

Tom Allocco
Interviewee

June Hunter
Kenneth Hunter
Interviewers

Interviewed on April 4, 2008
4p.m.
Albany, NY

This is April 4, 2008 at 4 p.m. in Albany, NY. We are interviewing Tom Allocco, who served in the United States Marine Corps September 7, 1967 through September 6, 1970, and in the United States Air Force Reserve from May 1982 to March 1, 2008. This interview is being conducted by Kenneth and June Hunter.

JH: Please tell us your full name and when and where you were born.

TA: Thomas N. Allocco, I was born in Rochester, NY.

JH: And please tell us why you entered the service.

TA: Well, I guess I entered the service because, first of all, I entered the service in '67 when an awful lot of people were entering the service. And in those days, of course, there was a draft on, they had a very large military. But I think I entered the service because I was born in 1948, early on in the "baby-boom" generation and I grew up in the '50s and the early '60s as a young person, just surrounded by World War II vets when they were still young and vigorous people and WWII was still relatively close in time; when people said, "the War", you knew what they meant. So I think it was just, for an impressionable young man, I guess it was inevitable that you would think about being in the military.

One of the stories that I tell is that on the street where I was first, I was born in a hospital, but on the street where my mother brought me, where we were first living, there were only about six or eight houses, and two young men were killed in WWII on that street and another was so severely wounded that he died in the early '50s, from his wounds. Two of the people that died on that street, Campbell Street, in Rochester were actually relatives of our family. My father's brother and my father's first cousin; one in Saipan, and one with a Liberator in Yugoslavia. So, growing up in that kind of an atmosphere, I think that, and being somebody who was a little too restless to want to go through college, I guess it was inevitable to think about the military.

So, in 1967 I was actually going to a community college, in the spring semester. And instead of taking a very difficult mathematics test, I went down to State St., Rochester and went in and talked to the recruiter, and basically signed up, right on the spot. Went down and took the test and signed up. I did a delayed thing and went in in September. Got up that morning, my mother drove me down to State St. to the federal building in a 1965 Ford Falcon with one of those old fashioned little gym bags. That was an adventure, because it was kinda like the WWII thing, they put us on a train, they actually bused us to Buffalo, but they put us on a train and it was an all day and all night thing down to Paris Island, South Carolina for boot camp there. That was 1967 and it was still, it was an unpleasant, rough experience. You know, you hear about Marine boot camp, I wouldn't say that they really hit you a lot, they would sometimes do things like that, but it wasn't a brutal kind of a thing, but it certainly was rough. I don't know what it's like now, but I know it was still an unpleasant experience.

Spent three years in the Marines. I was one of the few people at the end of boot camp who was issued an overcoat. Everybody else was going what they called "WestPac"; Western Pacific. I was given an overcoat and I was sent to Indianapolis, IN Fort Benjamin Harrison, which is now closed, and went through a school for, journalism school, and public affairs. So I didn't have quite the adventures that other people do in the Marines. I stayed in, I was in the United States. I was in the air wing at Cherry Point, NC and El Toro, CA over a period of three years in public affairs. A lot of the people I was in boot camp with arrived in Viet Nam just at the time of the Tet Offensive in January '68, and I do remember reading their names in... I think it was called The Marine Corps Times. They listed the casualties over there. So there was the impact of that Viet Nam War, of course.

Now, during my three years in the Marines, one of the things I wanted to mention was I did a lot of traveling around airports and things like that. And whatever you may hear about people being spit at in airports, I can tell you that there was an awful lot, I think there was an awful lot of patriotism back then. Because here I was this young guy, 19, 20, 21 and I remember you wore the green uniform then. I remember guys coming up, WWII vets coming up and buying us drinks. I have one particular memory of a veteran; he mighta looked maybe a little bit like I do with a jacket like this. He reached in his pocket and he pulled out his discharge papers from WWII. My experiences in uniform, traveling around were always positive. I did a certain amount of traveling because I was at, as I say, both in NC and CA.

One memory that I have is spending a long time on an Army base. And you know how veterans talk about bad food? Well, it really was bad food, you know? And just as an

example, they used to serve the same meatball two, three times in one week with different names. So I can testify that the food really, in the Army... the Marines and the Navy had good food, but the Army... I don't think they ever really came out of that old mentality. I never really thought that they treated their people as well as even the Marines and the Army(sic), at least during my three years.

KH: Now back to your basic training, what were some of the kinds of things you had to do? Did you have to get familiar with different kinds of weapons? What were your instructors like?

