



John Allen

Petty Officer Third Class, U.S. Navy Air Corps
World War II – 1944 – 1946
Korea – 1952 - 1953

I was born in a Latta, South Carolina. It was a very rural community that had about a thousand people. Schools had only eleven grades in those days so, at sixteen, I went off to the University of South Carolina. My college career was fairly short-lived because I wanted to volunteer for the military service. My brother had already joined up.

In 1944 I joined the Naval Air Corps and ended up as a combat air crewman. My first station was Memphis, Tennessee, and we went from there to Miami Florida. From there to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, then to Great Lakes Naval Station in Michigan. And from there back to Charleston Naval Base and that is where I was discharged. We trained until 1945 and just as we graduated, the war ended so we didn't get a chance to get shot at. I thought that was a pretty good idea.

We did a lot of flying as part of a torpedo squadron. The airplane I remember was the Avenger. It's a TBF. This was a torpedo bomber and I was the radio/radar operator. My seat was inside the bomb bay.

When I was in operational training in Fort Lauderdale I was part of a training squadron that was divided into three-plane flights. My sister flight was the one that disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean and was never heard from again. Five airplanes and fifteen men just disappeared. It was a very famous Navy story. We were part of the search and rescue effort to try to find them but no trace was ever found.

Luckily, the war ended as I was on my way to my carrier assignment. We were reassigned and sent to Great Lakes Naval Station to wait until we could be discharged. Fortunately, I missed out on the dangerous part of the war and was only in service for two years.

Prior to going into service, I had only one trip outside of the county. As a paper carrier, I had won a trip to the big city of Charleston, South Carolina, and stayed there for a weekend.

Some of the churches had activities for service men. Also, we enjoyed the USO. That was the place to go when you were off base. I danced with a famous movie star in a USO club. I'm trying to remember her name. It's been so long ago. We also saw many Bob Hope Shows.

I was a Christian when I went into service. I was privileged to have a Christian family. There was never a time I didn't know the Lord. If there was, I can't remember it. I've always thought that He preserved me...because we had such high casualties in training. You see we got the leftovers, the airplanes came back from the fleet that were all shot up and had holes in them. We used those to train in. One of my good friends was killed when they were coming in for a landing, and the engine fell off the plane. So we survived with the used equipment. I have often thought that the Lord had a hand in that.

After operational training, we were supposed to go to San Diego and practice carrier landings there. The next step was to the aircraft carrier to which we were assigned. We were a squadron of three flights of airplanes and we got all of our operational training as a team. Then we were to be shipped out there to practice carrier landings before we went on the ship. So it was timely to get out-I mean toward the end.

When the war ended, we were still in Miami. We had graduated and gotten our wings and were sitting there. We were told our orders had been

cut and we were to go to San Diego to join... I forgot the number of the fleet... when everything was cancelled. Then what do you do with all of these people that are in training? We were petty officers by that time so they sent us to look over the new recruits who were going through training. So we had to do that for a while until we gathered enough points to get discharged.

My family had moved to Charleston after I had joined the service. My father had worked at the Navy Yard down there. As soon as my brother and I got out of service, the family went back to Latta, S.C. My dad was a general contractor. A country church asked him to expand its building so my brother and I helped him for quite a long time before we went back to the University of South Carolina.

Later on, in March of 1948, I transferred to Georgia Tech and majored in electrical engineering. I met my wife while I was there and we got married.

The GI bill was a little scanty so I had to work my way through college. I had several ventures to earn money, but I needed a little bit more so I joined the Air Force R.O.T.C. Big mistake! In December 1951 I graduated one day, two days later was commissioned in the Air Force Reserve as a 2nd Lieutenant, and about 3 days later I was married. So it was a pretty busy week.

And then I didn't even have time for a honeymoon. I had a job offer and I went to that on the 31st of December. That led to Greensboro, North Carolina-the Western Electric Company for about six weeks.

Being a reserve officer, I was recalled into the Korean War. I am a two-time loser. We had been promised that veterans would not be called into service unless in time of war. So the Korean thing was a police action not a war, but that didn't bother the Air Force, they ordered me back in anyhow. I reported in at Lackland Air Force Base, in San Antonio, Texas. I was called in for only 22 months. I decided that if I was going to have go back in service I would like to do something interesting so I signed up for Special Weapons which meant that I had to wait first to get a pretty high level clearance.

Once I got the clearance they sent me to school and I did have the privilege of getting some very intense training in atomic energy at Sandia Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Then, I joined the 306th Bomber Wing in Tampa, Florida. During the 22 months, I did one tour of duty in England for 3 months. My wife stayed in Tampa as she was expecting our first child.

I had an amazing career. It's had some ups and downs. But thank goodness it was only a 5 year commission so when my 5 years were up I resigned with the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

I'm an advocate for military training for young men. I frankly think that the discipline works for the rest of your life-I think it's useful. One figures out they are not Number One and you learn team work and how to get along with folks. A lot of social skills are learned. The Israelis are not all wrong you know. It's almost mandatory.

When I retired I moved from the East Coast out to Hide-away Lake. And we were out there for 8 years at the Community Church there and we missed our Baptist roots traditions so we would come into town periodically "to get a fix" you might say. We tried several churches and we came to like Green Acres and maybe once a month we would visit. Not Sunday School just the church. But as we got older it became obvious that we should be closer to the health facilities and what have you and so we bought a home here in the Homestead which is near the church and we did that I reckon four years ago. And some time during that first year we joined Green Acres Church.

We have five children. Two in Dallas and one in Laurel Maryland and one in suburban Richmond, Virginia (that's my daughter and her husband who are ex-missionaries. They were both in Africa for about 6 years as missionaries. Then I have a son in Round Hill Virginia who is a pastor.

I've taught Sunday School my entire life and now I am teaching the Care and Share Class. I started as a backup for Janelle Doyle, but her health has caused her to resign, and I am teaching it now.

I don't think patriotism is nearly as important to this generation as it was to us. But then the times are different. You and I were reared during the Great Depression – hard times- and I reckon we grew up thinking everybody was enduring the same difficult times that we were so it was no big deal since everybody was having the same thing. And my father was in WWI and I got the stories of his endeavors and his adventures over there. So when it came time for this other war and it broke out when I was – what-

14 or 15. I just assumed that all my uncles and what have you were going off to service. My brother went off just as soon as he could-just as soon as he got the right age. I just assumed it was the thing to do. We never questioned the fact that we would join up and serve our country. You know we said the Pledge of Allegiance in school and always had the ceremonies which I think heighten patriotism as opposed to perhaps today they don't do it like that. I think it's taken a back seat today.