



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Interviewee: Chief Damage Controlman Clyde Allen,
USCG (Ret.)
World War II Coast Guard Veteran

Interviewer: Chris Havern, Assistant Historian

Date of Interview: 2 August 2004

Place: Chief of Staff's Office, Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Q: Good morning Sir. How are you today?

Allen: I'm fine, thank you.

Q: Sir, could you tell us how you first entered the Coast Guard and what made you think of selecting the Coast Guard as a service?

Allen: Yes. Mine is probably a little bit unusual from most of them because as a small kid when I first started to school I used to pick up the mail sometimes and when I went in the Post Office they had a small poster there of a Coast Guardsman with leggings, uniform and a small boat there, and it was advertising then for recruits for the Coast Guard; one year. So I was told one time - even the Postmaster was kidding me about it - so that kind of stuck in my mind. So after Pearl Harbor it seemed to just regenerate so that's why I went down to the Coast Guard Recruiting Office.

Q: And perhaps I should have started with this; where are you from originally and what did you do before you joined the Service?

Allen: I was born in Comanche, Texas, and when I was five years old we moved to Arizona; an old homestead my father had out there, and things were rough, but I guess they were rough for everybody else and we survived. But it was rough. Then when I was 15, times were rough and I went off and joined the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp. I lied about my age. I was 15. I told them I was 18 and I got in. So I went into the CCCs and was sent to Yuma, Arizona and it was more of a training for me but I ran into a person there that had bees and since my dad had bees I asked him about a job -



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everybody was looking for jobs - and they gave me a job and they said that they would let me go back to school if I wanted to move in with them. So I moved, left the CCCs, went up to Parker, Arizona and started back my junior year of high school and on weekends and off times we worked with the bees and shipped honey.

Q: Okay. After your enlistment where did you receive your initial training for the Coast Guard? Where did you do your basic [training]?

Allen: When I enlisted in Phoenix, Arizona I was sent to Government Island, which is known today as Coast Guard Island, and there I had my basic training, and from there I was sent to Seattle, Washington, and from Seattle, Washington I went back down to Newport, Oregon where they were starting the Beach Patrol.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about what the Beach Patrol was like for those who were actually conducting those patrols and maybe a little bit about your organization and what you would do as part of your daily routine and your patrol requirements while you were serving there?

Allen: Yeah, it was a good life. You met a lot of people because in patrolling up and down the beach there were people that would come there and there was nothing really drastic that ever happened, but the weather, as you know in Oregon, was wet, rainy and things like that. But the people around there we met were all good. So yeah, it was with some regrets, but after I'd been up there about a year I volunteered for sea duty and left there.

Q: Okay. Could you describe a little bit of your daily routine of patrolling? I mean I know you said you went up and down the beach. Was there anything in particular; certain procedures for reporting and things of that nature?

Allen: Oh yes, and what I forgot too was there was quite a few little stations set up on these peninsulas that stick out and there were watches out there, so you were on watch and you reported airplanes even though they were American airplanes, which that was the only thing. Every time they flew over you had a number you called and you reported the airplane in, and they were called Coastal Lookouts and there were probably as many of them as there was the guys pounding the beach. I forgot about that. I'm glad you mentioned that.

Q: Certainly Sir. I also know that from the photography in the Coast Guard Historian's Office there are a lot of images of beach patrolmen using horses and dogs as part of their patrols. Were you ever involved in that? Did you ever see the mounted patrols and the use of the dogs at all?



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Allen: Well the horses came after I left, but we did have dogs and that was another thing too. They were sure some good dogs and you really had to watch yourself. You know you wanted to make a pet out of them rather than use them for what they were trained for. But yes, those were good dogs too. I'd forgotten that. That's something else.

Q: Yes Sir. You said you volunteered for sea duty. What made you want to do that?

Allen: Hearing people talk and reading the newspapers and stuff it sounded exciting, but as I found out later on it wasn't all that exciting.

Q: Yes Sir. Once you volunteered for sea duty could you talk about what your first assignment was?

Allen: Yes. I was sent down to Pleasanton, California with the other town right by that, which was Dublin. It's about 30 miles south of Oakland or San Francisco, California, and we were up there for details while the ships were being made. At that time there were three troop ships being made in Richmond, California and they were all fitted with Coast Guard crews, and the [\[General Hugh L.\] Scott \[AP-136\]](#) was the third one to be built. Then when it was commissioned we went aboard it but we worked loading it and making preparations for it before we left for San Diego on a shakedown.



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USS *Hugh L. Scott* (click on image for a 300-dpi scan)

Q: And what was your rate when you reported to the *Hugh L. Scott*?

Allen: I was a Seaman.

Q: You were still a Seaman, okay. Captain [John] Trebes [Jr., USCG] was the Captain when the ship was commissioned. Was he the Skipper when you reported aboard?

Allen: He was, and a very likeable officer too. He didn't stay too long but he was a very . . . I would call him a great officer. He had had some experience in . . . I think that he was in charge of the ship when Amelia Earhart went down and he mentioned that a few times, but that's how they got . . . yeah, Captain Trebes was a good officer.

Q: Do you have any additional thoughts about some of the other officers onboard the ship that you could recall aside from the Skipper; any of the section officers that you could recall?



