

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Question: The first thing I'd like to do is just to get your name and the correct spelling so I have that on tape.

Answer: John B. Allan, A-I-I-a-n.

Question: A-I-I-a-n.

Answer: Yeah. I'm the ? one.

Question: And the, the traditional J-o-h-n of John?

Answer: Right.

Question: If I don't ask, they always spell it in a unique way.

Answer: Right.

Question: Now where were you born? Were you born in Washington?

Answer: No, I was born in Ireland. I'm from Roscommon County. My, I'm the youngest of 13 children. My, we lost 7 brothers and sisters in the big flu epidemic in 1919, so in 1920, my parents and I came over and my brothers and my sister and I came over to the United States, and I was at Ellis Island and came through there, and they got, we got to Cleveland, and it seems my mother, I don't know anything about anymore, had relations here in the United States. And she died two weeks after we got here and Dad put us in an orphanage in Cleveland, and he was supposed to come back, according to what little I can find out, and pick us up in 6 months and he never did. We think the British killed him, 'cause he was one of the officers in the original IRA. Not this one they have today, 'cause they didn't fight women and children, they fought soldiers.

Question: Right, so how old were you when you immigrated? Just a little boy?

Answer: When I came here?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: I was 5. I was born July 1, '15, and I came here in '20.

Question: As a 5-year-old, do you remember at all as a 5-year-old?

Answer: Not too much. I, uh, I have vague recollections of my sister. I think all of us were separated, primarily. Cause back then the orphanages, what they called orphanage. In fact, it was called Cuyahoga County Humane Society. That was what the term was for children's, that were orphans.

Question: Wow.

Answer: Yeah. So I stayed in the orphanage, called the Jones Home at the time, and. It was, you know, back in the days of the depression and everything, so whatever we ate we stole, because we got oatmeal for breakfast and beans for supper. That was about it. Anything else, there was a big open-air market a couple blocks from us, so they knew we'd been swipin' stuff, but, you know.

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Question: So you could sneak from the orphanage down...

Answer: Yeah, right. Well, we went to school, you know. We had regular, we went to regular public school. Uh, unfortunately, I wasn't always too bright. I got thrown out finally when I was in the 9th grade. But that's neither here nor there. Uh, I ran away from the orphanage when I was 12. And I hopped a train out of Cleveland and wound up in Mobile, Alabama, and I had, got a job on a snapper boat for the Star Fish and Oyster Company out of Mobile and was out in the Gulf and the Caribbean. We stayed out for a month at a time, and come in and we'd be in and we could do whatever we wanted on the 3 days while they re-iced the boat, re-supplied it with food and everything. And the season was. That was in November. December was the last month of fishing, so I started hitchhiking and walking up the coastline. I got to New Orleans, hopped a freight, and wound up in Mile City Montana. 20 below zero, and I'm dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and like to froze to death. And an old man in a 1914 Model T Ford picked me up and we'd, he was talking. He said, are you a run-away, I said No, not really. He said, Don't lie to me boy. I said, No, I was in an orphanage, but I ran away from that. He said, Well, I got a small ranch up here. He said, If you want to work, I'll put you to work. I showed him my hands, 'cause I was callus from doing the fishing 'cause that was a heavy job. And so he had a son that was 6 months younger than I was. Old Silas and Molly Jonas, and then the son was Ray, so I was kind of Ray's like brother to him. And I stayed on the ranch, uh, the small ranch was rather impressive. Our first job when we were 14 was to ride the line shacks and supply them with chopped wood for the fires, you know, 'cause it was open to anybody that would come by, and stocked with canned goods, and what have you. They, it took us 2 ½ weeks to ride it. The old man, he owned 150 sections and leased 150 from the government.

Question: So you were only 12 years old when you left the orphanage.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And had to make this journey.

Answer: Right.

Question: Now, because again, kids to a certain extent, they've read this a little bit, you know, but in their mind, they see an adult now. You were a young boy.

Answer: Yeah. Absolutely.

Question: Were you a big tough boy?

Answer: No. You mean boy in that?

Question: I mean, survival.

Answer: Oh, survival, Yeah. If you come, I survived the flu epidemic of Ireland. I survived 7 years in an orphanage back during the depression when, you know, you had a hand-me-down. You never saw a new pair of pants or shoes or anything. Food was very meager, and like I say, what we got we stole. And, you know, the.... I was the oldest one, so I was kind of the leader, and we had a couple of the girls....it

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

was a co-ed orphanage, and we had two of the girls talk to the clerks there while us got the good stuff.

Question: And you said you weren't smart.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Well, I was that way. But yeah, survival-wise, I've learned a lot of that.

Question: Did you face a lot of tough, 'cause again, a young boy ridin' the rails and all that, I assume...