TA: You know they say that people respect their drill instructors, and in my case, that's true! I know that we had two very tough drill instructors, both Viet Nam veterans; one had been a machine gunner in operation *Harvest Moon*, which had fairly recently taken place, which you can still read about in history books. I know that they were very rough with us, but they were respected, just like people say. One of my memories was, even though it was September, maybe it wasn't the high heat of summer, it was still... it was out in a swampy area of deep south South Carolina by the ocean. We were in t-shirts and we had these silver helmets and we were marching, it seemed like we were marching, marching constantly. What I remember is the marching, and the heat, and the drill. That's what I remember. I remember there was a lot of mental stress too. One of the things I remember is, in a sense, I didn't mind when they took us out for a run or something, because we actually got away. The mental part was harder than the physical part. They actually had a lot of schooling going on, things like that. You were given a guide book that you were expected to learn, a lot of things.

I guess what I remember most was the things like the drill and the PT(Physical Training). In those days they were still in a wooden barracks with a wooden floor and there was constant drill in that wooden barracks. I remember the floor being soaked with sweat and everything else. There was at least one case where a recruit was abused, that I felt. So it wasn't perfect, I mean it wasn't... they hadn't yet developed as sophisticated a training programs as they have now. I'll say that. I do think that on an individual basis people were good, but I think that the overall system was still primitive. Because as I said, I did see personally one thing of abuse of a recruit.

JH: How did they abuse him? Or what did they do? Or what did he do that caused this? Or would you rather not...

TA: Well, no. I mean, it's kind of sad, I mean, from his point of view. Now, I think this was a little bit out of character but there was another drill instructor who probably shouldn't have been there and what happened was, it was our last day of being in boot

camp and this, there's a thing called *UNQ*- unqualified, and in the Marines where they put so much emphasis on marksmanship, that's the worst mortal sin you can commit. He failed to qualify with the, we used M-14s in those days, even though the M-16 was the weapon used in Viet Nam, we were still training with the M-14. He failed to qualify, he was, they did a lot of bad things to him, the recruiter, the drill instructor did. On the last day before we were going to graduate, we were going to complete boot camp, get on the bus and leave, we were all in the barracks and this guy, this drill instructor from the other platoon brought this guy in, the guy was crying, he was so humiliated. They gave us large cloths, diaper cloths, because it was soft cotton, to shine our shoes with and he was wearing nothing but that diaper thing and he was carrying a big rock. In other words, he was humiliated way past what he should have been. And of course, it wasn't good training. It was terrible training. So I guess, in summary it's true that from my point of view, the drill instructors were respected. I still have a positive feeling for two out of three drill instructors, and I still think that things were absolutely wrong about the Marine training in 1967.

KH: Can you remember back in the basic training, pay days? Did you have to get your own haircuts after your initial one? What about clothing replacement? Did you have to purchase your own clothing? Did they give you an allowance for it?

TA: I remember we didn't get paid very much, that's the part I remember. But I also remember things didn't cost very much either. I remember that beer in the club was only 25 cents. And I remember that, yes, it seemed like we had to spend an awful lot of money on replacing uniforms. Because, being in the States, and not being overseas they were very strict. If there was one thread broken, or something like that, they would say, "That shirt is unserviceable", and you'd have to... again, they gave you an allowance, but it probably really wasn't enough. You ended up spending your own money for it, for uniform replacements. And that was kind of a nagging thing, this(sic) constant inspections that we had and constant uniforms. I remember very clearly talking to this one Marine one day, and he'd come back from Viet Nam not too long before that as an M-60 machine gunner, a grunt, and he said he was going back to Viet Nam, and I've heard other people say this too, but this particular person, he said it was easier to go back to Viet Nam where they didn't have all these inspections and everything that people had to put up with stateside.

KH: Did you have Saturday reviews?

TA: We did. There was a period of time when I was at El Toro when (on) Saturday mornings we would go out and drill. I think that was part of the tightening up of discipline. What happened was that between '67 and '70, my personal experience was,

you know they talk about how the military declined as the stresses of Viet Nam. I saw a decline in discipline between '67 and '70. You know, the time I came in and the time I got out. There was more people smoking marijuana, there was more people being disrespectful of the rules and things like that. I remember at El Toro, during my last time in the Marines in the summer of '70, they tried to start re-instilling some discipline, so every Saturday morning they would have us, instead of having a day off we would fall out and drill in a big parking lot, a big facility they had there. That's what I remember about as far as discipline and stuff like that.