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Allen: Yes and no. Some of them in those days were pretty severe. I understood at the Academy in the '30s that they really wanted to separate the officers from the enlisted men and the few ringers we got from the Academy had come up under that regime there, so there was a really segregated line between them, and then some of the other officers that we had were schoolteachers that had . . . their commissions, some of them, they got them pretty easy. Some of them, they worked for them. So there was kind of a variety of these Reserve officers and most of them were division officers, and I would say about half of them were qualified and the rest of them were . . . or something to that amount.

Q: Okay. Could you describe what it was like to serve onboard one of the large troop transports like the *Scott*?

Allen: Yes. We ran into a little trouble every now and then but we always had to come back to San Francisco every few months and load up or you'd run into some of those guys who had been over there for a year or two and they were really trying to get home. We would get back . . . sometimes we were only in there two or three days, load up, go back out again, but we did get back to San Francisco quite often.

Q: Could you describe the life onboard? I guess the question is, is it like living in a big city onboard the ship or did it have more of a small ship feel where you knew everyone aboard? Did you have the ability to get to know everybody?

Allen: No, it was hard to get to know everybody with a crew of 500 and you slept in different parts of the ship. Like where I slept in the First Division was up forward and Second Division was back aft, and our Division was somewhere amidships there. And yes, you got to know some of them. You worked with some of them and if you were on there quite awhile you had quite a bit of knowledge but you never did get to know everybody well.

Q: Uh hum. What was your assigned duty station onboard the ship?



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Allen: I was on the gun crew; 5-inch/38, and since I was bigger and I had done the job well I was a First Loader, and by that, when we'd get ready to fire there was a guy who would throw in a 28-pound powder cylinder and then I would have this 54-pound projectile and I would put it right in front of that and hit the lever and it would ram it up in the gun. So I spent my time on the gun watch as a . . . they call that a First Loader.

Q: Okay. When did you stand your watches?

Allen: We were standing . . . when we went out to sea that was the rough part. We were on four and eight and if there was any work to do during the day - a lot of times we worked - so when you had a four to eight watch you worked all day and then you had the eight to twelve. They alternated. It made for a long day [chuckle].

Q: Yes Sir, I'm sure it did. Was there a lot of drilling? You said you served on a gun crew. I imagine that was an important position, especially on a transport.

Allen: Yes, we were always drilling and practicing and we were trying to be as near ready as we could be.

Q: During your time onboard the *Scott* did you ever come under enemy fire?

Allen: Yes, when we picked up the wounded from Saipan. We were anchored there and we had two air raids over a period of three days there.

Q: Okay. Did you also, while in the course of conducting these cruises in the Pacific, did you ever suffer any submarine scares or any reported submarine activity in your area?

Allen: Yes, there were a few of those and you never knew . . . and the last one I was in we were coming back and we had three destroyers escorting us, which was unusual. Most the time we would run fast by ourselves. Then all at once General Quarters went off and these destroyers started dropping depth charges around us and you could see something in the water. You didn't know what it was. We were up on the gun crew so we could see a little better. But when it was all over with we got back on our course and headed on back for Honolulu. At the time, we had picked up a lot of Navy men who



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were on there and I think they'd been over there too long and they used the term "Asiatic", and they were out on deck and when this happened they all started hollering up at the bridge, "Captain, there it is, there it is", and after it was all over the Captain said, "If that happens again I'll put you all below deck."

Q: [Chuckle] For you personally, what was your greatest fear in the conduct of your cruises? For instance, you've already mentioned the submarine scares and the air raids.

Allen: Yeah.

Q: As a Sailor onboard, perhaps if you don't really have any differentiation one way or the other, perhaps the other guys onboard the ship were . . . what were you most fearful of; a submarine, a plane, perhaps a surface attack?

Allen: Most of the time it was a submarine. There'd been so many stories and we only had two or three submarine scares, but it was a submarine because when you figure they could shoot a torpedo into you without you even knowing it, lie and wait for you or something, which had never happened, but it was one of the things you were having some fear of.

Q: Uh hum. You mentioned an air raid. Were any of those kamikaze attacks where Japanese planes tried to crash into your ship either while you were onboard the *Scott* or onboard the [\[General H. F.\] Hodges \(AP-144\)](#)?

Allen: No, their fights were out at a distance and if there were other ships around most of the time they told us not to fire because some of those kamikazes would come down real quick and fly right over the water and everybody would turn around and shoot at them, and the ships would shoot each other, you know, because they'd come down in front of the ships there. So during air raids we never fired a shot. We were up there but we never fired a shot.

Q: How did you and your fellow crewmembers get along with those troops that you transported?



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Allen: Well we got along good because most everybody in those days coming in the Service had come up through the Depression. They hadn't traveled very far and they joined the Service and that was their first venture of going out, and most of the troops we hauled. They had that same idea as us. So we just visited and would find out what hometown they were from and we had some nice visits.

Q: Uh hum. We've heard stories - and we meaning historians - have heard stories about how crews of some of the transports had trouble when they transported Marines, especially those that were combat vets coming back to Hawaii. In essence it was because they had gone through such horrific circumstances in the course of the invasions that they developed an attitude, not so much of superiority, but they had seen the worst of it and no matter what happened there was nothing that could happen onboard a ship that could be as bad as what they'd already faced. Did you find that to be true in the course of your . . . ?

