

Kenneth E. Allen

Interviewer: Today is Thursday, September 14, 2006. We're at the Henderson Public Library, Paseo Verde branch. We are interviewing Kenneth Allen. My name is Shannon Berndt and Ed Feldman is our photographer. Thank you so much for participating in the Veteran's Oral History Project. We really appreciate it---your sharing your story with us. Before we talk about your service career, let's go back a little bit and tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised.

Kenneth Allen: Well, I'm a farm boy, country boy. I was raised on a farm outside Berthen [SP] 00:58, Colorado, and went to high school in Johnstown, Colorado, was just a few miles away, so that was a bus trip every day. I had always wanted to fly so in high school I spent most of my extra money and weekends and off time learning how to fly Piper Cubs and things like that. So then I eventually worked my way up to be a flight instructor. Then I went to California to Northrup Aeronautical Institute and had joined the National Guard in Colorado, but when I went to California I became a Naval Reserve enlistee. And soon thereafter I was on active duty with the Navy and spent 11 years as enlisted service, aviation electronics technician. And I applied for what we called the Navy Scientific Education Program. Just as a little sidelight I applied two years in a row and was turned down and I said, well, by golly, I'm going to keep on going and see if it happens, so the last year I was eligible, lo and behold I was accepted into the Navy Enlisted Scientific Education Program and was sent to the University of New Mexico for four years. Upon getting out of---graduating from the University of New Mexico, I went to the officer candidate school. I requested to be an aviator but they told me I was too old at that time. But if you think back at that period of time in 1967 they needed aviators pretty badly, and so I requested an age waiver and got an age waiver so I could become a pilot. As we went through officer candidate school, which was the normal progression, after that we'd be sent to officer flight training in Pensacola, Florida, and my arrival in Pensacola, Florida, they told me I had depth perception problems and I would have a choice of becoming a naval flight officer, which is a non-pilot, or I could go become an ensign on a destroyer. And so I said, well, I would like to hear the doctor tell me that. So we went through two or three weeks of physical hold while I went through some psychiatric analysis and all that kinds of stuff. And lo and behold, a navy captain by the name of Youngblood sat me down and says, well, you've passed all these tests now and we think you can fly an airplane. Would you like a waiver? Or would you like to just progress on? And I said, well, a waiver is good for all time, isn't it? And he said, yes. I said, let's have a waiver. Because next year I don't want to go up to a physical board and find out I have depth perception problems. And his comment was something like, well, you know, you've already demonstrated you can fly airplanes, and we're not taking much risk on you as far as getting through flight training. So the depth perception was not a real issue because he said when you're landing aboard a carrier at night, how much depth perception do you think you have? And of course that was a real boost to me. So I got into flight training with a couple of waivers. And that was a---that was, you know, fulfilling my dream to get that far. And in the military every program has its screening processes and those were some that I happened to get through and was very fortunate. So from there it was typically going into flight training and of course I did very well because I already had---I was already a flight instructor in the civilian

world so I didn't have much problems getting through flight training. And we spent time for about the first 18 months, as all naval aviators do, going through the various types of aircraft, building your way up to where you could land on aircraft carriers. So that was the big graduation exercise, the carrier qualifications. And then you go to your fleet squadrons and you get training en route in a specific model of airplane that you are going to go operate in the fleet. So that was pretty much the progression as far as getting from where I was raised in Colorado to getting out into a fleet squadron. And those travels over the years took us from, in the enlisted time, Alameda, California, Naval Air Station North Island where I was an instructor in Ls submarine warfare, then the University of New Mexico for a full four years. A wonderful program. That included you went to school during the summers, too, so we really graduated with sufficient hours to have a Master's degree, which was a good thing. The---from there into flight training. Our officer candidate school for the Navy was in Newport, Rhode Island, and then the flight training section starts in Pensacola, Florida, but then I went to Meridian, Mississippi to fly the first jets, and then to Kingsville, Texas to fly F-9s, and graduating from that we go out to the fleet squadron in Livermore, California. And you spend about six-eight months in the first fleet model airplane that you are going to fly, and from there to a squadron at Livermore, California, an operational squadron, and made two deployments to Southeast Asia on the Kitty Hawk. They were both long deployments. They were scheduled for six months but each one of them was about 11 months long because when you're over there and there's a need, they keep extending the deployment time. And then I applied for the Naval Test Pilot School and was accepted, so I spent some time at Patuxent River, Maryland going through the Test Pilot School and then about four years of doing actual test flying and delivering ordnance and weapons separation kinds of tests and that kind of thing. And then to the Naval War College for about a year in Newport, Rhode Island, which was a very good experience. And from there to an attack squadron in Cecil Field, Florida just outside of Jacksonville. And I made two deployments on the USS Saratoga to the Mediterranean. So those were all exciting things and just as much a different part of the Navy as the west coast and Southeast Asia was and then going to the Mediterranean, which was an entirely different operational tempo and the kinds of things that we did were much, much different. So. And then from there I went to the Naval Air Systems Command in Washington, DC, which was spent about three years there in their research and development arena, which was very exciting, and again different, and learning how to navigate all of the corridors of the Pentagon and the other offices we dealt with. Then I was selected to be commander of a squadron, which was a support squadron in Puerto Rico. I was XO for 18 months and then commanding officer for 18 months, and then I got transferred to the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake, California, which is just outside of Ridgecrest. Really, Ridgecrest is a little city that bumps up against the big ranges we had out there. I spent six years there in the RDTEV community, Research, Development, Test and Evaluation kinds of things dealing with some of the newest things, some of which will never go into the fleet, but they were very exciting to work on in developing the technology stuff. So that's a whole almost 36 years career in the Navy encapsulated into just a few minutes. So. I know that there are some things that you would like to discuss in terms of say, the war scenarios, which is Vietnam for me, or Southeast Asia environment. Well, how's that for summing that up?

Interviewer: Wonderful. Wonderful.

Kenneth Allen: Good.

Interviewer: First of all, my first question is how old were you when they said you were too old to be a pilot?