I had a good job. You know, I had a very good job. I was in the public affairs office, I had the opportunity to... Well, one thing that gave me a lot of pleasure, I went to Camp Lejune and did some exercises with the Marine reservists. Normally, I was with the air wing. And the Marine reservists, we were out in the field, there was action, we were driving around in jeeps. For training purposes, I think we were still using M-1s. I know when I did infantry training after Paris Island, we were still using old WWII M-1s. Matter of fact, we were still eating the C rations that were marked from like 1945. But anyway, while I didn't actually participate in it, I did have the opportunity to see a beach landing at Camp Lejune. I remember at night we'd be out and you could see the fires in the hills all around us where they were practicing artillery and things like that. So while I was in California, I did have a little taste of that Marine adventure thing.

KH: Did you have any opportunity to have rivalry with your sister service there, the Navy, at any time?

TA: No. We didn't really have anything going like that. Maybe because I just stayed at the air wing there, both at Cherry Point, NC and in California. But no, I didn't really have really any connection with the Navy or any other services. I remember I, we didn't like the Air Force, I remember that, which is ironic because I wound up spending a lot more years in the Air Force Reserve after getting out of the Marines. And one of the things I noticed when I was in the Air Force Reserve, I noticed that an awful lot of the, even though it's such a small service, the Marines, there were a lot of former Marines. Maybe because they were just military-oriented who went into the Air Force Reserve. You see a lot of people wearing their dress uniforms would have the Marine Good Conduct ribbon, the red, I think it's red and black ribbon.

KH: You mentioned wearing the green uniform. Were there ever any occasions with the blue uniform, the dress blue uniform?

TA: The only time I had a dress blue uniform was for the Paris Island picture. No, I never wore the dress blues. We had the green fatigues and the green dress, more formal

uniform. We still had the big round hats, and we still, in those days we still had khakis, the tan khakis. We had the summer trousers and the winter green.

KH: Can you remember leaving basic training and going home? What was the reception like back home when you got there from basic?

TA: Well, actually, what they did was, you went to Paris Island. And then when you finished Paris Island which was, of course, just the basic of the basic, everybody, no matter what your job was going to be, you know every Marine is a rifleman, we went up to Camp... Oh, you know what? Earlier when I was talking about California, I was saying Camp Lejune. It was Camp Pendleton that I was at out there. I was on the wrong coast. After Paris Island we all went up to Camp Lejune. It was a place called Camp Geiger, I don't know if they still use it for training, but that was pretty much in wooden hootches and we spent three weeks, I guess, doing infantry training. Living out there. And that's again, we were running around with the M-1s, doing infantry training. After that, then they sent us home.

Actually I got home at the beginning of December, and of course it was great getting home. It was great getting away. The first thing I noticed when I got home, putting on civilian clothes was how light they were. After the fatigues, is what they would call them in the Air Force, but after the heavy uniform, I noticed how light it was. A funny thing that happened was, well an un-funny thing for me at the time was, I got orders to go to Fort Benjamin Harrison, IN for, to go to school for journalism and to arrive on December 24th. Now at the time, I didn't realize that I could have actually requested an extension, or something like that, being brand new. So I arrived on December 24, after a long flight at the school, and everything is closed, I don't have what they call the chow card. Again, I probably could have fought it if I'd been more experienced, but I couldn't get, I couldn't go get the meal. There was no place to buy food. I had a very unpleasant December 24, and I don't know at which point I was actually able to get a meal, but I do remember sitting in a lower rec room and eating a plate of cookies or something. But for a growing young man it wasn't a very pleasant Christmas Eve. And at some point, you know it took a couple of days to get this chow card, to be able to get decent meals, but it was an unpleasant Christmas Eve and Christmas day. That was in Indianapolis.

The other kind of unpleasant thing that happened was I came down with strep throat. And again, this was an Army base and they were so much more primitive back then than they are now. I was sick in the barracks. Strep throat can be a pretty disabling thing, it weakens you, it's an Indiana winter, the hospital is up on the top of a hill, a mile or two away from the barracks, and I remember trudging up with this fever. Had to go to the hospital once a day, to get one more pass or whatever it is to not have to... to be off duty,

excusal from duty. But every day I had to trudge up this hill, with a fever, and get one more 24 hour pass, and back down. Cursing the Army all the way up there and back. Just ridiculous; as opposed to why don't you just say you're sick, and go to bed. I remember some sergeant yelling at me about it and threatening me with court martial and everything else. But I guess if there was one characteristic of my military career, it spanned 40 years, so after an 11 year break in service, after getting out in 1970, in 1982 I joined the Air Force Reserve. I got to witness a long period of time when actually they did make things an awful lot better. As far as treating people better, just having a better managerial system.