Allen: There were a few of them that way and the attitude that they didn't give a damn, that was it. But we carried 50 Marines on there and when they had characters like that they increased the guard and so we were never bothered with them, but some of the Marines that were the crew of the *Scott* were. They were involved with it. They had to do the policing of it.

Q: Okay, alright. On the 25th of March the *Scott* embarked 1,004 officers and men from the carrier USS *Franklin* (CV-13), which had been severely damaged on the 19th of March off the coast of Japan. Can you describe your interaction with the members and the men of the *Franklin*?

Allen: Yes, there were three big carriers and I know the *Franklin* was one of them and nearly all the troops that we had picked up out there were all Navy Recruits, most of them right out of Boot Camp, and it was a mess. They were young and I think a lot of them had kind of lied a little bit, like myself, about their age to get in, and I know when the *Franklin* came up there they said, "Personnel ready for . . .", 300 of them. They took them right - all 300, they were kids - and put them all on the *Franklin* and it was about two weeks later that the kamikaze hit it, so some of them got put into action pretty fast, them kids in the Navy.



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Q: After the war the Navy instituted what in essence was commonly known as “Magic Carpet Rides”; basically the transportation of the troops who had served in the different theaters were now returning back to the States. Were you involved in those and what were your thoughts?

Allen: Yes. If you had a wife or if you were sending money to your mother or somebody they'd give you 20 more points, so you had that. Well I had neither so I was responsible for making two trips to India and that's what that was, and most of those troops over there, quite a few of them, they had been over there a total of four years. They were ready to come home, stuck in that CBI; China/Burma/India theater.

Q: Yes Sir.

Allen: And they were really nice guys. One guy showed me a picture of his daughter, which was four years old that he'd never seen and something like that, and I think it meant more bringing them guys home that had been stuck over in a kind of forbidden place so long; that China/Burma/India.

Q: Yes Sir. After the war am I correct in saying you got out of the Coast Guard, is that correct?

Allen: For six months I stayed in the Service and made these trips to India and then I got out.

Q: Okay, but before getting out you served onboard the *General Hodges*, is that correct?

Allen: Yes.

Q: Alright. Can you tell us anything about her skipper; what he was like, again her officers?

Allen: If I was rating skippers I would rate the skipper of the *Hodges* Number One. He was older than the rest of them. He had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1913, I think, and had been through the war, got out and then he came back in the Coast Guard and his name was Carl Hilton. He was a brother to Conrad Hilton. There were three of them in the family. There was a girl and the two boys; Conrad and Carl, and you could talk to him anytime. He was a great man. And when we pulled into New York his connection at the Roosevelt Hotel . . . we usually had some pretty good parties there because he was connected with that, and I remember one thing in particular too. We were getting ready to come back through the Suez Canal and there was a soldier on there that had been married to an English girl. He ran into her, and Captain Hilton said,



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"Well you can get your way back to Port Said", so when we entered the Canal over here he moved out and made one of his staterooms available for this couple and they rode the ship through the Suez Canal and got off on the other side just because they hadn't seen each other, and the old fellow doing things like that, it sure rated high with me.

Q: Yes Sir, I can understand. Do you happen to recall any of the other officers onboard the *Hodges* while you were there; division officers or the XO or so?

Allen: The Commander that was the Executive Officer had been on the [Taney \[WPG-37\]](#) at Pearl Harbor when it was hit and he seemed to be a little jumpy or squirrely; whatever you want to call it. He was a little different at times, but he was a good fellow. He was just little nervous.

Q: Yes Sir [chuckle]. Your thoughts about your time onboard the *Hodges*; just any incidents that you recall?

Allen: Oh yes. I really enjoyed it on there because that's when I made my Third Class. I became a Coxswain. And when we'd pull into these ports, taking the dignitaries that we . . . I got to run the boats some up to the shore and leave them, and seeing these foreign countries . . . India was a very strange country. Well even Naples was. So with the *Scott* there were no countries to see over there. It was just islands and natives and that was it.

Q: Yes Sir.

Allen: So living conditions were better on the *Hodges*.

Q: Our records in the Historian's Office indicate that the *Hodges* sailed from San Francisco on the 10th of May, 1945 with over 3,000 troops and a contingent of Army nurses. Were you onboard at that time?

Allen: Yes. Well that was the one trip we made down into the Pacific. We went down along New Guinea and stopped there. In fact I've got a picture when we . . . well anyway, we went along the coast of New Guinea, then went down to the Philippines at Leyte and let off more troops and then we went into Manila and it was still burning, and they were still fighting out on the edge of town, and unloaded and picked up stuff and then came back to San Francisco.

Q: With the contingent of Army nurses onboard, what it was like sailing with women? I know you mentioned the fact that they had Marines to police the crew.

Allen: Yeah.



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Q: Were they put on extra duty [chuckle] as far as . . . were there any problems?

Allen: Well they had what they called a "Second Deck" and most of the women stayed up there and for the enlisted men that was sort of a no-man's land unless you had something to do up there. So I think them and some of the officers had a little fun but I don't think anybody else did.

Q: Yes Sir. Any overall thoughts in general? You've kind of touched on this a little bit earlier about the fact that in the Pacific you just dropped troops off at the islands and there really wasn't a whole lot to see. But what were your overall impressions of what you saw while onboard when you did go to places like Europe and India and Southeast Asia, and so forth. Any lasting impressions, and how many times did you get to make liberty?