Answer: Oh, yeah, but you know it was, it isn't like today. You can't compare today with back then. Uh, a woman back then could walk the streets at 2 o'clock in the morning and never worry about it being raped. We had some once in awhile, but it was so far and few between that, you know, it really didn't even enter the thoughts. We could leave \$100, we've left \$100 on the table in the line camps? Six months later it's be there. Nobody'd take it. It was, people were.. Doors never got locked. You didn't need to.

Question: So when you were hoppin' trains and stuff you didn't...

Answer: Well, everybody was hoppin' them. We had hobo jungles, and, yeah, I'm gonna say I, you know, it wasn't easy. I had to, I was able to do some damage to some of the guys that thought a young boy was real good, you know, and, but that was...it was very few between, you know, and like I said, at least I didn't have to stay out in the trains too long. Then I got up to Montana, and then my life changed. And it was hard work. We worked hard. It was, I've had some very great experiences when I was a kid. Like back in Cleveland I had a friend of mine, a school mate with me, who was Italian, and his father was one of the family members, and I used to get invited over once in awhile to get a good Italian spaghetti and that, you know, and I was...we went over one day and there was about 5 women in the kitchen and they were all talkin' Italian, you know, and I could see they were upset when I was there, 'cause they didn't know just what was to do, and then this real nice lookin' gentlemen came in the kitchen and he was talking to them in Italian, and he knew my buddy, and he asked who I was, and I, uh, I can't even think of the kid's name anymore, told him who I was, that I was in his class with him, and so we got invited into the table, and it was all men, you know, and he sat at the head of the table. He gave me a silver dollar. I'll never forget that. And later on I found out it was Lucky Luciano.

Question: Probably good information to get AFTER you were there!

Answer: Yeah. But I met, I met a lot of the, uh, infamous types. I knew who, I knew Johnny Licavolis and Joe English, who was Johnny's triggerman. He was the head of the Purple Gang in Detroit. I met him through the same situation, but you know, that's life. You could meet a lot of nice people, and they were nice. Really. They, you know, were gangsters, but it was business in that family. So, that was a big difference. And then when we were on the ranch, like I say, we worked awfully hard. It was a lot of, uh, we run about 5,000 head of cattle. We'd make trips down here twice a year. I can't think of what Auburn's original name was, but we went to the stockyards there and then to the ones in Olympia.

Question: Oh, really.

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah. We made the....twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Question: So did this gentleman kind of adopt you. I mean, did you become part of the family.

Answer: Oh, yeah. I became part of the family. In fact, I was, he wanted to split the ranch with me, and when we were getting close. We didn't have television or anything like that. We had kind of like crystal set radios. Uh, we didn't have any electricity so to speak. We had car batteries that, you know, we ran the sets off to get some of the news and that. And we knew that war was, they were talking a lot about war coming, that Adolf Hitler was in the, was Chancellor of Germany, and was causing, he was marching against all of Europe, and then we'd hear that the Japanese were unhappy with us because we were unhappy with them for invading China. So war was getting pretty eminent, and I was talking to Ray and he was, like I say, younger than I was, and he said, Well, we should join, get in the Army and go to war. And I didn't know. I was, he was 25 and I was 26. So we talked it over with Silas and Molly, and they said, well we're not happy about Ray going, and you can do it, you know, if you think it's best, uh, do that, but this is your home. So on July 5, 1941, Ray and I went to Mile City and I joined the Army. Ray did, too. We both went to Ft. Knox, Kentucky, for Basic Training. And then I, they were just starting talking about an airborne division, so I got real interested in that. I thought that would be pretty cool, jumping out of airplanes. I didn't realize the training that was involved, but it was, it was interesting, so I put in for parachute training, paratroopers, and in 19, I was going to take some special training at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, on December 10, I was coming out to the coast to be there. Japan hit us the 7th, so we got returned to, uh, the 82nd division is the grandparent of the 82nd airborne. The 82nd division was, at the time, was commanded by Major General Omar Bradley. We had, and if you're familiar with the 82nd division, that was Sgt. York's division in World War II, or in World War I. So then they decide.. Congress decided it was necessary to start an airborne division, so they made the 82nd airborne, which was the first actual airborne division at Ft. Benning, Georgia, then we went from there, we went to, I got accepted and I went to jump school.

Question: Was parachuting fairly new? Was this...

Answer: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. The only time you saw a parachutist was at county fairs, where the daredevils would fly out of balloons or something, you know.

Question: So the technology was not fully developed at this time?

Answer: Not really. I tell you what. The first 'chutes in the military was what they called the T-3, and since I'm talking to this for a bunch of high schoolers, let me tell you if it wasn't adjusted right, you could be a soprano real quick.