One of the things that I tell people is how bad the housing was, speaking of being on active duty. Both at Cherry Point and El Toro, which weren't even considered like, you know, infantry or rough kinds of places, they didn't even provide you your own bed! It was a bunk bed, so you didn't even have even your own space, let alone your own room. You shared that little, you had a little wall locker next to somebody else's wall locker and the two of you, you know one was up and one was down, so... And they didn't have doors on the bathroom, and the toilets, they didn't have doors. And it wasn't that they didn't build them, you could see where they actually had removed them. You know, whatever military policy that was... So my point here is, when I got out, when I completed my Air Force Reserve service in 2008, everybody was getting private rooms, everybody was getting microwave ovens, everybody has control of their own heat in the room. In the reserve, we had maids come in every single day to make your bed! So I went from, they took the doors off the toilets and not even having my own bed, basically having a bunk bed to uh... which wasn't really necessary, you know, because this was a base in the United States, it wasn't like it was off in someplace in Viet Nam or something like that. Anyway, I went from a bunk bed to having a microwave oven. I'll tell you, I did appreciate that.

Which leads me to another point; in the Air Force Reserve I made four trips on the C-5 Galaxy, the biggest cargo plane in the free world, to the middle east during *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* and also during operation *Iraqi Freedom*. One of the times I went there I had what I thought was an interesting experience. I was absolutely amazed at how good the food was over there. I complained about the Army. The Army, when I was on active duty gave us meatballs a couple of times a week and they would give them different names; pretend that they were serving you different food. I was in a big air base in Saudi Arabia and the food was like... every single thing that you could want, from eggs to steak to... any kind of food that you want. If you wanted pork, if you wanted chicken... and it was all like, take as much as you want. It was all unlimited. They used third world people behind me, the counters, I think it was Filipinos and stuff, but it was

just... I guess this was in 1990, when I was over there. But the point of what I'm saying is, I remember walking down the street on that base and thinking, "Boy these kids today have it made!", and I heard two young airmen saying, "I'm going out to buy pizza.", complaining about that food over at the messhall. So I guess some of it is perspective. When I was stationed on an Army base for a year, they said that you would be punished with an Article 15 if you took seconds. You could take seconds on salad, but if you took seconds on something in the food line... so my point is; compared to those two kids over in Saudi Arabia, I wanted to say to them, you know I remember when I was grateful just to be able to get enough calories to eat out of the stingy guys back in the '60s. So I did see some huge changes over the years.

JH: Now you had been serving in the Marines and then you went into the Air Force...

TA: Air Force Reserve.

JH: ... after a period of time. What did you do in, why did you leave the Marines and what did you do before you went into the Air Force?

TA: Well, you know, they talk about people getting their training and stuff you know, learning a job skill in the military and that's what happened to me. I went in the Marines, they sent me to journalism school, and I've spent the rest of my life in some form of public relations, basically, since then. In the time between being in the Marines and joining the Air Force Reserve, I graduated from the journalism program at Buffalo State College and got a job on a weekly newspaper and worked there for quite a number of years. At that point I was writing for and editing for a chain of weekly newspapers around Buffalo. And that's the point, I had been thinking about the military. Just having an interest in the military, military history and everything else and as I say, still always that son of a WWII generation, kind of thing, that whole "baby boom" thing. And somebody told me about an air base up in Niagara Falls, which I didn't know about, C-130 air base. Actually, I kind of expressed an interest in it, and I was home, on a Saturday morning I got a call from a recruiter. And almost before I knew it, kind of a thing, he said, "Why don't you just come down and take the AAFES test?" The Army, I don't know what AAFES stands for. The Army Air Force...

KH: It's a battery of...

TA: No, no, no, I'm mistaken. AAFES is the PX system. The uh...

KH: It's a battery of tests.

TA: Yeah, yeah, the battery of tests. I went down to the federal building, took it. Anyway, before I knew it I was back in the Air Force Reserve at Niagara Falls where they had C-130s, which they still have. At that time it was called the 914th Tactical Air Lift Group, I think it's called the 914th Air Lift Wing now. They fly C-130s, Hercules. It's a tactical airplane, four propellers. I went in for one year. And the second time around I re-enlisted for the full shot. I guess I knew that that's what I wanted to do, at least as far as a part time job, as soon as I went in. I enjoyed the camaraderie, I enjoyed being around the airplanes, and the adventure. And doing something kind of big and fun, you know? So, just a great part time job. I was in public affairs. Public affairs, from my point of view, is just about the best job you can have in the military, active duty or reserve.

