't remember any phone calls. Even coming home on leave, you didn't call. You just showed up.

Mom, Dad would say, "Oh, Al is home!"

John: Did you get leave?

Allen: Well, after boot camp, Yeah. And when I was discharged. Those were the only ones.

John: Where did you get out?

Allen: We went up to Norfolk, and we decommissioned the ship. We were in the Pacific all the time. We went through the Canal, around to Norfolk.

John: You went through the Canal?

Allen: Yeah, and then decommissioned it. And then came home by train. Actually, I had to go back to, I think, Great Lakes for mustering out. That kind of thing.

John: When did you get out?

Allen: In April, of '46. So then I decided, college! I'll become a chem. engineer.

John: I started as a chemist. Organic chemistry. I never saw a petri dish or a test tube after that. My dad said to be an engineer, so I was going to be anything else.

Allen: Well, that's the way. And, you see, when I started college, we had twenty thousand freshmen at the University of Wisconsin. And there were no advisers. Oh, yes, there were. Somebody was telling me, I remember, he was a junior in electrical engineering. How is this young, rosy cheeked kid going to? Well, I never went to see him. I had a feeling that I wanted engineering. I have two engineering sons now. And, looking back, civil engineering, that was my bag. I would have loved that. But I knew it was engineering, and the only thing I knew was chemistry. Nobody ever explained to me that there were other engineering. Yeah, civil engineering is what I would have enjoyed. I liked that kind of thing. But I ended up with the BBA.

John: You had the GI Bill?

Allen: Yeah. Oh, Yeah.

John: And you used that for school?

Allen: Yes. In fact, as it worked out economically, I lived in the dorms for four years. And we had, our cost was \$75 a month, including board and room. Three meals a

day. And maid service. We had maid service in Schlicter Hall, yes. Now, no, it was \$70 a month, was the cost, and we got \$25 a month from the government, as well as all tuition and supplies paid for. So, Yeah, I got four years of college. I would not have gone, otherwise. But four years of college, with the \$75 a month, and \$70 cost, with \$5 left over. Working summers, to provide clothes and what not. But after four years, I graduated with \$300 in the bank and a diamond ring paid for my wife.

John: That was a great thing. Between the kids going back to college. But also the Bill would cover a home loan. So there was a lot of house building going on. And everything that went along with that, appliances, lumber.

Allen: Yes, and Wisconsin had a bill that I took advantage of. I bought a house for \$13,500. And if you got fifty percent of it financed through a regular mortgage, the state would provide fifty percent. I got \$6,750 from the state at two percent, which was \$20 a month. Yes, I took advantage of that.

John: That was a great thing. It got people going after the war. It got business going.

Allen: So I was able to buy a house. I paid \$50 to the bank, for the \$6,750, and \$20 to the state. That was my principal payments.

John: Well, let me ask you a question that I ask everybody. You were a young man. You were a farmer. And then suddenly this thing happened, and you had a couple of years to get ready, but you were suddenly pulled out of life, and sent in harm's way. What did you think about that? What was your reaction to that?

Allen: Not that we were imposed upon in any way. That was just what we were going to do. I couldn't not go to the service. You felt very badly for the 4F guys. They were not the most popular. So, that was something that you actually looked forward to. My brother was in and what not. No, in fact I believe to this day that we should have mandatory two or three year of military service for every guy. I don't know about the girls, but I know every guy coming out of high school should have three or four years of service. That gives them maturity that you cannot buy.

John: Yeah. I grew up a little bit. I was going to college and I wasn't doing anything. I was going to have to repeat. I was screwing around. And I had read in the papers the Korean GI Bill was going to go out of existence at the end of January. I was going to do college and then do the Army. And I figured, why don't I do it the other way around? Why don't I go in now and get the GI Bill, grow up, try to save some money, then come out and go to college. Well, I went in, and I got into electronics school. At Great Lakes. I went to basic at Great Lakes. And then San

Diego. And I never went back to college. I came out and went in as a junior engineer. This is an incredible story. This is really great. How about organizations? The VFW? The Legion?