Kenneth Allen: I believe it was 29 and it was about a 24 month waiver. So I was 29 and they only wanted them at 27, but when they had a real need they said---well, again, they looked at my record. You know, they can go back and review all the things I had done and some of the qualifications. And to get the waiver I had to write a letter and say why I thought I was an acceptable candidate and then they seemed to agree.

Interviewer: Good. How old were you when you first really had a love or desire to fly an airplane?

Kenneth Allen: Well, that was probably when I was about nine years old. My mom and an uncle and myself and my sister went down to Texas and my uncle just happened to have an airplane, a Swift 125. So he took us for a ride. And I think that was the first real implantation of a desire to become a pilot. So, probably nine years old. And then in high school the youngest you could get a student pilot's license was 16, so when I was 16 I had a student pilot's license. So every dollar I earned went into paying the rent and that on the Piper Cub J-3, \$7.50 an hour. I'd usually get in about three or four hours a week.

Interviewer: Oh, I lost my train of thought. Why---oh, why did you choose the Navy---to be a pilot? There's other branches, right, that have pilots, right?

Kenneth Allen: Well, yeah, there were. Of course, obviously at that point there was the Air Force, you know, which used to be the Army Air Corps and soon became the United States Air Force. The Navy presented opportunities of having aircraft carriers that could go anywhere in the world and project power ashore. Well, I didn't know that at the time that is what we were going to call it, but they had some of the most exciting opportunities, I thought, that gave you the travel. As a young man that seemed to have an appeal. So that's probably the basic reason. And I became very proud of the Navy and the actions the Navy was involved in. And all of the services do a great job. And they're more intertwined today than probably they ever were, but, yeah, it was exciting.

Interviewer: So you---when you were in Southeast Asia you were on the Kitty Hawk.

Kenneth Allen: Mm hm.

Interviewer: What was life like on board ship?

Kenneth Allen: Well, you work a lot of long hours. And if you---the beauty of operating off of a ship is that you got a warm bed at night or when you're off then you get your meals are hot, compared to say being on the ground in country where a hot meal may be a long ways away and the miserable living conditions. So that part of it was very nice. But it was very long hours. Typical hours were 16 to 18 hours a day. You squeaked in a little bit of sleep whenever you could. The accommodations were fine. The Navy had really learned a lot on how to keep--- you know, you hear the stories of World War II where they would have weevils in the bread and that kind of thing. Well, that never happened at all in my time frame when I was on the Kitty Hawk. Or later. You know, the food was very, very good. Very difficult to lose weight on those diets. But the operational tempo at that time was normally you'd fly probably a minimum of two sorties a day or two flights a day in addition to taking care of all your administrative work writing up evaluations on your personnel and managing divisions. I had the aircraft armament division, which is four sections of technicians, and, you know, giving guidance to those folks and doing the administrative things to keep the squadron running. The two sorties a day usually running probably about two hours total. You know, the aircraft launches if you've seen any of the films are just every few seconds they're launching an aircraft and the same way when they're recovering aircraft. That's only about 15 seconds between landings, and, well, that's a hectic pace. And if you've ever seen pictures of the flight deck, it's a very dangerous place from the standpoint you can get hurt if you don't follow the rules and the guidelines and the training. So it's a---one of the---it's still amazing to me today how the teamwork can get aircraft launched and recovered and put away and maintained with---everybody has got to do their part. There is no---any one person falls down in an area that somebody can really get hurt or killed. So it's very dynamic. And the crew that maintains the airplanes and maintains the ship put in long, long hard hours on deployment. So. And normally our operational days were somewhere in the 20 to 30 day period. We had one what we called line period 52 days without getting into port. And that was very rigorous. And on those days most of the experienced aviators might fly as many as three sorties in one day. So that was long. And these are sorties all around the clock, whether it be middle of the night or middle of the day ____ (14:30). And when we had more than one carrier on station, we would have, you know, we'd have a day carrier and night carrier, then we'd switch so your---the things would, you know, that we were presenting, our projection of power ashore, 24 hours a day from some aircraft carrier or another. As well as coordinated with the Air Force and what was going on with the Marines and the other parts in Southeast Asia. So we were oftentimes in direct support of people on the ground. You know, close air support whether it be strafing or dropping bombs very near our own people to---because they were in conflict, whether it was---several of those things took place, too.

Interviewer: What years were you in Southeast Asia?

Kenneth Allen: That would have been from about 1969 to 1972. About that time frame. And there was the---as an attack pilot, which I flew A-7s during that period of time, and we had the A-70, which was the latest of the A-7 models that had the computerized delivery systems and a lot of things not as tweaked up and as sophisticated as they are now, but they were still the latest thing going, so we could pretty accurately drop bombs on target, pretty accurately do

any of the functions we had including navigating close to borders, whether it be the Chinese border or Cambodian border or the North Vietnamese border, we could get right up to it without infringing on the international rules. So it was exciting times and as an attack pilot with an A-7 we had a whole variety of things we could do from dropping various kinds of bombs to strafing. We could do limited aerial combat maneuvering with fighter aircraft if we had to, but typically we stayed away from that. We had missiles. We had sidewinder missiles, which are heat seekers that could be fired at another aircraft. We had antiradiation suppression missiles like the shrike and---so that we could provide air cover for other strike aircraft if needed and the mining capability. I was---this was a very unique scenario when Nixon decided that--- President Nixon decided that he was going to mine Haiphong harbor, I got to lead that flight. It was 16 aircraft and a whole bunch of various kinds of mines to put in the Haiphong harbor. It was a very demanding flight and before it took place, of course, it was very highly classified at the time, but---the weather didn't look too good, and so the night before we had the CTS-77s task commander come down and the task force---a commander come down from the task force and talk to me about, okay, well, what if the weather isn't this good. And so he said, can you bend the rules a little bit. How low would you really go? So I said, well, mm, okay. We heehawed around on the, okay, well, if it's 3000 feet and five miles, that would be okay. Two or three hours later he comes back down and says, well, how low do you think you really could go? So we---and of course this was violating some of the various rules we had, the AVFR flying, the visual flight rules, so the pressure was on. He wanted to know different, so I said, well, okay, maybe we could drop the ceiling down to 1000 feet. Okay, so he went up apparently and talked to the admiral, and of course the weather forecast looked like that's what it was going to be and when we launched with all the mine aircraft, the A-6s and the A-7s going inland, we descended down very low underneath radar coverage until we got close to the beach. But when we got there, there was a fog bank. And so we actually really wound up down at 300 feet with 16 airplanes in a formation flying, you know, just above the water but under the fog bank, and fortunately—and this was sort of forecasted—we got close to land—the fog bank disappeared.