They put out a monthly newspaper, Going for the Weekend, and I actually tried to volunteer for some other days, also. I did a couple of good things. I remember going on some exercises out of Niagara Falls, going on some exercises like with our Security Police down to Arkansas, the air base that they have down there outside of Little Rock. Little Rock AFB. So anyway, it opened up some opportunities for me, in the reserve. I got a job in 1985 working for the New York state health department in Albany. Again in public relations, directly because of the training I started with in the Marines when I went to the journalism school, a job that falls under public affairs.

I transferred over to the 439th Air Lift Wing out of Chicopee, MA. Westover Air Reserve Base, it's called now and I was there up until last month, March 1st. You can stay in the Reserve up till your 60th birthday and I worked up until two days before my 60th birthday writing stories for the base paper, The Patriot, at Westover. I first got there at Westover, it was C-130s, just like at Niagara Falls and then they later, what they called transitioned over to C-5s, the Galaxy, which is the big airlifter, heavy airlifter. It can fly, if they want to under war-time conditions, it can carry up to about 250,000 or more, pounds of cargo. It's for out-sized cargo. And I've got a lot of fond memories of the C-5 Galaxy. The time that I really came to appreciate being at Westover and what I was getting out of the reserve was in *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*. I went there in '85 and in '90 was when they activated us. I never really thought that we'd be activated. It was August of 1990 that Saddam Hussein crossed the border into Kuwait. I remember hearing it on the radio. I remember wondering if this would be as big as the *Just Cause*, as the problems we had in Panama just the year before. And, of course, here we are in 2008 and we're still involved so it definitely turned out to be pretty big.

In August 1990, within a couple of days, the first C -5s started carrying people over to Saudi Arabia, when they made the agreements. I think it was within about a week. I went to Westover, I volunteered in November, to do 30 days. I went on the first trip that

November, carrying some of the first people. We went down to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, an airfield just outside of Ft. Campbell. We carried the 101st Airborne, the first contingents of the 101st Airborne people over to Saudi Arabia. The way you would do the airlift... I accompanied... three times I went over during *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* on C-5s. The third time I stayed in Saudi Arabia and actually travelled around on a Blackhawk and a C-130 throughout that area. So my combat experience is limited to about a week or so and a few other odds and ends, days over there. The way we did it was, they would fly from wherever you are in the U.S., Dover, Delaware is the big C-5 place. Nobody flies directly, even now, into the Middle East. You fly over to Germany. At that time it was Ramstein and Rhein Main, Rhein Main being outside of Frankfurt. Now it's just Ramstein. And at that time I know they were also flying to Spain sometimes and spend the night. I know they still do, as a matter of fact, they fly to Rota, Spain now. We just had a C-5 operation out of there, Westover did. What they call a Pony Express operation, which formerly we called it a Pony Express operation. And what that meant, means is you put a crew at an air base in Germany, you put a couple of crews in an air base in Germany or Spain. Plane flies over there, now that crew has to get some rest. They've spent 7-8 hours in flight and a number of other hours getting ready for the flight. There's no sense in that airplane sitting there. You get a fresh crew, put that crew on the airplane and shuttle them what they call "down range". Down into, I know in *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* it was Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. It was a base near Riyadh, that we were at. And I just spent a week there and, matter of fact, I made it into Riyadh and it was just like in the movies.

I remember I spent the night somewhere in Riyadh. In the morning, sun was coming up and it was like, sand and stuff in the air and they were calling the prayers from the mosques and everything, and it really was like in the movies. What I was doing was, we had people permanently stationed over in Saudi Arabia, again this is *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, and I spent some time taking pictures and interviewing them and sending things back for home town newspapers, things like that. I went up, we had some people who made some donations to the troops and so to give them a little bit of publicity they put these donations, I think it was dental equipment and things like that. We put it on a Blackhawk and we flew the Blackhawk up... This was just after they had pushed Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, we went to Saudi Arabia, King Khalid Military City, they call it, it's a big base in northern Saudi Arabia, and we went up into a small air base in Kuwait to make this delivery of some of this humanitarian equipment that had been donated from Massachusetts. So I went along to take pictures and wrote a story to send back to the Massachusetts papers about how their humanitarian aid was being used. Did fly over what they called The Road of Death, which was where, which was just after the Iraqis had been pushed out of Kuwait City, and as they were going north from Kuwait City to

