



## **Allan C. Jackson**

United States Army

Sergeant

Camp Kearns

Date Interviewed: 5/10/05

Location of Interview:

Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer: Rick Randle

**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

**Rick:** All right Mr. Jackson would you just say your name and spell it for us?

**Allan:** My name is Alan C. Jackson. My first name is A-L-L-A-N, C, J-A-C-K-S-O-N.

**Rick:** All right well thanks very much. Can you tell us a little about your early life, where you were born?

**Allan:** I was born in Nassau Bahamas the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1903 and when I was nine years old my mother and father came over to the United States with 16 of us 'Crone Pickers'. They were what you would call 'Island Hoppers'. They worked all over different islands and they got so they couldn't support us over there so they came to the United States. But I was probably raised in Montgomery Alabama.

**Rick:** Tell us where you were on December 7<sup>th</sup> and what your thoughts were about that.

**Allan:** Well I didn't give it a thought on the first day when Pearl Harbor got bombed I didn't think nothing of it at first. But afterward I began to take it very seriously. But see I was already in the Army in 1937.

**Rick:** You joined the service in 1937?

**Allan:** Well I was 'attached Army'. But I wasn't assigned to no continental barrack at all it was... I don't know how you'd call it (a liaison for the Army or what it was) but what I did – there were three white fellows that went with me and the first time we left we went to Oakville Kentucky working for the Illinois Railroad. All I was doing, I had a *beater* checking joists on the railroad track to see about everything, then I'd report back to them. Then they transferred me to the Pennsylvania Railroad and I went to the Pennsylvania Railroad and I did the same thing. Then they transferred me to Lime Ohio Steel Refinery where they were making hash tracks and I was a Steel Chipper and a Sand Blaster, which was all I did for them.

I didn't know it but I thought this was a rightly job working for the Army and then when Pearl Harbor got bombed they told me "we going back to Fort Benning Georgia" and that was in February in '44.

We said "what we gonna do"?

They said, “*You’re going to the rifle range and take a practice with the M2 and the 38*” (just the revolver).

Then they sent me to Lincoln Nebraska for a while. But first I came to Fort Douglas in 1937. Then I went on to this other place, and then when they finally introduced me into the Army I first landed in Lincoln Nebraska. Then they sent me to Columbus Airbase in Columbus Mississippi and from Columbus Mississippi they sent me to Kearns.

**Rick:** When you were attached to the Army and doing that work on the railroad did you have a uniform?

**Allan:** No, no. You didn’t think...nobody thought you was in the Army. I didn’t even know I was in the Army until I went back to Fort Benning.

**Rick:** Where did your paychecks come from?

**Allan:** Paychecks? It’s what they called ‘*strip*’. You go to the Army base (wherever the Army base is) and you cash that strip of paper there. It wasn’t no check.

**Rick:** All right and then you were sent to Fort Douglas in 1937. Tell us about that. How long were you there?

**Allan:** I guess I was there about 9 months and when I first got there it was on a Sunday, I’ll never forget because it was 7 o’clock on a Sunday and they didn’t pick us up until 4 o’clock that afternoon and I didn’t see no Afro-Americans and I wondered ‘*where were they?*’ So I didn’t see any and so when they did pick us up to go to Fort Douglas after we was institutionalized and interrogated, you know, we got a chance to come to Salt Lake.

Then I met a Puerto Rican guy and he said “*hey bro what ya looking for?*”

And I said “*someplace to eat at*”.

He says, “*Follow me*”.

So we came here on the west side and I got on the west side down there on 2<sup>nd</sup> South and I’ll never forget how it went. Everybody was united like diversity – the Japanese, the Chinese, the Mexican’s, the Afro-American’s all was there and they were having a happy time. That’s where you could, you know, get something to eat and have a place to sleep at. And then I found out

that the colored population at that time was 275 here in Salt Lake but they was living in East Millcreek Canyon out there where...like an Indian Reservation. They was all living in a hub out there until 1944 when I came back here.