Interviewer: Oh.

Kenneth Allen: So we could climb just a little bit, get our landmarks and go out and mine Haiphong Harbor. So that was a one-of-a-time strike, if you will, and it was very successful, but it was also probably the most frightening for the other aircraft in the flight because this was really, you know, we were supposed to stay visual flight rules and very difficult. But the success was---and President Nixon wanted mines in the water. He knew within minutes that the mission had been accomplished as we communicated back to the ship with our secure communications and then the White House knew right away. And not one of those ships came out of Haiphong Harbor over the next several months. None of the ships would risk being destroyed by a mine. And none went in as far as I know.

Interviewer: Wonderful.

Kenneth Allen: So that was kind of the highlight of my career in that sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. The Vietnamese, they flew MiGs, right?

Kenneth Allen: Yes, mm hm.

Interviewer: Did you ever come in contact and have to fight with...

Kenneth Allen: No. As an attack pilot we tried to avoid those and let our fighter aircraft, and at that time we had F-4s, they were assigned the mission of air-to-air combat or protecting the strike aircraft, which the A-7 was, from the MiGs. So we would get---we had communications with a ship out in the water that was monitoring the whole issue and they would say, bandits, bandits, 340 at 20 miles, meaning there was MiGs at 20 miles from us, and of course we would take evasive maneuvers and get out of the way and let the fighters take care of the MiGs. So it wasn't too long after we were there that the MiGs just didn't want to tangle with the F-4s. Our fighter guys were well trained. They learned lessons early on and they really beefed that up. You probably heard of Top Gun and that kind of thing, and when people went through that they got---we came out of there with the best fighter pilots, and the training made the difference. There wasn't anything really badly wrong with some of the MiGs, but we had good training and we had good control and as far as air combat maneuvering went, the US Navy stood out pretty well.

Interviewer: So there's a difference between a fighter and an attack pilot.

Kenneth Allen: Yes. In those days there were. In other words we didn't have multi-role aircraft. Now the A-7 could get in and maneuver with other aircraft but it wasn't really designed as a fighter airplane. Today is a little bit different. We've got the F-18, which is they call it an FA-18, a fighter-attack airplane, so it's got really good maneuverability and fighter capabilities as well as being a superb attack aircraft because it can really pinpoint and put things on the target. I got to fly the F-18 my last six years in the Navy at the Naval Weapons Center China Lake, so I can compare what we have today, or what we had at least in 1992 with what we had in 1972 and there's a world of difference, just a world of difference in capability, and we're close to having an aircraft that can be both a good fighter and a good attack airplane. And things just keep getting better as technology grows. So I can just imagine how much more refined even those airplanes are today than they were in 1992.

Interviewer: So then your job being an attack pilot was doing what you said before was strafing and bombing and...

Kenneth Allen: Mm hm.

Interviewer: Whatever needed to be done with---to help the men on the ground.

Kenneth Allen: Yep. You bet. And in a bigger picture, was to deny such things as interdiction of the trails and so on to keep the North Vietnamese from bringing down their

weapons and ordnance and troops, you know, we were on the trails looking for those kinds of things and destroying anything from---when you're in the military you're out there to break things and cause the other guy to die for his country, as Patton would have said in the movie, you know, it's not my job to die for my country, it's my job to go out and make the other poor devil die for his country. And that's the ugly part of war but that's just the way it is. And so we would do a lot of those things. Night missions, day missions, interdiction missions to destroy bridges, destroy fords where they would put, you know, dirt over a river and cross a river that way. So we had a lot of that kind of stuff going.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of pilots that were shot down? Were there a lot of casualties with pilots?

Kenneth Allen: [Pause] No, there weren't a lot. There were a few. [Pause]

Interviewer: Were you ever fearful for yourself?

Kenneth Allen: No. You know, you fly and there's a lot of moments when there's, you know, I wouldn't call it boredom, but things are all under control. And then there are times when things get kind of heated up. But, no, I never really gave that much consideration because we were very well trained, we knew how to defeat almost everything the enemy had, at least that was our---how we felt internally. There were, you know, obviously, from the enemy's side they had their lucky shots, and they certainly did do some damage early on before my time frame over there where their sands [SP] 24:39 before we learned how to get good countermeasures and that kind of stuff working. But I had a lot of confidence in what our government was providing us with in terms of tools and that, and of course the training so that you could use our stuff very precisely. You know, we lost, you know, pilots. Some of them had to do with operational kinds of losses. A good friend, Don Hall, flew into the water behind the ship for some reason. You know, that's---he wasn't shot down. So we had those kinds of things, and---and we had people---missions where, you know, one of the friends of mine was on the ground in his parachute and talking on the radio with---and he had some broken limbs, I don't know how many, but he could talk on the radio but the enemy was closing in on him. And so they had us drop bombs. The forward air controller was in an OV-10 flying overhead and he would---wanted us precisely to know how well we could place bombs---we had to place one over here, let us say 100 meters from my smoke. And he says, okay, that's not quite 100 meters but go half that distance to the, I forget which direction, but closer to where we knew Bart was. We couldn't see him until the last part of it. So the forward air controller calibrated the strike one bomb at a time and we marched the bombs right up to within about 50 to 100 meters of the downed pilot, and finally the forward air controller was taking so much fire from the enemy that he had to call it off and we had to leave. So we never heard from Bart again and he didn't show and presumed dead, but he wasn't dead at the time. And---so we had those kinds of things. And those are the close air support kinds of stuff that you do for search and rescue and those kinds of things where many of the forward air controllers or the SANDYs, which were the search and rescue helicopters would come in and try to get an aviator out, and oftentimes they took more losses than the aviator. You know, one aviator on the ground, they

might get him out but they might lose seven or eight or nine people in the process. But we always knew somebody would come get us if at all possible.