Allen: Well there was one place in the South Pacific where we used to go and it was a staging area that they called Nouvea and New Caledonia. It was French and there were a lot of natives there but at least we could go out to the beaches and go swimming in the Pacific. Then in Manila there wasn't too much to do there because it was still burning and it was still in ruins there, and those were about the only two places in the Pacific. Now in the Atlantic, yes. In Naples, even though the war had ended and the people were poor, it was still a fascinating place to be. Then when we came back I went to India where we had to go 40 miles up the Ganges River to tie up and since it was a river and it ran so we had to moor with chain. They wouldn't let us use rope, so we had a lot of work but it was still interesting there to go up that river and tie up. And some of the things that really made us shake our heads and look were the bodies floating in the river because about half the people over there don't have enough money to burn and bury their dead so they just throw them in the river.

Q: Right.

Allen: That's it. So yeah, it was terrible in India.

Q: You've kind of mentioned this earlier when we were talking prior to the interview and that is, when we had the Japanese capitulation, how did you and your fellow crewmen react and were you anxious to return home and return to civilian life?

Allen: Yes, we were, and then there seemed to be hardly any more animosity. Before that sometimes you had all these old sayings, "Go and blow up Japan", and stuff, but after the war most of the animosity just kind of dropped and everybody thought they were going to get out and get a big job and make money and stuff, which didn't happen, but we had high thoughts.



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Q: Yes Sir. Actually there is . . . if we could just go back a little bit and that is, your views on the Japanese and . . . or that of not maybe perhaps just you but your fellow crewmen, regarding the Japanese, and although you weren't necessarily in Europe for the fight against the Germans, what were the views of the enlisted men as far as the enemy was concerned?

Allen: Well they were pretty bitter because several times we brought back Japanese prisoners to be interrogated at San Francisco and they were really held to tight security and they could go no place, but most of the time the Marines did that. They guarded them.

Q: Okay. We were talking earlier and you had mentioned that you had an encounter with [Jack Dempsey](#) or he was onboard your ship. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Allen: Well that's one of the favorite stories I like to talk about. We were in Hollandia, New Guinea and he came aboard and we had plenty of room to set up a full ream for a smoker, and we probably had a half of dozen or more – it depends on his time – as you could see. There's a picture. He's legible enough.

Q: Yes Sir.

Allen: But towards the last fight they mixed it up. There was a black fellow and a white guy and the fight, to me, I don't think it could have been any closer. It was close and it was a good fight too. And finally I don't know why he went over and he took the white guy and he held his hand up and when he did this black fellow, he just came unglued. He said he knew he was better than that and he was going to whip anybody on this ship and he says, "And that includes you", and he stuck his finger at Jack Dempsey and the crowd starting agitating him on, "Don't let him do that. Go ahead Jack, show him", and all that stuff. So he took his shirt off and when he did he put on the gloves. It looked like he had made a mistake because this kid, what he did to him, and I mean he got in two or three punches and you could see it hurt old Jack but he was just waiting a minute and finally he got a chance, and that right he was famous for, he shot that right out and he got him, and years later I was reading some of his autobiography and they asked him which were the toughest fights he was ever in and he mentioned that one about being on the *Scott* there when this young black Solider liked to whipped him [laughter].

Q: Yes Sir. After your time on the *Hodges*, was that when you got out of the Coast Guard?

Allen: Yes, I got out of the Coast Guard and went up to Oregon since I was stationed up there on Beach Patrol and I thought I'd like to work in the timber as a logger, and so I did go work as a logger in Oregon.



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Q: And how long were you there working as a logger?

Allen: I was working there about a year-and-a-half and then I realized that in that mud and rain and stuff - and I had spent three years and some months in the Coast Guard - that there was a better life for me so I headed for the Recruiting Office. The only thing was when I got back there I couldn't go in with my rate. I had to go in as a Seaman and that's how I came to change my rate then. I was a Boatswain's Mate when I got out, but when I came back in the second time I went to DC school and became a Damage Controlman.

Q: I see. And insofar as your reenlisting, did you have to go through Basic again or did you just have some sort of refresher training?

Allen: I went right on the [Minnetonka \[WPG-67\]](#) and right out to . . . there's a weather ship out of San Francisco. While I was out there on the weather ship my son was born and I don't know whether they can see this but you can read that and then flip it when you get through reading it.

The USCGC *Minnetonka* (WPG-67) in 1958.



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Q: Okay. It says, "Aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Minnetonka* on Weather Station November. I just received a message that I had a new son born January 16th, 1949. We named him Thad William Allen. See the backside for a surprise." There he is; current Vice Admiral and Coast Guard Chief of Staff, Thad W. Allen. Here you go Sir.

You've mentioned that you were homeported in San Francisco and that you served on the weather patrol. This is a question as a sailor on the 255, something kind of curious. There's kind of a debate among some of the historians of Coast Guard history regarding the sea-keeping abilities and overall quality of the 255 class. Former Coast Guard Historian, Bob Scheina referred to them as the "Fiasco class" whereas Robert Johnson, the author of, *Guardians of the Sea* [Naval Institute Press, 1987] took exception to that and basically said that the 255s were a good class of boats and that they served the Coast Guard well. As somebody onboard, what was your view of it?