**Rick:** How did the white people treat you in those years? You could only go in certain restaurants I guess.

**Allan:** You mean when I was a kid?

**Rick:** In 1937.

**Allan:** Oh here? You wasn't allowed in none. The only two places that I remember were at the Elks and American Woodland on 3<sup>rd</sup> West between 2<sup>nd</sup> West and Temple. That's the only two places we could eat back then.

**Rick:** On 3<sup>rd</sup> West and South Temple did you say?

**Allan:** Yeah it was between 3<sup>rd</sup> West and North Temple there.

**Rick:** How about movie theaters?

**Allan:** They had you go upstairs and I tried to go down and sit in the cafeteria but they told me I had to go back so I backed down and I didn't go up there.

**Rick:** And so tell me more about this group up in Millcreek Canyon. Was that in 1937 where this group was?

**Allan:** Well this group, their parents came with the pioneers in the valley, when they came here in 1846 and all back then. And I got a chance to meet some of the younger generation.

**Rick:** Were they African American did you say?

**Allan:** Yes they was African American. I don't know, some of them you couldn't tell what they were by the color of their skin. You could say they was Afro-American or they was Caucasian or they were half Indians or what they were you know? They had different tests for the color of their skin. But I know something was going on wrong somewhere.

**Rick:** Well in 1937 you were in Salt Lake City for 9 months, are there any other experiences or stories you'd like to share with us?

**Allan:** Well then I happened to meet a Mexican girl here that I had my eye on and when I got her name I told her "*I'll see you someday*". So I got a chance to see her and that *someday* was when I was in...I caught a troop train going down to Green River to bring a troop train back to Kearns and I had a pretty good captain who put some tanks on it and Shanghai'd back to Salt Lake City. Then we got married and that was a funny thing because you could marry a Mexican girl and an Indian girl here in Utah but you couldn't, you know, marry a Caucasian girl. My last wife was Caucasian that I married. I couldn't marry her even in 1963. I had to go to Elko Nevada to get married but I could come here and stay with her and raise my kids here.

**Rick:** Well now you were then in the regular Army, you were in your thirty's I guess at that time?

**Allan:** Late thirties.

**Rick:** Okay then tell us a little more detail how you got out to Camp Kearns and what that was about.

**Allan:** Well then they sent me back to Fort Benning Georgia. That's when I become to be in uniform and that's the first time I knew my skin was black, when I joined the Army. When I joined the Army they called me '*nigger*'. See in Montgomery Alabama I was adopted by a Jewish family. You know Levi Strauss that makes the Levi's? His sister Sophie adopted me to be raised up with her kin. And so in Montgomery I was raised up with the Gentiles and the Catholics and the Jews and whatever in Montgomery Alabama where we went to segregated schools.

**Rick:** And so you grew up with some affluence then with that family?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** And when you got in the Army that was the first time you realized that you had black skin huh?

**Allan:** I knew my skin was dark, you know, but I never did come in conflict with that hatred like some Afro Americans did in that city. But see Montgomery was something like a Cosmopolitan city. On the streetcars during that time all the colored had to go to the back of the bus (the streetcar).

But you as a Caucasian, if you knew me you'd say *"Hello Jackson, Hello Aunt Sosa (they called my momma Aunt Sosa) come on and sit. But don't sit there by yourself"*.

**Rick:** When you were transferred to Camp Kearns you started to see some discrimination from the other soldiers?

**Allan:** Oh it wasn't so much of the soldiers; it was the Army that discriminated us. Kearns was absolutely discriminated. All the blacks soldiers had full barracks which was permanently parted and all of the white soldiers; they lived in their areas. They had their own mess hall, they had their own tents out there but the Captain, an official Officer, was white. He slept in the same barracks we did. Now we couldn't go to the PX with the white. We couldn't go to the service club but they could come down to the mess hall and do whatever they wanted to.

And so after I got out of the hospital they made me MP. That's where I met John Agar in the Veterans Hospital up here. I met John Agar when he was in the hospital at the same time I was and I happened to meet Shirley Temple and me and her got a chance to go in different wards and perform to the inpatient soldiers there. And then here come Dean Martin. I couldn't out sing him but I could out dance him!