Interviewer: Did you make many close friends?

Kenneth Allen: Yeah, you make friends, but in the military moving around every three years is pretty much what we did. We got accustomed to being part of a group of aviators in a squadron. You became friends and then we all gotta move on sooner or later. You know, about a third of the squadron turns over every year. So you have people coming and people going. So, yeah, you make friends. Lifelong friends, I never really developed that. I think our emotions kind of said don't get too close to anybody because you don't know if they're going to be there tomorrow. So we made---you know, there were a lot of wonderful guys out there that were doing the same thing. And you worked as a team, which is, you know, you don't always find that, where everyone is going to pull their weight and go do their jobs. It was a---it was good from that standpoint. And the families stuck together, the wives, you know, they would have functions at the Officers Club or that kind of thing. So---I never stayed---and even---the longest tour of duty I had was six years at the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake. That was the longest in one spot until I moved here 13 years ago. This is the longest time I stayed anywhere except, you know, when I was being raised on a farm.

Interviewer: The---what was the morale of the men during your stay in Southeast Asia?

Kenneth Allen: Well, I think a lot of it varied. Some of it varied depending on what their jobs were. You know, I had a great experience of having---I mentioned the Avionics Armament Division, which had the _____ (28:33) ordnance men, electricians, and AOs, which were the fire control technicians, and then we had the aviation electronics technicians. And the electricians probably had the lowest morale in the squadron, but then when you look at their work environment, they got all the airplanes that were broken and they were working at night in the hangar bay usually under red lights, which is difficult, and then maybe the airplanes would come back the next day with the same kind of problem. So they would get frustrated. But you took the ordnance men, which were working on the flight deck whether it be day or night, and they could measure their productivity every day by how many tons of bombs went off the front end of the ship, subtract the ones that had to come back aboard, you know, at the end of the flight, and they could measure their productivity, how many tons of bombs did we move today? And so they kind of had the highest morale. So I thought that was kind of interesting to watch happening. And of course, then, there were other places on the ship that, you know, people don't see the light of day unless they make it a point to go up and get outside, down in the bowels of the ship, what we call the ship's company people, the people who run the engineering plant and that kind of thing. So I thought the morale was high. I thought the morale in the U.S. was lower than it was out where we were. You know, we were doing something. We were productive every day. When we went into port we had a good time and relaxed. And then we would go back and do it again.

Interviewer: As a Vietnam vet, did you see or feel the negativity when you came home because of being in Vietnam?

Kenneth Allen: Not so much because my arrival back was back in my military environment, back on a military base. We often lived on a military base. Not every time. But we were back in that group and I never ran into any of the demonstrations which would make the news, you know, the rabble rousers, or the places like there at Kent State where they had all the, you know, the stuff that went on there. I didn't see that or get involved with it much. I never had anybody come up and slap me on the back and say, gee, what a great job you're doing defending America, but you know, I think that---our soldiers and airmen and sailors coming back now from say Iraq or wherever, they do get that recognition. You know, we didn't get that kind of recognition. But I never ran into anything negative about it. I never had any confrontation with anybody about it.

Interviewer: Tell me about your most memorable experience.

Kenneth Allen: Well, there are probably many. I can remember, oh, probably several things, but the mining situation is one that always sticks in my mind because it was one of a kind.

Interviewer: Right.

Kenneth Allen: There are other experiences like I was a very fortunate guy. I was on the daylight strike and my airplane was on the catapult and it sounded like the---my gun had gone off, that there were several, about a half a dozen or so very loud bangs, and it was determined soon thereafter that those were compressor stalls of the engine as the engine was coming apart. But I already was at full throttle and had saluted the catapult officer, meaning that the airplane was going to go. Of course as soon as he heard that noise, he suspended the catapult, but he wanted me to throttle back and our rules are you don't throttle back unless you'll stand in front of the airplane. Well, he didn't want to stand in front of the airplane because he thought the gun had gone off, so---but anyway he convinced me I could throttle back, and of course when I reduced the throttle the engine seized in about three seconds. And normally it takes oh, maybe eight-ten seconds for the engine to wind down or maybe even a little bit longer. But this one just seized tight. So if the catapult had fired and I would've been airborne, the engine would have quit within seconds of being launched into the sky. So very fortunate. Very memorable. That's a very memorable thing. There are lots of strikes I can say that are memorable. When Nixon ordered the linebacker kinds of things and a lot of B-52 bombings, we were launched one night to provide missile suppression, which are Shrike missiles. We launched each airplane, the two airplanes, mine and my flight _____ (32:37) had four Shrikes on board and we were to suppress any missiles being fired near the coast towards the B-52s, and of course it was at night and there were a lot of clouds out there. Well, the North Vietnamese decided to get our attention. They launched---started launching missiles. Well, we weren't getting the indications that they were being radar guided, and it turns out after we saw about three or four of them that what they were doing was launching 122-millimeter rockets,

which had a similar appearance at night, only they didn't have the big blossom of the booster going off. They were just a solid thing. So we pretty quickly picked up on the fact that these are just rockets, these are not guided, they're just launching whatever they can in the air hoping that they'd detract us. So we never did see a SAM launched that night in that mission. But it was still very scary because it---you would break---with a missile or a SAM being launched at you, you can usually defeat it by maneuvering your aircraft appropriately. It's the ones that you don't see that bother you, so if---we'd be watching one, trying to dodge one and fly into a cloud and then you couldn't see it anymore and then you'd say, oh, my goodness, this is not good, and we dodged clouds for about an hour and a half and fortunately didn't run into each other, and we got back to the ship. Very memorable. That was very---well, I don't want to say scary, but it was very disturbing to know what's being launched at you, you might not be able to avoid because you can't keep track of it. But it all turned out okay. But again, the training pays off. Just go back to the rudimentary thing. Needle ball airspeed, or watch your altitude and airspeed, and do all that you can, and rely on the training that you got. It works.