Question: And that's not the Mafia Soprano that's on HBO now?.

Answer: No. No. This was one that, if that was, got tight down there you were in trouble.

Question: So where did you do jump training then?

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: We did it at Benning. Uh, we, they already established us as the 82nd Airborne, and backward A's that represents the insignia of the 82nd is the All-Americans Division, and that was the 82nd division. That's what they were called in France, the All-American, and so we took that as our logos. Then I was, I trained with the 505 regiment. The commander of the 82nd at the time, airborne, was Mathew Ridgeway. He was a Major General then. And then Jimmy Gavin, who finally commanded, was only a colonel then, and they called him Jumpin' Jimmy. He loved to jump. He was kind of like a daredevil. He freefell and pulled his own ripcords out of the old by-planes and what have you. Just uh, he loved jumping. My C.O. in World War II, what was his name now, darn it, it was just on the tip of my tongue... Anyway, he was also a, loved to jump, and then we transferred to air, uh, to Georgia, no, to Ft. Bragg. They activated Ft. Bragg, and that was the beginning of the 82nd's home, and that's been a permanent home of the 82nd all through the career. Since we, since we were at war, the, we did a lot of specialized training. A lot of specialized jumping. Cause they needed, they had no use right now for, in the beginning of the war for us. In 1942, I think it was January. I'm not sure anymore. It's been just 61 years ago, and, but we went to North Africa, and we were in a little area outside of.. in Tunisia, and we did a lot of training there for, 'cause they were getting.. the combats there and we only got involved in two of them, which were mostly not Germans but Italian troops. And at that time the Italians were under the German rule, the boot so much that they were ready to give up anyway. There was not much fight left in them. But, the U.S. Government was getting ready to, trying to get on the mainland of Europe, and the only place they could do it was Sicily. And so we did a lot of training for making parachute jumps behind enemy lines, and

Question: How did you train? I mean, did you have to put on full gear and go up and jump?

Answer: Oh, yes. Absolutely. We trained constantly in full gear, 'cause, you know, we had to take it anyway. And at the time we sometimes even had 200 pounds of supplies hanging from our belts going down that we released just before we hit the ground. And so the training was very rigorous, extremely rigorous.

Question: Were you doing static line jumps?

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Were you doing static line jumps?

Answer: Yeah. Mm,hmmmm.

Question: They hooked you up and...

Answer: Right. Yeah. You get, we, uh, our jump master would get the go from the pilot, hopefully, that we were on our targets and then we'd stand in the doorways and then the jump master would just say Go, Go, Go, and we'd go around the plane and hook up as we got on the one side where the doors were, and then jump.

Question: And did you, now you were excited to at first when you thought about, oh, jumping sounds cool. Was it cool when you got there?

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah, actually I enjoyed it. I really did. I'm kind of weird anyway. At least that's what some people tell me. My sweetheart particularly. Uh, but, I enjoyed it. I really did. In fact, I made quite a number of jumps through my career. But, yeah. We had to, at first we had to pack our own 'chutes. That was one of the...and let me go back a little bit in the beginning of the jump training. Back then, to get your jump wings you had to earn your glider wings first. And those gliders were death traps as far as I'm concerned. I was glad to be out of that and get into the parachutes.

Question: So before you could jump, you had to go do the glider.

Answer: Yeah. We did the gliders. And then we got our glider wings and then we got our, when we continued...some guys couldn't qualify for the paratroops so they stayed with gliders, but let me get, let the kids understand...when we, when I say 82nd Airborne, that doesn't mean just PIRs, Parachute Infantry Regiments. That means we had medics jump with us, we had field artillery jump, we had all of the, uh, machinists, everything that would support, our jeeps, our trucks, whatever. All had to jump out of those planes. So we had, it was, it wasn't just infantry soldiers that jumped. It was everybody.

Question: Were you dropping gear, too, then?

Answer: No. We dropped, we were paratroopers, we were PIRs, and that's Paratroop Infantry Regiments. The 505 was a regiment, the 504th was. There was quite a few of them. And then we trained a lot with some British in North Africa, British paratroopers, 'cause the assault on Sicily was going to be a bearcat. When the assault did come, the...I forget what division it was that landed first. I think it was the 3rd, but I'm not really sure. But they got hung up bad. So it was sent down from headquarters that we were going to jump behind enemy lines and Giuliana Sicily. It was on the coast, and we had, there was about 12 pillboxes that had to be taken out because they controlled every movement of the roads. So that was one of our jobs, and then we, the intelligence wasn't as good as it supposedly today. They didn't tell us that the Herman Goring Panzer Division was there also, and we ran into that.