Allen: Well they didn't last as long and they were made right at the end of the war, and they shortened them 50 feet in the center so they were wide and short and they didn't ride too good. But being out there on weather patrol a lot of them liked that kind of life because they could go out there. They were out there 21 days. They'd catch up on their work and if they caught up some of them brought skeet or they had different recreation things that they were involved in, and then they'd come back for two months before they'd go out. So for sea duty that was a deal for some of them, although I was only on one weather patrol.

Q: Oh, okay. The weather station duty . . . this might seem like an unusual question, but was it as boring as it sounds, you know for those of us who have never been out on one? I mean what was your daily routine?

Allen: Yeah it was, because a lot of times you finished up just kind of routine jobs and that's why they ended up on recreation skeet shooting and stuff, swim parties and stuff like that. Now that's one side of it. Now the other side - and you've probably heard this - one of them was out there when a Pan American Airline came by, lost an engine, couldn't go any further, circled around and they followed right with the ship and when it went into the water they stopped there and they got everybody off including some babies and stuff, and that was the [Ponchartrain \[WPG-70\]](#) that had that. So they used to call that the "Diaper Ship" because they were trying to find material for diapers before they got back in [chuckle].

Q: Oh, yes.

Allen: So they made some rescues and I think that there was a ship - and I can't recall the name of it - in the Atlantic that the same thing happened to; where a plane went



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down by the ship and they were able to save the crew and that was a weather ship, but most of them though, they were just easy, just sitting out there.

Q: Yes Sir. I know you said you only did one weather patrol but did you experience any sort of bad storms or anything like that? Was there any significant weather event while you were onboard?

Allen: No, it was halfway between San Francisco and Honolulu and out there as a rule, the weather's good.

Q: Uh hum, okay.

Allen: Some of them that they had up in the North Atlantic or other places were bad.

Q: Right. What was liberty like? You had mentioned earlier something about going out for 21 days and coming back for two months. How were those rotations conducted?

Allen: They were pretty good, but in those days the Service always had you in three groups and a third of the group stayed aboard every night and the other teams were off, so it just rotated. So every third day you usually stood duty.

Q: Uh hum. After your time on the *Minnetonka*, which ship did you go to?

Allen: I went to the [Morris \[WSC-147\]](#). It was a 125-footer that they were re-commissioning and it was in Seattle.



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The USCGC *Morris*.

Q: Okay, and could you tell us a little bit about what that was like?

Allen: It was one complete mess. It still was the old blue and all the doors were sealed up and preservative over all the engines and all the stuff, so we spent a lot of time cleaning before they ever got the engines to go and everything. And then after we got to where it could run we brought it down to Long Beach, California, and from there I got off it to DC school.

Q: Okay, and where did you go to DC School?

Allen: I went to Groton, Connecticut, and that was right by New London.



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Q: Oh, okay, and upon completing the DC School where were you assigned?

Allen: I went back to Long Beach, California and for a while I was on the M&R Groups that worked on the lighthouses up and down the 11th District from Santa Barbara to San Diego.

Q: How'd you like working Aids to Navigation?

Allen: I loved that because they were all different and at that time they still had quite a few of the old civilian keepers and they were always ready to talk and they always had stories to tell. So yeah, it was good duty.

Q: There are actually some things - after we talk about your career – that we're going to go back and talk about in general and one of those regards the nature of those civilian keepers, especially on the lighthouse tenders and things of that nature that you might have come across. When was it that you served onboard the [Kukui \[WAK-186\]](#)?

Allen: I was sent up to Alameda there with the Rio Det Major Training Station and then in 1953 I went aboard the *Kukui* [right; click on image for a 300 dpi scan] as a crewmember but we all were going to get off but we were just put on there as crewmembers and went to the Batan Islands, which is the northern most tip of the Philippines. In fact they're closer to Formosa, China than they are the Philippines. But that was closest group of islands to Vietnam at that time and Vietnam was getting stirred up and they wanted to put three new LORAN stations out there to help navigate in and out of Vietnam.

Q: I see. What was it like serving on the only cargo ship in the Coast Guard at that time?

Allen: That was kind of laid back too and there was a lot of recreation and stuff going on, and occasionally a beer party in the afternoon. You'd get two beers and stuff like that.

Q: That was actually another question.

Allen: And the Captain we had on there was Captain Nap who later made Admiral Nap, but he used to like to stop for swim call every so often. That was always nice.



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Q: Swim call; what was that like?

Allen: They would have somebody stand on the flying bridge with a submachine gun and then the rest of them would just swim out there and there was never any problem.

Q: Uh hum. Out there with a weapon for protection against sharks?

Allen: Sharks; in case a shark would come up, which never happened.

Q: Okay. While onboard the *Kukui*, and you had mentioned the construction of the LORAN stations, what was your assignment? You know, what duty stations did you have while you were onboard her?

Allen: When we got to the Island of Bataan we had a bulldozer and I had run a bulldozer before, so they assigned me to take the bulldozer and pull some of the wagons. We had about five miles from where we landed to stop on the beach, down a road to where the station was being built, so I spent most of my time on the bulldozer clearing that up for the LORAN station.

Q: So you were actually involved in the construction of the site?

Allen: Yes.

Q: So the actual construction of the LORAN station was that done by the crewmembers or were there also contractors involved?