Interviewer: Amazing. When you said you were XO, commanding officer of men or whatever...

Kenneth Allen: Mm hm.

Interviewer: What was---what are your responsibilities when you're an XO?

Kenneth Allen: Well, there are two positions in a squadron. You have an executive officer, which is the number two guy, and then there's the commanding officer. So the way the Navy works their squadrons, and I'm assuming they still do it today, you go into the squadron as an XO for 18 months, or a given period of time, and then you fleet up to be the commanding officer when the commanding officer gets relieved and goes on about---on to his next tour of duty. So as an executive officer you're essentially the guy that does all the discipline, doing all the kinds of things internal to the squadron. The commanding officer has the responsibility for the entire squadron, the health and welfare of his sailors, the protection from all enemies, whatever, and that kind of thing, social security, the welfare and morale of the squadron is in the CO's hands. But the XO is the guy that's really the guy that does a lot of---the CO says, make this happen, the XO gets buys making that happen, whatever it happens to be. So that's the training you get. Before you can be CO you need to spend that time as an XO to know what needs to be done. And then when you're a CO you get to direct how that's going to be done and when and all that stuff. So it's a huge responsibility. And whether it be XO of a squadron, CO of a squadron, or CO of a ship, you know, if the commanding officer of a ship runs a ship aground one time, that's the end of his career usually, and you don't get the opportunity because somehow navigation went wrong, this went wrong, whatever went wrong, and oftentimes it's back to the training I mentioned, that if you don't have everybody trained doing the right things, then things can go wrong. And the CO is the last person in that chain responsible to see that the buck stops there and he's responsible to see that it doesn't happen, that bad things don't happen. Well, he's got a big responsibility. A big responsibility to see everybody's trained, to get all that kind of stuff done. As an aviator, you know, we've got all

these various kinds of missiles, various kinds of systems in the airplane, and when you're getting prepared for deployment, you've got to exercise every one of those to get up to an efficient degree of operational capability. So it's a big job.

Interviewer: Yes, it would be.

Kenneth Allen: And, you know, it can't be taken lightly, because any of those things, particularly in aviation but I'm sure it is also true of army, running tanks and all these other kinds of things, and if somebody isn't properly trained, somebody else gets hurt usually. You know, this is a big man's game, so to speak, that those things are very serious.

Interviewer: So you had a military career. Were you married---are you---during your young military life?

Kenneth Allen: Yep, coming up on 50 years.

Interviewer: Fifty years. Oh.

Kenneth Allen: Yeah, so we were married when I got started in the military, really.

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Kenneth Allen: Mm hm. I have three. They are all adults and they have children, too, now, but...

Interviewer: So you had a military family that moved around. How did your kids adjust or like that kind of a life?

Kenneth Allen: They wouldn't trade it for anything. Where they have been, they said, dad, there's no comparison of what we know and what we've seen that others will never experience, whether it be living in Florida---and everywhere we went when I had an opportunity, if it was Livermore, California, we would spend the fall hunting or camping or going up in the mountains, you know, I had a camper-trailer at that time and so we would be out-of-doors doing things. Even going down to Los Angeles, you know, to the Disney Worlds and that kind of stuff. When we were in Florida we did other things. We would go out in the Everglades. We had a boat. We would go fishing and do all that stuff. When we were in Maryland, we took hunting at Camp AP Hill. Went into the Smokey Mountains as many weekends as we possibly could, and so they got to raise a raccoon. It wasn't intended that way, but mama raccoon abandoned two---she actually abandoned three but came back and got one, and then we raised the other two, one of them all the way and then the other one died for some unknown reason when it was about half grown. But we got a permit from the state. They said, well, yeah, they'll die if you don't do something. So we got the permit from the state and took her to the vet and did all that stuff, so they got to do that. They got to see so many parts of the country that they enjoyed it all. Even today now they want to go where they can

get out and do things, whether it be skiing and they're in Colorado, whether it be skiing or canoeing, or kayaking or all that stuff, they do a lot of the same things. So oftentimes they'd get to a new school with the local children and the local children wouldn't believe that they had seen alligators jump out of the water, come up out of the water and do all that kinds of stuff. So. Yeah, they wouldn't trade it for anything. We never had problems with our children going to school or getting into problems. It was pretty good.

Interviewer: Did you live on base or off of base?

Kenneth Allen: A little mixture of both. Most of the places we lived off base. You know, in Florida we bought a house. That was three years that we lived in that house. At the Naval Weapons Center in China Lake we lived on the base in senior officer housing. But for the most part we lived off base either as renters or owners of a home.

Interviewer: So you retired from the service in 1992.

Kenneth Allen: Mm hm, January 1.

Interviewer: And what did you do for a career after that?

Kenneth Allen: Well, we floated around with our motor home for a year and a half. We went from all the way to the northwestern part all the way to Vancouver, then back down to Florida where our kids were at the time and traveled lots of places in between, all up and down the west coast. We didn't go to the northeast much in the motor home, but we had been there in Newport when we had tours of duty there, so for a year and a half we kind of floated around. And the kids wanted to move out of Florida, so we said okay, we'll---we have to stick a stake in the ground somewhere and get a home because our furniture was being stored by the Navy. So we did that. We stuck the stake in the ground here in Las Vegas in the middle of '93, I think June of '93, and then the kids said, we're going to leave Florida. Well, they eventually did. Our plan was to stay here in Las Vegas three to five years and then we'd go wherever the kids decided they were going to migrate and get back into sort of---as a family. So we've been here 13 years and my wife keeps reminding me that's a little longer than three to five years, and so she's ready to get back with her sisters and brother in Colorado and I have a sister in Colorado, and two of our kids are in Colorado. So that's why we're going there. It's within easy distance. And then Nancy's not in the best of health so we're going to where we can get familial support in our golden years, so to speak. So as a career goes, I was walking by an office, an H&R Block office, and it said, learn to do taxes. So I said, okay, I'll do that. Because I thought, like many people thought, and some of them still think, that once you learn how to do taxes, you find all these loopholes and you don't pay taxes any more. Well, I found out all those loopholes were closed in 1986. So for the most part for the average citizen there aren't very many loopholes any more. So I took the tax course and then of course I didn't realize it at the time, but that's how H&R Block recruits new tax advisers or tax preparers is through their tax course. Take the course, we offer you a job, you pass the test, and we'll hire you. So then I said, oh, well, okay, I don't have anything to do in the winter. So for the first few years we would be here about