Question: Was that your first combat jump?

Answer: Yeah. That the first combat actual. The combat jumps that we had there in North Africa against the Italians was really nothing. They were more or less almost like training jumps, 'cause we didn't, there wasn't that much firing from either side. They just lifted their selves and they just gave up. They had no heart for it.

Question: And that was, like you said, the Italians that had been under the boot of Germany, and...

Answer: Yeah. And by that time, even the Germans were getting pretty fed up. Their supplies were getting low, they couldn't get fuel, and Panzers, uh, Rommel was from what I understood, was rather ill, and was sent back. Then he was put in, well I don't want to get into that. He, the Germans pretty much gave up after awhile in North Africa.. history could tell you. But Sicily was the first actual invasion of mainland Europe. We got a lot of, uh, we lost a lot of men. The, like I say, our leaders were pretty good, but the higher commands were, you know, they just

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

couldn't understand how to fight against different things. And so a lot of times with the 82nd, we had to function on our own and kind of learn our commando tactics, we uh, we had one colonel, light colonel, his grandfather was an Indian fighter. He'd listened to stories, so he said, Maybe it's time we started doing a little Indian fighting and doing some of the things the Indians did, and it did, it helped, because you have to adapt. In war there's no, you cannot plan right out front how you're going to fight a war, 'cause the terrain is different. In Tunisia, you fought sand and fleas. I mean, you couldn't. Our bodies were practically raw. You take a shower, you'd start sweatin' and you were in horrible shape, so it was actually very, very difficult to do...to fight. And then in Italy, or in Sicily, it was, it was kind of sunny. It wasn't too bad, the weather wasn't. Uh, but, then we got, we finally ran the Germans out of Sicily. I forget what all divisions. I know the 3rd was there, and I believe the 1st was there, but I won't swear to it. They, the 101st was activated, which was the Screaming Eagles, and so they were, I'm not sure just exactly where they were at that time, then we jumped into Milan Italy, and got secured the Italian Peninsula pretty good.

Question: Did you generally jump at night?

Answer: No. no. Nobody jumped at night.

Question: So you jumped in daylight.

Answer: No. There was no such thing as night jumping.

Question: Now, being a novice, I see one problem here.

Answer: What's that?

Question: Big white target coming out of the sky.

Answer: Absolutely.

Question: So what's it like jumping into a situation like that?

Answer: Well, it's, by then, myself, was getting to be a seasoned trooper. I was, been shot at, I'd been nicked a couple times, and I'd had a couple busted ankles and that, so I was aware of what the situation was, but usually at that time, our drop zones were pretty well open. We didn't have to worry about the Germans at that time, especially in Sicily. When we landed, we were fine. It was when we tried to move in and hold and take those pillboxes that we ran into one hell of a fight. 'Cause the Germans weren't about to give up Sicily without it...and it was a constant, you got nailed from sniper fire. The Germans had a lot of good snipers, and they were very accurate in their fire, so you just did and survived. You took cover when you had to, you manipulated terrain to suit your own purposes.

Question: When you jumped, did you carry your weapon out with you, or did you...

Answer: Oh, yes.

Question: So you did coming down, you

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. See our "chutes automatically opened from the, when we tied up, and then if, you know, parachute jumping in the early years was hell because the T-3s were not easily guided, and the uh, I. My primary weapon was the Sub.. Thompson caliber machine gun, which most, a lot of the PIRs were. The, we got, so we always kept our guns at the ready just in case we did run into enemy forces on the ground shooting up. Shooting up or shooting down is not as easy as it sounds. It uh, your trajectory is so much different, so it, unless you're getting shot at from a machine gun point, you're pretty safe. And you do, you know, I don't know if you know what a streamer is. That's a 'chute that doesn't open, and we do have reserve 'chutes, and sometimes if that, I've had several of my men killed by streamers. Their primary.. the other 'chute wouldn't open, and gets tangled in the main 'chute. The primary. So it was very difficult. You could usually say a streamer was dead.

Question: Did you see when you jumped, again, I only have the movie perception of the numbers of parachutes. When you jumped, could you see other soldiers close enough?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You're, we followed each other out very closely. We would, when their 'chutes opened, the wind always is taking you, and you're, our jump zones were like.. The plane, here's our jump zone, the plane, we go out here, so that we can glide in, 'cause the wind's gonna take us one way or the other. And it can be tricky. It isn't like today where the 'chutes you can drop on a dime. You just hoped the wind wasn't too bad. You didn't get a big gust that would drive you way the hell off your course.

Question: So what was the closest to the target you were and what was your farthest away?