Allen: There were contractors out of Honolulu but they hired a lot of the Philippine laborers on the island there to work and stuff and brought some up from Manila. But the Filipinos did most of the construction.

Q: And while you were onboard the *Kukui* where was she homeported?

Allen: Honolulu.

Q: Honolulu, okay. As part of the construction crew on that, I mean did you have any time off and what did you do while you were on the island? You know what was involved with that? Is it just a matter of simply construction, go back to the ship at night and sleep and come back the next day?

Allen: Yeah, that's the way it was until the ship left and then we were on the island for a year and the people up there were poorer than most Filipinos but very friendly, and there was a little community place there. They had a Catholic church and I would say



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about half of them went to school and they always teach English at school, so that worked out pretty good. And some of their language was Spanish and since I was raised along the border there I knew a little bit of Spanish and I did all right talking to them since it was about half Spanish and something else.

Q: I think it's Tagalog they call it.

Allen: Yeah.

Q: And after your time on the *Kukui* where did you happen to go?

Allen: I went to Mobile, Alabama and I was, again, on construction with the ADNs mostly up and down a part of the Florida coast and Alabama coast there on the aids. But the country . . . it was one time when race played a part in your staying there. When I left California I had a California license on my car and I went through some little town in Mississippi and the police stopped me there and I said, "What was I doing?" I said, "I'm down here at Mobile in the Coast Guard", and I showed them my ID card and then the guy did a complete flip. "Oh brother it's good to see you", you know. And so there was so much of that that I didn't want to stay. Well my wife and kids were down there so I volunteered for Alaska to get out of Mobile. I had a good job there but at that time with the registered voters and the turmoil going on there and the way I felt, it wasn't the place for me.

Q: Uh hum. You said you went from Mobile to Alaska. What was it that you were involved in when you arrived in Alaska?

Allen: I went to Alaska and then I went aboard the *Sweetbrier* [WAGL/WLB-405].



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The USCGC *Sweetbrier*, circa 1955.

Q: Okay.

Allen: And that was very good duty. It was homeported in Ketchikan. We did have quite a range to work. We worked the Aleutian Islands; the aids and stuff out there, but it was good duty and besides the aids the first winter we were up there it was colder than average and there was no wind, so a lot of the coves where these saw mills were, were all closed up. So we spent several days breaking ice into a small logging camp or a fishing village. The ice was not more than a foot thick.

Q: Right. What was the duty like aboard the 180-foot buoy tender in Alaskan waters? Was she a good ship? Was it a good design for those, not only for the duty but for that particular location?



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Allen: It was and I think that's the reason that those old 180-foot buoy tenders lasted as long as they did. They had icebreaker bows on them and there have been two or three different times that they happened to have collisions with other ships and they always came out with the better end of it, you know, with that ice breaker bow. They were made right after the war but they were good ships and I think the Coast Guard had about 25 or 30 of them and the one I was on was next to the last to leave the Coast Guard; the *Sweetbrier*.

Q: Was there a large crew onboard?

Allen: No, about 35.

Q: Thirty-five, and did everyone get along or were there instances in your time onboard where there were problems between the crewmembers?

Allen: No, that was pretty good. There were little disagreements but no, it was good.

Q: And you'd mentioned this earlier about your coming across former lighthouse service personnel, was there also former lighthouse service people onboard the *Sweetbrier* when you were onboard?

Allen: No, most of them had gotten too old to be at sea. There were a few of them left at these light stations around and they were kind of a breed all of their own; very clean and their housekeeping was some of the best. So when you were working around there they were always cleaning up after you or making sure you cleaned up around the stations there, and then there were some characters, because I think they stayed on those isolated islands so long that when you came there they were ready to talk.

Q: Uh hum [chuckle]. That's something from an historian's perspective is, I'm always giving cause to think of what kind of person would be interested in running a lighthouse and being a lighthouse keeper, especially on some of these more remote locations. So it is interesting that you would note that they would be very outgoing. I imagine they would be out there for all that time with few people to talk to.

Allen: Yeah, it was. Some of them, they told me back in the old days; some of the stations I was at, that they'd stay on that station a year or whatever it took, then they'd go ashore and they'd take two months and some of them would take cruises because they'd make good money and there was no place they could spend it. So they took cruises and they read a lot, so you could discuss almost anything with them. They were readers.



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Q: What was it like to go on liberty? We've heard stories from other Coast Guard veterans that basically when they got liberty in Alaska they were able to go on shore, maybe buy some beer and then they ended up sitting on the beach drinking their beer because they couldn't bring it back onboard the ship. I mean what was it like when you were on the *Sweetbriar*?

Allen: Well yes, in some places it might have been like that and you never could bring liquor back aboard. But no, we hit those little towns; Ketchikan where we were based and we hit Juno quite a bit and Wrangel and some of the other little towns out there. Some of the villages there wasn't anything. They were like in the chains. Every time we pulled in one the Eskimos would come out to meet us and they'd want us to go in and show a movie and usually we didn't get off except the guy that went ashore and showed the movie. But no, the people in Alaska I think are some of the friendliest people that you can get to know.

Q: So you got along very well with the Inuits in Alaska?

Allen: Very well, yes.

Q: What was a typical patrol like while you were tending aids and did you have any notable search and rescue cases while you were onboard the *Sweetbriar*?