three weeks---or we'd be gone for about three weeks, come home for a week, check the grass and be sure the house hadn't burned down, go back up to northern California at _____ (42:43) Lake with our motor home and friends and fish, so from '93 to about '98 that's what we did. I did taxes in the fall---or get ready to do taxes in the fall, take courses, and then from January to April I worked taxes, and then fishing season opened up the end of April so we were gone. And that went on for about five or six years and then they said, how would you like to be a district manager. I said, well, gee, you know, I really hate to give up my fishing, so I accepted the job because the man at that time was moving, being promoted, and he needed to find a relief, so I said, sure, I'll try it for a year or two. Well, now I've been doing that for about eight years. So. Yeah, it's been---so now I'm the division manager for H&R Block. It was a progression that kind of grew and followed on, one thing after another in a small company. We're a franchise here. We're not a parent company. So. And it was pretty exciting to do that, but very---it kind of killed the fishing and vacation and the laid-back era for a while. But we'll get back to it.

Interviewer: Do you still fly?

Kenneth Allen: No. I haven't done it---when I started out flying in 16 years old I was paying somebody to fly an airplane, and then I got in the Navy and now somebody else was paying me to fly an airplane, and now of course it's very expensive to rent airplanes and do all that stuff. And I was going to buy an airplane and then I decided, you know, you're in the airplane only two or three hours and it sits on the ground for a week or two. You know, the cost per hour is just not a good trade off here. I could go get in an airliner and do the same thing and not spend nearly as much money. So I decided not to do that. I still love it, you know, it's still a good thing. And at the time I retired I was a little too old to go jump in an airliner then and get, you know, get the training to be an airliner. And flying is really, for the most part, the skill---or the enjoyment and all that is still there, but it's kind of a young man's business in a lot of ways. You got to stay sharp. You know, as you start getting a little bit older and everything, the eyes get a little bit worse and the hearing gets a little bit worse and all that kinds of stuff that you need to be---if you want to be an airline pilot you need to be on top of your game all the time. It's a huge responsibility.

Interviewer: Did your attitude towards the military change from the time that you were a young man when you first joined to the time that you retired?

Kenneth Allen: It's kind of a difficult question to answer because I say as you go along, you expand your knowledge. You know, a young kid of 18 years old getting into the military doesn't really have a lot of knowledge about the world, whether it be other countries or our political situations or any of that. That stuff doesn't grow on you until later on when you see the ramifications of some of the decisions that are being made by the top level people or what other countries are doing and that kinds of stuff, so I don't think my attitude toward the military has ever changed. One, it was a very patriotic thing to do. I felt let down, retiring, in a sense that, what do I do now that even compares with contributing to our national defense? Doing taxes, as far as government, seemed to be a good idea, though the government's not paying me, but I'm helping people live according to what our government says we have to do.

So that was still kind of a patriotic thing to do. So I think all of my---in my heart it was always a patriotic thing to do. And it's still a very honorable thing to do. We knew going in that the pay was never going to be great. Even going through the officer ranks and everything it's still not great pay when you consider what some of the CEOs who are getting millions of dollars a year could get, and we had sharp people in the military, you know, some of these admirals and generals and whatnot are very, very topnotch folks. They have a lot more responsibility than say some of the civilian CEOs making many, many times more money. When you're sitting there, as an example, the civilian world does not trust you with very many things unless they really have got a way to develop that trust. In the military as a young aviator 25 years old they let you fly around the country with a nuclear bomb on your wing and expect you to get it from Point A to Point B without dropping it on somebody. You know, or give you a \$26 or \$30 million airplane and say, don't break it, bring it back at the end of your flight. You know, that's a huge responsibility given to a very young person. And, you know, you can find the constraints in the civilian world. They don't trust you with a very big pocket of money to go out and do something with as an individual. You know, there are a lot of constraints and controls, so from that standpoint, anyone going into any part of the service is given a huge responsibility with some very expensive equipment whether it be a Humvee or a rifle, you know, they're expected to take care of it, bring it back, and we have controls in place to see that that happens. But, yeah. You get to do things that you won't get to do in a lot of other places until you're very senior and very trustworthy. So.

Interviewer: So when you joined the navy you felt it was the patriotic thing to do?

Kenneth Allen: That was probably the biggest underlying thing there, other than my desire to fly, yeah. If it hadn't been the Navy it would've been the Air Force. There wasn't any Air Force Reserve units there. That was another part of why did you go to the Navy. When I got down to Los Angeles, California, there wasn't a Navy---there wasn't an Air Force Reserve unit that had airplanes and I figured the Navy had some airplanes, that's the place you go. If you want to fly, you've got to get close to the hardware. So.

Interviewer: Very good. Do you---are you a member of any of the veterans groups or...

Kenneth Allen: I've never been a very big joiner, so no, the answer to that is a no. Red River Rafts is probably one that I would recommend to anybody if I were a joiner. The people who look after the children of the Vietnamese era time frame.

Interviewer: Oh.

Kenneth Allen: So, no, I didn't join the VFW or Veterans, yeah, or any of those organizations.

Interviewer: Did your unit or squad have a name? Sometimes they're named.