Answer: Normandy was our farthest. That was a nightmare, but the, I think in Sicily we were within a thousand feet of our where we wanted to land anyway. So it wasn't bad, 'cause the weather conditions were pretty good at the time we jumped. They tried not to get us to jump in foul weather if possible because of the, you had a wet 'chute, you had this, you had all that, you know, and it really contributed, the visibility would be bad, so we tried to jump when...we depended a lot on the meteorological organizations of the military to give us at least a half-way accurate description of what the weather was like of where we were going to be in action.

Question: Did you, once you got down, did you get rid of your 'chute?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You just folded them up and dropped them, you know. Yeah. You didn't want to leave them out because a gust of wind could take them and cover maybe two or three men, and that would be disastrous, 'cause they were trying to get out of their 'chutes and all that, so, yeah, the minute we hit and rolled, we'd unbuckle and get out of the 'chute and then just roll it up, but then we'd try to form our groups by companies, and then take care of our objectives. We had demolition people with us, and all of that, so we would try to protect them as much as possible. Actually, what a good, I always that a good infantryman is fodder for everybody else.

Question: And so you were usually going in first.

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Oh, yeah. We went in first. Yeah. And you know, the uh. When Sicily was secured and we went in to Italy, it was kind of a piece of cake and everybody, we thought Oh, boy, we're going to get into Rome and have a few days and all that. Next thing I know, we're on our way to England. They're talking about Normandy. We need to get into France, so unfortunately, we went into England, and all it was was rain and fog, rain and fog. We were, we were scattered, the 101st, the British Airborne, the 82nd, were scattered at staging areas all over England. We had, you gotta realize that some of the movies are true, especially The Longest Day. We had about 3 ½ million men stationed in England at different staging areas, on ships that were getting seasick as hell, and the weather was atrocious. The Channel you couldn't even see it. The, Normandy was fogged in and rained in. It was a mess. They uh, we went there in June of '44, I'm sorry, in January '44, we went to England, and we'd missed uh.. Eisenhower tried to get us in about May, but it was, the weather was just atrocious. The Germans were suffering just as bad, 'cause they, the only one that had any intelligence about Normandy was Rommel. He was in command of the coast of Normandy. And he's the one that had the German army build all the barricades on Omaha beach. And the, we did, it came to that we would have to be jumping at night into Normandy, and nobody had ever jumped at night, so in the staging areas where we were we started jumping. Night jumping. Scared the hell out of England people. God, I wound up in a privy one time, and I wasn't no rose when I came out. A bunch of, you know, landed in barnyards. Some landed in a convent's courtyard. It was a mess. We would get...James Gavin was brigadier at the time, and he was getting complaints from the mayors of all these little towns about us scaring the hell out of the people because here we are coming down at night, and it was really getting real bad, but then the high command was, got word that Normandy, the weather was clearing, so we got ready for, and On June 6. Now I'd trained as a pathfinder down in England there. The pathfinders were the British, the 101st and the 82nd, we were gonna be the first out of the aircraft, and we were to light the drop zones. We had boxes about like that with lights in them run by batteries and a shield over it, and then when we hit the ground we could wrap a cover and show the drop zone because they could see it from the air. It was a good plan. Just too bad it didn't work. The, when we got over Normandy. The airborne was the first, the British and the 82nd and the 101st. We were the to invade Normandy. We jumped at 0200 hours, and I was attached to F Company at that time, and we were way off course. Everybody was off course. The crosswinds weren't anticipated for, and my group came down right in the square St. Mere Eglise.

Question: What was your initial target? Where were you supposed to be?

Answer: We were supposed to be about 2 miles from....unfortunately, the Germans inland a little from the beaches of Normandy had flooded a lot of the areas, so that if paratroopers did land they'd bog down with all the equipment. Some drowned. And then our gliders, we pulled gliders also, and they had to land, and the British made a better glider than the United States did. They, their landings were a lot better, although they had a lot of casualties, but our, we suffered a lot of casualties on our glider people. Then when I came down, I could see the action of the guys getting killed. Germans, they had a whole company of Germans there, and they were just firing every time a guy got in sight, they were dead. It was a massacre. I, one of our people landed on the roof of a cathedral, and I landed about 150 yards out of the city. I got hung up in a tree, and my shroud line snapped and wrapped around my heck and held me there, and my neck was broke, so that was my career at Normandy, but the. I know the Omaha was the hardest hit. The British and Canadians and French landed at Sword and Gold Beach. The 29th division

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

landed at Omaha, and the 24th division landed, was supposed to land at Utah. Unfortunately, even the first wave of the 24th got screwed up because of the heavy smoke from the artillery firing from the ships, and so they were about a mile and ½ away from their target. But it was, Normandy, don't mistake it. It was one of the toughest battles this country has ever fought, and none will ever compare to it. The 29th just before they could get off the beach lost over 1,000 men. Utah, they lost a few, but they were able to get inland pretty quick. And Sword the British at Sword and Juno were able to get in pretty good. The Germans had heavy fortifications there at Omaha, so that was where the main fight was, but once the... everybody was lost. We, we'd hook up with the 82nd, the 101st, British, half the time we didn't know who the hell we were going to run into, 'cause we were at night, we just, you couldn't see anything, so it was one of the, it was a heck of an experience.