Allen: No. I think I joined the VFW when I was still in, before I was discharged, something like that. But I never got active in the VFW, because I went from there to college. Now I didn't have any money. So by the time I got out of college, we started having the six kids, and money was too tight. There were other priorities. I never got involved in those.

John: How about reunions? Ever get together with anybody?

Allen: No. I've often wondered how many guys from the 500 ship's company would still be around. Or the boat group. But, I knew of no way to contact any of them. And even my son, on the Internet. And was not able to bring up a personnel roster of any kind. No, it would have been interesting. There is an amphibious get-together down in Nacomis, Florida, I've heard about. Because we go there in the winter time for a short bit. And that would be interesting to do just to see. Hell, the youngest one has to be eighty years old.

John: Yes.

Allen: Then, of course, we're dying at the rate, what is it? A couple of thousand every day.

John: Eleven hundred each day. I never stayed in contact with anybody until just a few years ago I got an e-mail from a guy who said, "Are you the guy that used to tell me to kick the damn radio if it wasn't working right?" Then three of us got in contact over the Internet, and the outfit had a reunion in October of '04. And the three of us went to the reunion. And we met another fellow there, who we were with fifty years ago. We stay in touch. We send Christmas cards. This is a remarkable story. Well, Yeah, I spent a little time popping up and down in a Peter boat.

Allen: Another thing we did that was kind of interesting, in maneuvers, we would lay dead in the water at night and then we'd unload the ship under complete blackout. Oh, this was a lot of fun. Particularly if you are down in the boat, and I don't see it, but here comes a Jeep on a hoist over your head. Down into the boat. The Jeep was swinging, you're in a boat, you don't push the Jeep aside, and there isn't much room. Yeah, they would lower the Jeep in my boat, and you got to guide this Jeep in there, and at night it's black. The guys crawling in, down the cargo nets, that was bad. Well, the Marines carried a lot of Jeeps and trailers with quad-fifty machine guns on them. So that is what we hauled. The light tanks went on

the M-boats. But that was kind of fun. And, also, when we were in, I think we were in some harbor. I don't know where, but there were a lot of suicide swimmers around. They would take a floating mine, and push them into the side of a ship. Well, we were anchored in this harbor, so what we used to do is what they called smoke the ship. We'd take our boats and run them around the ship with smokers on them, and completely smoke the ship, so it wasn't visible. But then we still had the suicide swimmer. That would take care of the kamikaze coming in. But we still had to account for the guys who were suicide swimmers. So what we did, we'd have a couple of boats just circling the ship all day and all night, with two guys sitting on the fantail with Thompson sub-machine guns. And they'd just sit back there playing shotgun, and anything afloat in the water, you'd give it a couple squirts from the Thompson sub. They'd do that all night long. Just sit there and brrr, brrr. But that was our defense. When we were in Okinawa, this was constant kamikaze. One or two at a time, and they would be real high. Now, we never got hit, although the *New Mexico*, the battleship, was anchored right off our port. She got hit, and we saw him coming. Went to general quarters. And they were both coming down. We didn't know who they were aiming for. But the first one got hit by anti-aircraft fire, primarily from the battle wagon. And that one veered off, and blew up in the water. The second one hit the *New Mexico* mid-ships. And she was close enough where it was quite a bang. And we didn't suffer any damage from it. But the kamikazes were effective, in that they sure wore on you. I don't remember how many there were. There must have been two hundred raids that day. There were many. If there weren't two hundred, we said there were two hundred. But there were a lot of them. They were constant. When I was aboard ship, I was also a signalman striker.

John: Okay.