Kenneth Allen: Well, we had several because each squadron, like the First Attack Squadron in the fleet, the attack squadron I went into, was nicknamed the Dambusters, VA-195, so that was a three year stint in that squadron. And then when I was in Florida it was VA-37, the ___ (49:33) was the nickname, so from the squadron standpoint, those were the two real fleet squadrons. Then a lot of things in between, you know, didn't quite have the flavor or the machoism or were the pointy end of the spear, so to speak, but those were the two attack squadrons that I was related to. And then the squadron I commanded, the support squadron in Puerto Rico, we had six TA-4 aircraft and six helicopters, so the A-4s were providing support by either towing targets so that ships could shoot at the targets towed behind the aircraft or providing raid aircraft for simulated attacks against, you know, the blue forces and the red forces, that kind of stuff. So that was a little bit different. The squadron that could deploy but usually didn't but they were heavily involved in Grenada as an example. We did not know what was happening, but we know in the middle of the night one night to---I was the executive office and the---and a good friend of mine was the commanding officer and he got called up to the headquarters building and came back and was directed to have a crew and a helicopter ready to go first light in the morning to land on a destroyer and they would come back sometime. I mean he said be sure you put enough spare parts on there and enough people that can maintain that helicopter for several days. Well, as it turns out that was the forerunner to Grenada. The destroyer---the helicopter was going to be used to implant SEALs along the beach so that they could go into the beach and do their recon work and whatever SEALs do in the clandestine arena and very, very hush-hush at the time. I didn't know what was going on, so as it happened I was on a training flight flying a helicopter and I looked down on a runway and there was a whole string of ambulances down there, and I said I didn't know we owned that many. Where did they come from? Well, in the middle of the night they flew them in on C-141s. And so they had a whole operation take place in the middle of the night that none of us around the air station knew about except maybe two or three people. And of course that's when we knew things were happening in Grenada, and that was a few days after our helicopter went on the destroyer to go do their work. So that was their---I was glad to know that we could keep some secrets. You know, you hear all these stories about who leaks this, who leaks that, we can't keep a secret in Washington. Well, there are secrets kept in Washington, thank goodness.

Interviewer: Yes.

Kenneth Allen: They have to have them. You just can't function without them. But that was a well done operation. They were right underneath our noses. And then of course they prepared us. They said, okay, now you got to be ready for medivac helicopter support and all that kinds of things, and we were ready.

Interviewer: You've led an exciting life. Did you have a handle or name?

Kenneth Allen: Raven.

Interviewer: Raven.

Kenneth Allen: That's what I kind of stuck with. There are some real wild ones out there.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Kenneth Allen: I have another friend called Booger, if you can imagine. How that came about we'll never know, but we can almost guess.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's... Well, thank you so much. It's been very interesting. Do you have any other experiences or stories you'd like to share?

Kenneth Allen: Well, I probably do. I just haven't dusted them off, but there were so many. As an example, I have I think it's 629 carrier landings.

Interviewer: Oh, man.

Kenneth Allen: A good many of those are at night. And of course every one of my take-offs was matched with a landing. Some people can't say that. I never had to eject out of an airplane, which is one of those things because some things do go wrong. So that was the hallmark. I never got hurt. No purple hearts. None of that stuff, so I felt in many ways we kind of had a motto, or at least some of us developed a motto, you make your own luck. You know, you prepare, you do all you can do, you stay physically fit. If you're going to be a prisoner of war it's better to go into the prisoner of war camp physically fit and your teeth in good shape and all that kind of things, or if you have to eject and get in the water and have to swim your chances are so much better if you're physically fit and do all that stuff, so. And I've always had a weight problem all my life, but I did concentrate on trying to keep it down as much as possible. So those things are all things that go into a military mind. Staying physically fit is important, and mentally fit is as important as having good equipment. You know, you're only as good as the weakest link.

Interviewer: Mm hm.

Kenneth Allen: So those are important things. But with that I'd say I've kind of covered the water front. You know, I would've liked to have had a little time to prepare with some photographs and had some pictures. As an example I have some pictures, the after action pictures, actually they were taken during a flight in the belly of the A-7. We had what we called a KB18 camera. This operated off of the trigger or the bomb switch. When you pressed those buttons the camera would run for so many seconds and take good pictures. And so, on one mission my flight leader and I were tasked with destroying a convoy of vehicles on a road. And they were in the open, so it made it very, you know, it was like sitting ducks almost. And we did what we call high angle strafe, and my flight lead made two passes. He didn't quite realize how to use the M-61 gun in the A-7, so he made two passes and did it kind of like you see pictures of World War II where they strafe and the bullets, you know, go all along the _____ (55:25). Well, when the M-61 gun fires it even---it's a low rate of fire, 4000 rounds a minute. It yaws the

airplane a little bit. So by holding the trigger down, he was out of ammunition after making two passes, and he hit the first vehicle, but then he walked this string of bullets down, didn't hit any others. He did that twice. And I was the weapons training officer and had---I learned how to use the gun very effectively. It's on the trigger and off the trigger real quickly and you put out about 50 rounds of ammunition. Well, 50 rounds of ammunition of 20 mm normal dispersion will just about cover the size of a truck in a high angle strafe. So I made 19 passes at about 50 rounds each and I destroyed the rest of the vehicles that hadn't been destroyed by him. And you know, the _____ (56:11) said, hey, aren't you out of---aren't you Winchester, meaning aren't you out of ammunition? Not yet. Okay. So he cued me in to keep going. So we destroyed every single vehicle in that convoy, and the camera was running and took pictures of those. So I have those in my file. One of the trucks was apparently a repair kind of truck that had a culvert on it. It looked like maybe a concrete culvert that was probably 30 or 40 feet long, and of course the after pictures---this thing was beautiful in the pre-firing picture, but on the after picture, that thing is all crumbled, broken up and on the ground on each side of the truck, and of course the truck's on fire. It was a---and it turns out---you know, and there's a part of the story that will never be told by the newspapers was, those were our own trucks but they were afraid the Vietnamese would get in them and use them, so we had to abandon that convoy in Southeast Asia and then we were in there to destroy it so nobody else could use it. So---but if it had been the enemy, he would have been in trouble. But that was---that's where I talk about the training is so key to fully understand the capabilities of your machine and how to use it to its best advantage, and I had the opportunity to learn how to do that. I got to shoot or fire every missile we had as the weapons training officer. So I was the expert in the squadron, so to speak, at that particular time, and so I learned how to do all those things, and tried to convey that kind of training on to everybody else, but sometimes it doesn't soak in. But that was---those were some of the exciting things. You know, I got a whole drawer full. You know, you talk about medals and awards on there. I got a whole drawer full of those things that I file away, and they are all very commendatory, obviously, but...