Allen: Most cases run about . . . running the aids is about three weeks, sometimes two, and there had been several times that we were in the area where there was a search and rescue that would come up. Like in one place I remember there was a baby that got sick and wasn't expecting to live. We went in, brought the couple out with the baby and then they sent an airplane. The airplane couldn't get into where these people lived so we brought them out to open water where the plane could land there and they took the baby to the hospital, and some cases similar to that, but most of it was just working on the Aids to Navigation.

Q: And so you really liked working the Aids. What was it particularly about it that you liked?

Allen: Well you kind of could see what you were doing there and it was a challenge to help them scrape those buoys down, and you didn't paint them too much but you just cleaned them off and put them back or you took out new ones and got them in the right position to sit that buoy right where it belonged. Of course that was the Captain and his bunch on the bridge that was doing that. They just told us when to drop it.

Q: Okay. Let's discuss some of the general questions I had and that is, when you decided to go back into the Service, did you think about joining one of the other Armed



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Services or were you convinced that you wanted to rejoin the Coast Guard, and if so why?

Allen: I was really convinced that I wanted to join the Coast Guard and I was thinking very seriously that I'd get my rate back, which was Boatswain's Mate. Well I didn't get that back and at that time it was frozen so I ended up doing something else. But no, I wasn't thinking about any other branch of Service except the Coast Guard. I decided to reenlist.

Q: You served in the Coast Guard during wartime and then again during peacetime. Any thoughts on the differences in the Service between those two times? Was there anything distinctively that sticks out in your mind?

Allen: No. Some of the stuff in peacetime we weren't too much involved in, whereas in wartime we were supplying them with troops and it was a different ballgame in that way. It was different as far as in combat.

Q: How were the relations, granted of course you served in different eras and different types of ships throughout your career, but how were the relations between the various rates, you know, basically the differences between the black gang versus the deck force and Petty Officers versus the junior enlisted, and of course the differences between the enlisted ranks and the officers? Do you care to discuss that at all?

Allen: Yeah, there was always a little bit of something there but I think it gave you the incentive to try and work for something; to come up the ranks as a Seaman, start striking, start doing something where you could move up the ladder to where you wouldn't be at the end of the line, or like in some places where the First Class had a table, the Chiefs had their quarters and stuff, you looked forward to going to that table to eat. So that was kind of an incentive to work at it and go along there, and the life was pretty good on the tenders.

Q: Uh hum. Do you have anybody that you recall with whom you were especially friendly? I imagine that given you had a number of assignments but you weren't in a number of locations for a number of years, did you develop really close friendships with anybody, some of whom you may have reunited with later in the Service or perhaps even later in life?

Allen: Yeah, I think that happened just about to everybody and one in particular was a guy I seemed to have . . . but my buddy was one of the smallest guys and this guy's name was Ted Neumiller and we talked about anything, and we liked to sing too. Everybody on there thought they were Caruso and there was always a lot of singing going on. But yes, I had a buddy or two that I was really fond of.



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Q: And then we kind of discussed this prior to the interview and that was the issue of segregation. You had mentioned earlier that there was a white fighter and a black fighter onboard the *Scott* and there was segregation at that time during the Second World War.

Allen: Yeah. Well there was a small incident or two. Most of the time it was segregated but there was nothing done. Like I slept up in the forward part of the ship on the one side and the Steward's space, the black ones, slept on the other side. We talked and visited and stuff but we didn't sleep in the same quarters then and it was, I think, three or four years before [President Harry S.] Truman or somebody got that straightened out.

Q: Also with the desegregation of the Armed Services in the late 1940s, how did the Coast Guard come to terms with it, at least from your perspective?

Allen: I think they did real good and they really tried to reach out. Of course there were problems along but right off, instead of being Stewards the black kids, they became enginemen and all other rates in the Coast Guard and did a very good job. So I think we did a little bit better than some of the other Services because we were smaller, which was probably the reason. From the '50s on it was just we were there. I had a lot of black friends and Filipinos and everything else and we were just all one.

Q: Yes Sir. That kind of concludes all the prepared questions that I have. Were there some things you'd like to tell us about; particular incidents that you recall with either fondness or things that stuck out that were really bad in the course of your career; stories that you wanted to tell? You mentioned earlier your encounter with Jack Dempsey. Were there other instances like that where you perhaps came across somebody with some fame or some funny incident that you recall? [Chuckle] Not to put you on the spot.

Allen: I'll try to remember. We had them smokers quite a bit and then I never was on them. Some of the troop ships, I guess at times they've had some of the celebrities come aboard but we never had any celebrities aboard.

Q: You had mentioned to me earlier too that you had served some time in Recruiting Duty. Anything that you recall that happened while you were serving as a recruiter? You mentioned something about an encounter with Otto Graham.

Allen: Yes.

Q: We haven't discussed that.

Allen: Oh, we haven't discussed that.



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Q: No Sir.