Question: Did you know, 'cause you'd had some jumps already, did you coming in that this was different when you jumped that time?

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: So you knew you were in trouble coming down.

Answer: Well, yeah. Once we were out of the planes, we could, you know, we could tell by the winds that we were getting way off of our jump course. And as I say, the uh, none of the pathfinders from either the 505 or the 82nd or the 101st or the British, we were dead. We couldn't do anything 'cause nobody was, you could see the 'chutes coming down, but they were scattered all over Normandy. So that was about the experience of World War II for me.

Question: So how long were you stuck up, 'cause you got up in a tree, right?

Answer: Yeah, for 3 days.

Question: 3 days. How did you survive 3 days in a tree?

Answer: I was tied. I was unconscious a lot of the time. I'd come in and out of consciousness, then I don't even know who found me. All I know is I woke up in England in the hospital.

Question: So you don't remember getting out of the tree or...

Answer: No.

Question: How many, now you jumped out of what type of plane?

Answer: C-47.

Question: And how many 'chutes in a jump, ballpark?

Answer: About 40, 50.

Question: And are these, because I know through the war everybody moved and changed in groups and, you know, were these people you knew? I mean, had you been with them long enough to...

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah. A lot of them. I made a, I lost some good friends in Africa and Sicily, and I learned then, do NOT make friends. So I was very, I was a sergeant at the time when we jumped at Normandy, and I wasn't, I was real standoffish. I was friendly, I was very fair in my orders to my men, but I didn't get close to them, because, you know, you can go crazy when you lose good friends.

Question: Is that one of the hardest parts of war?

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. You could, you know, you see a good friend of yours and all of a sudden he's not there. An artillery shell or a mortar just blew him to pieces. You know, you accepted the fact that, yes, you could say, Ok, I could get killed, but it didn't matter to me because I had nobody. I'd already signed up and told Silas and Molly to go ahead and take my name off of the inheritance 'cause I was going to make the Army my career. I enjoyed it. I loved the Army. It had a lot of fallacies, like in England, like I say, it rained and was foggy, rain and fog, and we had field kitchens, and you'd get your mess kit out there, get your slop put on it, your mashed potatoes would be floating in an inch of water by the time you got where you're gonna eat. The coffee was, well, it'd put hair on your chest and about 5 minutes later take it off. You know, it was nice and good and strong. But it was like that day in and day out. And we jumped at night in the rain. My commander was Benjamin Vanderboot, he was a lieutenant colonel, and he was very stern on us. He, it was, but he saved a lot of the 505's lives because of his, especially the 2nd battalion, which I was attached to.

Question: Tell me, let me hand this to you. Tell me about this picture.

Answer: This?

Question: Yeah. Where are you? Where is that?

Answer: This was England. This was F Company, just before the take-off to Normandy, and these two are the pilots, pilot and co-pilot of the C-47 that we jumped out of. This was the whole group, and myself here, and I'm not sure where, I can't even think of his name anymore. He lives in Chicago. He became an attorney. I can't think of where he is in here. But anyway, all of them are dead. They got killed coming down into Mer Ste. Ste. Mere Eglise

Question: Oh, my. So do you remember then taking that picture?

Answer: Oh, yeah. I remember getting it taken about a day and half before we jumped.

Question: And was this common, I mean...

Answer: Oh, yeah. The groups would try to get together, and it was beneficial to the records of the Army, because we, the Army tried to keep as much track of their wounded and dead as possible. It was, a lot of the sergeant's jobs sometimes, it if was areas where Graves registration wasn't going to get to for maybe a week, we would remove the dog tags, so that there was a record sent to the Army and they could take care of sending telegrams of.. sorry, you know, you lost your son or something.

Question: I look at these and, you know, some pretty young kids.

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah. I was called Pops. I was 26 when I joined the Army, so it was really good. I joined the Army, like I said, July 5, 1941, and I retired November 10, 1971, so I had 30, 4 months, and 10 days.

Question: Can you remember conversations?