Allen: So I'd be up on the bridge. And whatever ships were, like in a dock, or packed against each other, or tied up, the signalmen are talking to each other. Flashlights or semaphore. I remember one carrier came in. It was damaged. So I'm up there. So I get ahold of some guy's attention. And I said, "What happened to you guys?" And now this signalman, don't know his name, don't know who he was, he signaled back to me, well, they got hit by a kamikaze. And I said something like how was that? And he said, surprisingly, the pilot was in a silk suit and it blew him free, and he was still alive on the deck after he hit. And this guy said, I don't know if it was true or not, but he said, the guys topside said, "Okay, you wanted to die?" They wired the landing gear of the plane to his leg and threw him over the side. Don't know if it was true.

John: This outfit I was in, we were forward air controllers. We called in air strikes. But we were radiomen. We knew semaphore, we knew lights. I couldn't try semaphore any more, but I could use it. Especially when we were getting supplies.

We would have a freighter there that would be bringing supplies over in the nets, and we'd be wig-wagging back and forth to the sailors over there. Of course, the other Marines, they'd be saying, "What's going on?" And we'd tell them, "Oh, God. Oh, no. You don't want to hear about it. You'll hear. Your captain will tell you. This is bad." And they'd be saying to us what the movies are, or something like that.

Allen: It was only the signalmen aboard ship who knew what was going on with the rest of the ships. Because we'd talk to each other. And, of course, it was all unofficial. At night, everybody had flashlights. You'd find somebody and go dit-dit-didit. Till somebody would answer, and you'd talk back and forth. Where you been. And, of course, semaphore was real handy in the daytime. We were the only people aboard ship who knew what was going on.

John: This is remarkable.

Allen: Well, that is about the extent of my war experiences. You have them all.

John: I always had a lot of respect for the coxswains of those little Peter-boats. I never saw them back into a wave, but sometimes handling those things, we were scared silly, of course.

Allen: Yeah. And there are no guarantees. We had two pieces of plywood that were shaped like a plow, facing aft, just for that, so when you backed into the wave, it would kind of break it. Now, those plows were about a foot and a half, but they were just enough for when the wave came over the deck of the boat aft, it had enough just to break it. At least the guy at the helm had some protection. It wouldn't hit him in the hind end. It would blow up over his head.

John: It was a wonder they never swamped.

Allen: Well, we had the bilge pumps, and they were enough that they could take out a lot of water. But you hit the wave, and some of it would splash over, so your bilge pumps are going constantly. We never had any of them swamp. But I can remember from waves, because you hit about two of them going through. Usually one big one. Yes, those were rather interesting times. When we went ashore, there was a guy by the name of Ferdina from St. Louis, he was one of the deck monkeys. And he and I were on a boat. This was on Okinawa, after we had everybody unloaded. And so we were just kind of sitting there, and he said. "Well, before we go back to the ship, we ought to go get some souvenirs. Well, he and I, all we got is dungarees, as we're standing there, and a bowie knife. We went in to a cave, and here was something that looked like a little torpedo. So there were two of them there. We stuck them in our pockets. Headed back, and just as we were

about to leave, some guy comes running up. He's got a gunny sack. He said, "Hey, are you guys going back to the ship? Can I get a ride?" "Sure, come on, we'll take you back. So we said, "What are you?" He said, "I'm a reporter." I said, "What do you have in that bag?" So he opens it up, and he has a whole bunch of stuff in there, pistols and such. And I said, "Don Ferdina and I got some souvenirs, too." And I pulled it out of my hip pocket. And he said, "Hey, I wouldn't horse around with that." I said, "Why?" He says, "Don't you know what that is?" I said, "No." "That's a sixty millimeter mortar shell. See that little wire on it. You touch that and you are going to blow yourself up." We're sailors. We don't know anything about this. It's an American sixty millimeter mortar shell, that's what it was. Oh, you talk about smart kids. But we were all eighteen, nineteen, twenty year-old kids.

John: I have a friend who just passed away. And he wrote about the war in Europe. And kids. He said Normandy was done by the high school graduating class of 1944, and the fight across Europe was done by the high school graduating class of 1945. They were all kids.

Allen: All kids.

John: This is remarkable.

Allen: Okay. I think you got it.

John: I'll take this. I'll turn this off. If you think of anything more, tell me.

[End of Interview]