Basra, we were hitting their military vehicles. And they still had the vehicles all over. I know somebody said there were still bodies that you could see down there. I didn't, I did see a lot of carnage. We did see the smoke. We drove, the Bahrain oil wells, and we did come fairly close. Spent a couple of nights in Kuwait. At night when it got dark you could go up on top of the buildings and you could see the flames coming out of the burning oil wells. That was my closest to... I did see going around the air base, I was told we had taken this air base, we had shot up this air base when it was being used by Saddam Hussein. What impressed me was what an A-10 can do. The A-10, the Warthog, came in firing, what was it? .50? I can't think of what they were, big rounds. It wasn't... 30 millimeter(mm)?

KH: 50 mm?

TA: Well, it's a round about this big. And all over the place you could see what they had done. You could walk down the street and you could see a hole every three, four feet. I remember walking through a building and you could see where it went through this wall, this wall, and this wall and scattered over on this wall where it just... And this wasn't any big battle. And all over the place you could see shrapnel and metal; it was all over the place, just like snow. It impressed me what modern weapons could do.

Then when I was over in Saudi Arabia, what I was doing was, we had people who were organizing the airlift home, of the Army people. I remember seeing some French soldiers, and I remember seeing the American. They were the 7th Corps, I think, the 7th Corps out of Germany. Our Air Force people were putting them on planes, a lot of commercial planes and some C-5 Galaxies for their equipment, and anyway, they were taking them to Germany. A lot of the troops who were in *Desert Storm* had been in Germany.

So I did make three trips overseas. I remember I went to Bahrain, which is an island off of Saudi Arabia, Navy base... The thing that most impressed me was the summer of 1990 and the war was, let's see... the actual fighting when they pushed them out of Kuwait was in March. At some point not too long after that, the first people started coming home. Westover is the largest, it's the closest big air base to Europe, according to the way you fly, in the U.S. There's a bigger one, Dover, DE, there's McGuire down in NJ and there's smaller ones that are a little farther north, up in Maine. But we at Westover really in a sense were on the front lines of *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* in the sense that we were the closest to where people would go, that would be flying to Europe. They could actually carry more cargo and everything else, because they had to carry less fuel than if you were going to, say out of Dover, DE. So, when they were coming back, we had 3,000 people who were welcomed home. 3,000 troops who were welcomed home from *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*. That began, must have been in March, right after the land fighting

took place, after they pushed up into Kuwait City and everything. And that continued throughout the summer. Seemed to me it lasted till like July or August. And at first, because, it was completely different from the way things are now. We didn't have this huge amount of security. The terrorists, we didn't have the terrorist threat that they have now. At first we weren't letting anybody on base, only people who had somebody, a relative coming home. The general, General Walker, who was in charge of Westover, relented on that at some point... First of all, it became obvious that a lot of people didn't actually have relatives. People were coming on base saying that they had relatives coming home, and the point is that people wanted to welcome the troops home. There hadn't been a war, in 2008 I think people are war weary, we've been at war since 1990. But in 1990 there had been a long period of relative calm, since, let's say 1973 when the last of the ground troops were in Viet Nam. People were enthusiastic, there was support for, you know... People thought that Saddam Hussein had taken Kuwait, so it was kind of a simple, clear thing that people could understand. It wasn't a preemptive kind of war like the second invasion of Iraq. People trusted, I think people trusted the president more than they do now, there was enthusiasm, they were more, and it was something they could understand. I think they supported us going into Kuwait, to liberate Kuwait.

When the troops started coming home, I think in light of all that kind of pent up patriotism, people went crazy. At some point the general said that every single person coming home, 3,000 of them, it was going on day and night, a lot of commercial airplanes was the way, were flying into the big air base. You know we have like two mile long runways and everything, it's a major air base. Only 100 miles away from Albany, which people here in Albany didn't even know about it. But if you went over to Westover, you could almost feel like you were on the front lines of the war in the Middle East. People were walking around in desert uniforms, literally still having the dust, the dirt of Saudi Arabia, still having the sand on them. I know personally coming home, still having all that sand on us. But in any case, the general said, every single person coming home is going to have a welcome home party. And that's what they did. They filled up a hangar, an Air Force hangar is a very large thing, they filled up that Air Force hangar, they got some veterans, the American Legion, these people, some beer companies donated beer. They set up a bar with paper cups of beer. The guys would, the planes would land, they'd put them on a bus, they'd bring them to the hangar, over and over again they'd play that Proud to be an American song and a few other songs like that. It was just this incredible outpouring from the community. And the thing that I've been saying for years since then is that one thing that I've learned from *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* is that people want to participate in something bigger than them. They want to participate... they want to be part of a community and things like that. In this current war, they've completely missed on actually bringing people into it. But there is a desire for