Answer: Oh, yea, we would talk, we didn't talk so much about the upcoming jump. That was something that was kind of a taboo situation. You tried never to think of anything negative. You'd think of the good times you've had in the Army. You'd think of what was possibly, some of the dumb things that you did, you know. You'd think of some of the beer parties you had, or the fights you got into with other units, you know, that you were stationed with, and what have you. It was, being a good Irisher, I used to love a donnybrook now and then. Especially if we run into Marines. The 82nd and Marines, I mean, we were literally at war all the time. But one thing about it, it was a lot of camaraderie, because you always, after the fight, you'd hold up your buddies and have a drink.

Question: That's what the movies doesn't exaggerate on, the fact that the Army, Marines, that there was that friendly fire so to speak.

Answer: Oh, yeah!! It was always friendly fire. We had, you know, there was no such thing as the Air Force at that time. It was the United States Army Air Corps. And we'd get into a good deal with them. They would, they would get to, you know, we'd get into areas after a confrontation, and I think the first thing we needed to do was get rid of a lot of excess energy and get the adrenaline down so we'd find the quickest way to get a fight. If we couldn't find it with somebody else, we usually did it between ourselves, but it was a lot of fun. You know, you always had good moments in a war. I'm a firm believer that after I fought 3 of them, that war has never solved anything, really. But, you know, you can think of all the hard times in a war, and I like to impress on, when I go to schools here in Kitsap County, impress upon the kids that, even though there was a lot of loss of life, a lot of people injured, it, you still had some times that you can never forget, you know, that uh, you know you see kids that are hurt or scared and you try to help them out. You kind of, me, I was kind of a mother to a lot of them. Even when I enjoyed, uh, we had a lot of kids that wanted to quit because it was tough. Airborne training was real tough. Then, and I thought, Oh, boy, nothing could get tougher, but later on I found out that it could, but that's a different war, but we had, I was hurt a few times in World War II, like Normandy, and then I got broken up in North Africa and broke a couple ankles and that, so. It was always, you can break anything on a parachute jump. A lot of men at Normandy got busted up, landing. See we.. being in the dark, France has a lot of hedge rows, and that was one of the main obstacles we tried to avoid, but unfortunately the wind weren't with us. It could scatter us, and I remember one of our majors broke his shoulder on landing on a stone wall. It was, it was a lot of things that you couldn't conceive of happening, but did. And that's in any war. You can't, it's not set out to be a well-planned offense or defense. You, in a war, you never know what's going to happen.

Question: Do you live in fear all the time? This is the hardest thing, I think, for someone who's never to war. I've never been, and...

Answer: The, you respect your fear. You don't let fear...the worst thing about fear is fear itself. It can literally decapitate a person if they give in to it. What you

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

do, you try to remember your discipline that you've learned throughout your training, and that's why I was, the Army had a lot of discipline, especially in the 82nd Airborne and when they made the 101st, activated it, it was too. It was a tough damn job. You, there was no getting away from it. You, your DIs, your drill sergeants and that, if you did something that even looked wrong, Drop, Give me 50! And you did it. You know, and even back then, you tried to minimize the pain that you might be able to suffer, 'cause somebody broke something every time they jumped. They had, you know, nothing was predictable. You could jump in, like in Tunisia, North Africa. We jumped in and 5 guys got trapped in quicksand, right in the desert, 'cause there is quicksand in the desert. And fortunately, the other guys that landed on solid group was able to extract them from that, but it's, you never know what you're going to get when you're jumping in. You depend a lot on, you control a lot of your fear. And then you know, when you're in. I always kind of got a kick out of kids, Oh, they just, you know, they got on the marksman's ranges at basic training and all that. Some of them were pretty darned good shots. And I'd always impress upon them, Yeah, but just remember, that target's not shooting back at you. And that was one of the things that was, we had to get over, was being shot at. 'Cause that's whole different ball game. We have, you know, it wasn't just bullets that you had to contend with. You had a lot of problems with grenades, mortars, artillery. The artillery could drive you crazy, because you know, you don't know where it's going to hit. You could hear it coming in, but you don't, you just hope you're down far enough that you survive it. Grenades are the same way. The German's had what we called potato mashers, and they were a very formidable weapon, but you know, you just took everything into account, and your discipline helped a lot, and your adrenaline. You know, you'd get a hell of an adrenaline rush, and that saved a lot of lives. Me, it made me kind of crazy enough to kind of enjoy it, but it was. It was hard on a lot of the kids, but they learned. I had a friend of mine that was a sergeant, he was a drill sergeant, and he was a veteran of World War I, and one of the guys asked him in our, that was in our training group, he says, Sir, what's it like to be in a battle. He said, and he looked at him and said, Kid, you'll learn everything you'll need to know after 5 minutes if you're alive. And that sums it up. You survived.