Interviewer: Well, you don't care about them as much as the people that show them to you to be in awe of.

Kenneth Allen: Well, what is the impressive part is the symbolism that goes along with it. You know, when you walk into a room and you got lots of rows of medals and awards, it has a lot more meaning even in our own culture in the military than somebody who had maybe three ribbons up there and has put in 20 years. So, yeah, it says you kind of wear your experience on your lapel and what you did good, so I'm very proud of all of them, but to single any one of them out and say, well, I did this for that doesn't stand out. Now probably every one that got a purple heart can say, yeah, I got this purple heart, there's the wound, and they can associate with that, but each of these things just seemed to happen so often that, you know, every mission you go on a combat mission, you assume somebody is shooting at you even if you can't see them. You know, the rifle bullet, if you're down low level, the rifle bullet can bring down a jet airplane if it hits in the right place, and many, many rounds are fired at us. One of the things that was so obvious. If tracers are coming straight at you, particularly in low-light conditions, you know it. In the daytime you may not see too many of those because not every round and

almost all of our weapons systems or the enemy's weapons systems is a tracer. Oftentimes it's 1 out of 20 or 1 out of 10 depending on how they happen to want it loaded, so if you see tracers going by your canopy going by this way, vertically, they are very, very close. You won't see a tracer in daylight if it's out several---many meters away. I had one mission that they were going by the canopy. And I don't know how close. They could have been 100 yards out, they could have been 50 yards, or they could have been six inches out. But they didn't hit me. So I was still doing something right. But they got pretty close. And some of our night missions doing night bombing where there were a lot of tracers going on, those you see. You know, even if they're off at an angle somewhere. Yeah, there are just lots of little things like that that come up that a person could talk about that are lessons learned and what to do and what not to do.

Interviewer: What was the biggest lesson that you feel that you learned in your service career?

Kenneth Allen: I would say it's probably to accept responsibility for your actions. Doesn't have to be in the military to learn that. But you learn it a little quicker and a little bit better driven home, if you will. I think. If you can be a success in the military, you're probably going to be a success in civilian life. You know, for the skills and the kinds of things you need up here, and attitude, will carry you through in both places. One of my, and I won't use the exact word, but one of the things that I learned early on was, you can do a good job if you give a hoot about the product you're doing or the job that you're doing. You got to care about the end result. And sometimes that means you got to stay an extra 15 minutes to get it done just right. Sometimes it means you got to have somebody else look at it and give you a little help. But if you care about the product or the job that's being done, then you'll do a better job. But if you're there to spend eight hours and get a paycheck and don't really associate the end product with your performance, then other people will observe that, too. And so I would say for success---you know, to get from a seaman in the navy to a navy captain, an O6 pay grade, is a long transition period. And not everyone is going to make it that far. But that was---that has been my philosophy. If you care about the product, you care about the job that you do and you want to do it to the best of your ability, and that was learned in the military. I think I learned that a long time ago. Maybe I had it when I was growing up on the farm because I worked on the farm as a teenager. You know, you talk about child labor laws, what else was I going to do? I had played from the years all the way up through about seven or eight years old, and then my dad had me on a tractor driving around when I was six years old. And I ran into a couple things after he turned me loose. Didn't do any damage, but we bent a couple pipes. So I was---when I was nine years old I was hauling manure with an old D John Deere tractor and a manure spreader out in the field, and I only hooked one fence post, but that's how I was raised on a farm. There was things to do, and they were all fun things to do. A kid driving a tractor? The kid's eyes---why, my eyes must have been that big, you know, when you think about getting on a tractor and driving it. And so I was kind of raised that way. One of the things about---an example was, Dad says, okay, I want you to plant that field up there, that 40-acre field, with corn. So I didn't get any more instructions than that. Well, he said that the seed's in the truck. Go out---I had to hook up the corn planter, get it on the tractor. And I was probably at this age

12, 13, and I knew how to do all this, and so I got on the tractor and I said, you know, I wonder how—this was just a curiosity point—how straight can I make these rows? Because I had seen other planters. Their rows were a little wiggly, you know, they aren't perfect. And I said, how straight can I make these rows. So I sat on the tractor seat, I got the planter going, loaded with seed, got the marker down that you use to come back---when you come back the other way, and so I focused on the radiator cap and I fixed my position in the seat and I drove that radiator cap half a mile all the way to the fence post up there, the straightest---well, you don't know how straight it is, really, until the corn comes up. So I said, so, I got a start. I got the first two row corn planter, you know, so you got to go up and down the field several times in 40 acres. So I did that and then that laid the groundwork for the little marker that left a trail in the dirt, so I---coming down the other way, you would keep the radiator cap right in that marker. You don't pay any attention to anything else except driving straight. So I got the 40 acres planted with no problem. And the proof of the pudding wasn't until the corn comes up. And our neighbors drive by and they'd ask my dad, who planted your corn up there? My son did. Oh? Those are the straightest rows I've ever seen. So all the neighbors got to observe—and that's kind of where I got the, do it as good as you could do it. Now, can you get more ears of corn out of a straight row or a crooked row? Well, I've never been able to answer that question adequately. Probably a crooked row. Well, what you do, if you have a crooked row, then the next row is crooked. When you cultivate, you cut out some of them, so---because they aren't symmetrical, they aren't evenly spaced. So I was very proud of that. That was an early-on lesson that stuck with me for my life.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. That's where you learned it. You had it already before you went into the service.

Kenneth Allen: In some ways. Good examples. So. I tell that story oftentimes when I'm teaching, you know, our tax business. You know, how---if you care about the job you do, then it'll be a better job in the end.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

Kenneth Allen: Well, I appreciate it. I hope it turns out good.

Interviewer: Oh, it will.

Kenneth Allen: And, you know, I apologize for not having some of the pictures and some of the mementoes and some of that stuff.