people to do that. And the community just poured into that hangar. What we did, what we had was ropes that kind of held people back from swamping these guys. When a busload, let's say of 50 or 100 people, you know relatively small groups of guys, a few buses would bring them in, we had a red carpet... Actually, I think the red carpet at the end of the war was like cut up and given to people as souvenirs or something, but we had a red carpet that we wore out, leading out to the flight line where the bus was. They'd come down and music would be pouring out, the crowd would be cheering, the kids and everything. The guys would come in, they had a rec area for them, and as I said, they set them up. They had paper cups of beer, the veterans from the Korean War and stuff were there. They had people coming in, playing music. What I remember was a lot of veterans groups too. I remember there was one veteran, he was coming in, he was doing magic tricks. People just wanted to applaud these troops, these troops coming back. Nice thing from my point of view is I could go behind that wire, you know they were holding all the civilians back, so I was going in there, I'd talk to the guys, I'd do stories and talk to them about some of the things they had done and just goof around, and bring media in, a lot of the t.v. and news stations. Went on for the whole summer of 1990, it was just a great, positive experience.

I do want to mention, I do want to put that kind of in balance... Before the guys started coming home, they were also going overseas. The same thing happened, of course, going overseas before March. I started serving in Westover in October, October 1st. But the wing itself was activated, where everybody got called up, by presidential order on December 2nd. So from then on, through the summer of '90 we were all at Westover on active duty. So before the war we were sending people overseas. People were coming from bases, a lot of planes, planes would stop and refuel, do a last minute maintenance check before flying over to Germany or Spain, going on down. I remember working Christmas Eve, I mean I remember working Christmas day and Thanksgiving day. And I remember on the planes, the kids would have their Christmas, the troops would have their Christmas meal, some of them were cooked in these little convection ovens on the plane going over. Somebody was chipping in, I remember they bought them a ham on Christmas day. They got on the big plane, the C-5 has a galley, has two galleys for, with little convection ovens. That's how these guys had their Christmas dinner. I very distinctly remember Thanksgiving and Christmas walking around in the passenger terminal where they were loading up the airplanes and everything.

Outside the gate, during buildup time, we did have some anti-war protesters, and things like that coming out. Some people coming out. We have a big university there, and stuff like that. And so while I said that overall most people were in support of the war, unlike this thing that's going on now, where people are so war-weary now, back then... But

even then there were a certain number of people who had some arguments against going, against using ground forces to push Saddam Hussein out. One thing that was said was that maybe an embargo would work, something like that. But in any case, what struck me was the difference between Viet Nam and the anti-war protests, *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*. I think both sides learned a little bit. There wasn't nearly, I was actually walking around in uniform out there because we had to be out there to kind of monitor the thing because we would have news cameras out there and everything else, taking pictures of the war protesters. And it was almost like a gentleman's agreement among everybody that we were all just kind of get along and everything. It wasn't any of the confrontational kind of stuff like in Viet Nam. There was a little bit of stuff, they blocked the streets once or twice. But I remember, even being in uniform I was able to talk to them and they were able to talk to me. It wasn't like, you know you think of like Viet Nam where there was a conflict. It was closer to a kabuki dance where we were all going to agree that this is what you're going to do and this is what I'm going to do. And I remember walking through the crowds. We had a particularly big one, I think at the time when the ground fighting first started, out there. But I remember walking among all the people with posters and everything. I remember one thing we did, with some of the protesters; we took pictures of them, in case there ever was anything where people might try to get on base, that kind of thing. That was more of a precautionary kind of thing. That was *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*.