Allen: Okay. Yes, I was on recruiting duty in Portland, Oregon and since I had lived up there when I was a civilian as a logger it was really very easy for me to bring in recruits. But we always had our information to try and get these recruits. We took them out to the TV station and they'd be fair with us but they weren't very enthusiastic, and then when they called down and said that [Otto Graham](#) was coming down and we'd make a reservation for him. So I went over to the TV station and, "Oh yeah, bring him in." So the next day when he came down he and the Chief of Personnel . . . and I had to say one thing. He's probably one of the most likeable guys but he was a poor excuse the way he dressed for an officer [chuckle]. His uniform didn't look very good. But everybody liked Otto and the Commander behind him was the Chief of Personnel up in Seattle and he was immaculate. So it was quite a strain. But when we got to the TV station the guys knew my name and they came running up and he shook hands with them. He'd say, "Hello Allen, glad to see you", which he'd never done before. He looked right past me at Otto Graham and then they got started and it was a good interview. That guy, he could make anybody happy or whatever talking to them about anything. So the results from that deal was they were giving out to critical rates, which were electronics, radiomen, quartermasters something like that, and the DC rating; myself, wasn't on it. So they decided that they would give out Proficiency Pay to a few of the non-critical ratings and about a month later the list came out about this Pro Pay and I made it, and I know what had done it. It was that TV station and those guys looking at Otto Graham, the Chief of Personnel was right behind him, and took it all in. So I got my Pro Pay for a year, which was \$30.00 a month, which was quite a bit of money in those days.

Q: Now after your time on the *Sweetbriar* what other duty stations were you at prior to your retirement and then how long?

Allen: I did a tour of maintenance on the lighthouses up and down the California coast for about three years and that was, like I said before, meeting the old keepers and some of the old stuff had to be taken down and we were putting new fog horns and stuff like that up. So it was, I would say, some of my best time working at that. Then from there when I made Chief I went over to Alameda and at that time the Vietnam War was really going and they were loading ammunition up to Port Chicago, and if you're familiar with that, that's where the big explosion was in World War II but that's where it's still loaded. So I went up there and the officers were the supervisors during the day and the chiefs were supervisors at night, and I worked there about six/seven months loading the ships with ammunition for Vietnam.

Q: When exactly did you retire, Sir?

Allen: I retired in October of 1965.



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Q: And in the end how many years service and what was your rate?

Allen: I retired as a Chief Damage Controlman and have been retired now – let's see - quite a while now [chuckle].

Q: Yes Sir.

Allen: And I feel very fortunate because probably a lot of the guys that have retired have gotten up and, I mean, they're gone, so I feel fortunate that I've been able to hang around this long.

Q: Yes Sir. Well, is there is anything else you'd like to mention as part of this interview?

Allen: The only thing is it seems like, whether it's the Coast Guard or something else, when something comes up the people don't know what the Coast Guard does, and so many things, and one thing in particular that I know happened, the thing is about giving credit to the Coast Guard for what they've done, and so many people don't know that when the Coast Guard went under the Navy in [November] of 1941 they took four of these large attack transports, put landing craft on them and they were all Coast Guard crew, and they were already sent out to Hong Kong and Shanghai and places over there to evacuate the Americans because the Japanese was pounding some of those places, and they were the main ships then that when they did go into Guadalcanal, that did all the landing of the troops there and then they pulled up . . . the reason why they gave them to the Coast Guard is because they figured that they had more experience with small boats. So that's why they called up so many of the Coast Guard to serve on these attack transports. Then of course, as you know, in Guadalcanal, that's where the first Coast Guardsman got the Congressional Medal of Honor [\[Douglas Munro\]](#).

Q: Yes Sir.

Allen: He was serving on one of these four ships. So in just about everything we've gone to, but I'd like to just say about two or three weeks ago when they were rehashing the anniversary of D-Day there were two women newscasters talking and they interviewed two guys and they said, "You were there", and they said, "Yeah, we landed troops in D-Day." "And what were you in?" "The Coast Guard." They said, "The Coast Guard", and then the guys told them after they left there on D-Day they went over to Iwo Jima when that was going on and participated in landing troops in Okinawa and Iwo Jima, and it seems like, I don't know why, that there's just hardly anything said about the part that the Coast Guard played in World War II and some of the others too. When I say all the rest of them I mean World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam.



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Q: Well, yes Sir. We often, in our office, get questions as to whether or not the Coast Guard is actually an Armed Service and then we also have things, you know, when we say the Coast Guard's been involved in every major war since 1790 for the United States; in which the United States has been engaged, and people are astonished and it's unfortunate. We do our best to get the word out to people and it's certainly a credit to people like yourself and the other veterans who fought in those wars and have done a lot to increase the heritage and build on the heritage of the Coast Guard, not just in it's performance of lifesaving and law enforcement duties but also in the performance of it's combat missions in support of the United States.

Allen: That's great because when Alexander Hamilton commissioned those first [ten] ships, that was before we had any Navy, so the Coast Guard is actually a little older than the Navy. I'm not doing that to put the Navy down. I'm just saying it's older.

Q: Oh no, yes Sir, I understand. Again, it's another one of those issues that is often brought up to our attention down in the Historian's Office.

Allen: Well yeah, some of the quiz questions on some of these programs.

Q: Yes Sir. Well is there anything else Sir?

Allen: No, I think you really covered it and I really thank you for giving me the opportunity to express myself on some of these.

Q: Oh we certainly appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule while you're here in Washington to speak with us and to get this down, and this will be transcribed and will be kept in our office for future generations to read about your involvement with the Coast Guard and your career. So I'd like to thank you again for taking the time to be with us.

Allen: And I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Q: No problem Sir. Thanks a lot, and this concludes our interview with Clyde Allen, conducted on the 2nd of August 2004. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