Question: so all that pre-training is great and helped, but until you got there in battle,

Answer: Oh, yeah. Nobody can tell you what battle's going to be like. You know you're, you have, you're gonna have death all around you. You can be talking to, be in a foxhole with a couple of guys and all of a sudden and you talk over and they're both dead. So, you know, it's not a joyous occasion. You're doing a job, you're not trying to be a hero or anything like that. In fact, I hate that word. You do, you're there to do a job, and you do it the best you can.

Question: Do you go into, 'cause you'd touched on the fact that, for instance, being in a foxhole and one minute talking to people and the next minute them being gone, does your mind go to a different place? I mean, is there, do you kind of disassociate death and life and...

Answer: Yeah. I learned that, you know, I was raised on a ranch, and I had, we had deaths there, we had a couple of men killed, you know, and it was just part of the work, you know, it's just like life itself, Karl, you can't. You could walk out the door here and get killed. You know, it's that uncertain. You just take it one step at a time, and yet, in battle you try to disassociate yourself, but not to the point where

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

you're getting careless. 'Cause that'll get you killed. You always try to remember that people are shooting at you and trying to kill you, and it's your job and your obligation to do the same. So, like I say, it's not a fun thing, it's not something you should really look forward to and think, Oh, boy and can go out here and kill all kinds of people, and it's not really that good.

Question: I watched again last night to get a little refreshing, Longest Day. Was the, did they depict combat accurately? I mean, were you that close to the enemy? I mean, some of it looked like sometimes they were 50 yards away, 10 yards away.

Answer: Oh, hell, yes. Oh, God, yes. I've had hand-to-hand with the Germans. I've had to cut a few throats, you know, take sentries out. Oh, yeah. We, I uh, I'm not even aware, familiar now with what my confirmed kills were in the 3 wars, but they, you know, they're nothing to brag about. Let's put it that way. It's, you don't, you had to do what you had to do, and yes, you get, I got in hand-to-hand quite a bit, yeah. We had some German troops try to charge with bayonets, and so you got really close to a lot of it. We didn't have that much confrontation like some of the other infantry divisions. They had, you know, they fixed bayonets and everything. Mostly we didn't because we were like commandos. We had certain projects and targets to take out, and minimize. So that's primarily what we did. We were rangers, we were regimental combat teams, so we would go in first to try to soften it up a little bit, and then let the main divisions take it over from there.

Question: So were you in, what were.. like roads and things like that? Is that some of your...

Answer: Oh, yeah. We, our job at, in Sicily was to keep some roads, 3 roads open for the troops to come in, the divisions. And we had to not only capture them, we had to maintain them until relieved. We got relieved by the divisions that came in.

Question: In Sicily, were you mostly fighting the Germans?

Answer: Oh, that's extensively yeah. That's all we fought. Italy, the Italians weren't in Sicily as far as fighting forces.

Question: There were Italian citizens there, still in...

Answer: Yeah. You know, don't get confused. Sicily is a different country than Italy is, really, and the Sicilians were a lot better fighters than the Italians were, actually. The Italians, I've always felt sorry for, because their hearts were never in it. Mussolini was crazy, same as Adolf Hitler was. He thought he could get to be a big shot if he joined with Hitler, so that, and then Japan did and made it the Axis power. But the Italians really, their hearts weren't in it. They gave up pretty easily once we hit the mainland.

Question: And was it easy for you to tell the difference? I mean, you could definitely see a different attitude when you went against...

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they lost heart back in, you know they joined with Hitler back in '39, '38, and their, by the time of.. '44, their heart wasn't in it. They gave up like crazy there in North Africa, and predominantly, that's where the

John B. Allan

Tape 1 of 2

Germans had most of the Italians anyway. The Germans, especially the Panzers, they just considered the Italians fodder for the British.

Question: What was the um.. my mind wanders a little bit here, so let me. There's one point where you talk about, there are some good aspects of war. I mean, the camaraderie, the practical jokes. Did you guys play practical jokes?

Answer: Not on, you know, we'd, yeah, we'd get, especially some new recruits come in. Our replacements. I don't call them recruits, but replacements. You'd get a couple of guys that been on the line for 6, 7 months, you know, and they'd be out standing inspection, and I'd be reviewing them and check their weapons. Guys next to them got a bunch of sand or dirt and puttin' it down the guy's barrel and we gotta, Hmm, bam, there's your gun. Clean it. But, yeah, they, we'd you know, in England when we were in staging areas and weather was so awful, the outside kitchens, you know, God, I mean, we'd, a lotta guys would get a cup of coffee and somebody'd pour a handful of salt in it. But, or we'd, if we were in the barracks or something it was nothing to be short-sheeted. That was one of the primary things about combat, was if you were in a barracks, always check your bed before you got in it.

Question: I gotta switch tapes here.