Then there was the long stretch of the 90s where it seemed like we were always doing one thing or another. I didn't go over there, but we sent people over to Somalia, some of the people from my office were sent to Haiti. There were always things going on. And of course, we sent a bunch of what we call our aerial porters over to Aviano, Italy which is an Italian air base up in northern Italy. That was for Kosovo and Serbia, and that whole series of operations over there. So it seemed that all during the 90s, Westover C-5s, 16 big Galaxies were always being called out. And we had things like, every time there was an earthquake in the Philippines or something like that we were doing humanitarian relief. A lot of responses worldwide on those big airplanes. One of the things I always told people, because I had to do tours on the C-5, I'd say if you want to send something overseas and you want to save your money, you put it on a ship. If you want to send 100 tanks overseas, you're going to put them on ships. But if you want to Federal Express it overnight, you can put it on one of our C-5s. Because you can get it to Germany in eight hours and another eight hours, what they call "downrange". And we were constantly doing that in response... during the big... what was that earthquake thing that they had overseas? Any case...

KH: You're not thinking of the tsunami?

TA: Tsunami, yeah! The tsunami. We immediately sent people over there. When we had an earthquake, when we had a hurricane in Florida at Homestead Air Force Base, we sent people down there. Classic example of what a C-5 did that I'm proud of is, the air war started and we bombed Bagdad in late January or the beginning of February 1990. Very next day you could watch on t.v., Saddam Hussein was firing SCUDs at Tel Aviv. It was a Westover plane, they actually had some Patriot missiles in Massachusetts and they put some on a Westover plane. It was a Westover plane that took off the very next day, immediately flew, aerial refueled and everything else, so they didn't have to make any stops and it flew right to Tel Aviv with Patriot Missiles and Patriot Missile crews. I remember seeing that. I remember going in the plane and it had this equipment. So that was a classic example of like an overnight response.

When the Special Forces were killed, were attacked over in Somalia, in Mogadishu, in the '90s, they needed heavy equipment, and it was a Westover plane. And the point is, like I say, Westover... it's in the middle of Massachusetts, but it's actually on the front line. And people here, 100 miles away in Albany, don't know that. But it's on the front line of worldwide military things. It was a Westover C-5, I don't know where they flew to, flew to an Army base in the south, or maybe it was Dover, DE, but they picked up armor equipment, aerial refueled all across the Atlantic and Mediterranean and went down to Mogadishu. They got that equipment down there within 24 hours, whatever it was. Ok, so that was the '90s.

And then, 2001, September 11, I was at Westover, I was working on a very boring thing. I had what they call an additional duty, working on training records for uh... just to keep records of people who were training. I remember, and it's not a story, I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, I wish something would happen" because, just as an excuse not to have to bend over the desk working on these training records. I was talking to somebody else and they came in and they said that a plane had hit the World Trade Center, and we know the rest of it. Actually what happened was I was in my blue uniform and they said, you know, we were watching it on t.v. and all that stuff, and they said, "Ok, we're now on 24 hour operations." And they said, "You will lock up... You're going to be staying in the office tonight, sleeping on the couch, and everything else. We don't know what's going on in the world." Went back to the barracks, took off the blue uniform, put on the green uniform and we kind of all went to war. I made another trip over to uh, where'd I go? Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as part of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and out of that I got a big medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal. A beautiful medal that someday I'll give to the nieces and nephews, they'll think that I was a real war hero. During *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, of course we've been in that up till now, we've been sending planes and I've been interviewing people by telephone who are over in

Afghanistan and Iraq. You know, again, from my point of view, best job in the world. I can sit at my desk, and it's amazing. We have DSN phone numbers, you punch a few numbers in, I can be talking to people in Kasakhstan(sic) as clear as I'm talking right now, as though I was talking on the telephone to somebody in Schenectady. And that's what I've been doing on this long war that we've been having since 2003. Up until March 1st, last month when I retired, and turned 60.

KH: While you were over there did you have any opportunity to work with the commercial media?

TA: We took media over there and they were really great, they were enthusiastic. The t.v. stations, including some Albany people. We took them over to Germany, unfortunately in this war we couldn't get them down, what they call "downrange" into Saudi Arabia, and into Iraq. But we took them over to Germany where they actually interviewed our medical people who were working with the wounded coming back, and that was a really sad story. I've interviewed a number of our medical people. It was a completely un-sanitized version of war. They talked about kids, severely brain damaged, kids with burned lungs and everything else. The doctors and the nurses from Westover that I've talked to had, some of them were just about shell shocked from the things that they saw. And what I always try to tell the kids is that the sanitized version you see on t.v. is just not true. When they were telling me about children with their arms blown off and they were telling me about who were picking up their sons, who the son would never get out of his hospital bed because of brain damage, and everything else. Burned lungs and blindings and everything else. Even the reservists over there got to see a real horror show.

JH: Ok, well, we thank you very much for your service to our country and for doing this interview.

TA: Thank you.