**Rick:** You had a real interesting experience up there. You say you went with John Agar and entertained some of the patients?

**Allan:** No, his wife. His wife Shirley Temple.

**Rick:** And you went with her to entertain...

**Allan:** In the different wards in the hospital.

**Rick:** And what did you do? Did you dance did you say?

**Allan:** I tap danced. See I be a professional tap dancer in civilian life.

**Rick:** And so you got to know Shirley Temple and John Agar both pretty well then?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** Did they treat you okay?

Allan: They treated me just like anybody else.

Rick: How interesting. What else, you say Dean Martin?

Allan: I danced with Dean Martin. I couldn't out sing him but I could out dance him.

Rick: Were there any other entertainers that came to Camp Kearns?

Allan: No, because when I become the VMP they sent me to Salt Lake. We only went back to the base once a month or so on inspection.

Rick: And that was it huh?

Allan: And we stayed in town until they had the race riot out to Kearns and then they called us back out there to see what was going on. But when we got out there it was all over. Nobody got shot and nobody got hurt. Now some heads were bashed in with bricks and rocks only because they were supposed to go to Camp Kearns here and the only people they could go for were either black or white so they didn't want nothing to have with us black soldiers and so that started it.

Rick: So they had a race riot out there at Camp Kearns?

Allan: Yes, it was in airport number two at Camp Kearns. Benjamin Hope Davis – the old man from World War I came out there and had a talk and they got together with Hill Field and some of the hierarchy's from Fort Douglas and quieted it down and that's when the Army went Army-Air Force in '45.

Rick: And you, as an MP, were patrolling the streets in Salt Lake City, is that right? And did you stay at Fort Douglas or where did you stay?

Allan: No. We stayed in a special hotel. We stayed in a special hotel in Salt Lake. We could go into any hotel, any café we wanted to as long as we had 'MP' on. In '45 we could go into any hotel or cafeteria looking for soldiers and everything. But we couldn't eat in one and we couldn't sleep in one.

Rick: But you could go in and look for soldiers?

Allan: Yeah.

**Rick:** Where did the soldiers hang out in Salt Lake?

**Allan:** Well they had a USO up on...I think it was 2<sup>nd</sup> South and about 3<sup>rd</sup> East. The white soldiers loved to come down to the [black] USO because it looked like it was more fun there.

**Rick:** So they had a black USO and a white USO.

**Allan:** Yeah. They could come down to the [black] USO and stay all night and entertain us but we couldn't go to their USO.

**Rick:** And you had a lot of white soldiers coming because it looked like there was more things going on down there?

**Allan:** It was more foreign and they enjoyed it. You see on every Sunday before I come to Salt Lake to be an MP, busses would come out there and pick up the white soldiers and families would take them all night to serve them, to have dinner together, but the black bus never come to pick up black soldiers.

**Rick:** Well, where was the black USO located?

**Allan:** I think it was about 2<sup>nd</sup> South and 3<sup>rd</sup> East, right on the corner.

**Rick:** And it was quite away from the white one?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** What other experiences did you have as an MP in Salt Lake?

**Allan:** Well I got a chance to become acquainted with lots of people of different nationalities and different cultures you know and everybody respected me in that area for what I was. You know I treated everybody just like they was. See at that time the MP station was on South Temple and the old Lewis Brothers Station used to be on Temple there between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> South and there was what they called '*The Blue Cab*' where you could ride the cars for 50 cents about town. That's where we had to go to report every afternoon that we go on duty. We was supposed to leave the 45 [pistol] at the police department but we never did, we kept it on there.

**Rick:** They kept it on all the time?

**Allan:** Yeah and so we stayed at the hotel called '*Seiner Hall*' which is Jerry Seiner's Hall and I guess you know Jerry Seiner – he used to go to the C-Rancho Bowling Alley on North Temple. He owned that hotel during the war time and he didn't care who stayed at his hotel as long as you behave yourself and everybody behaved themselves because they had two rough looking beings in there all the time. That's where all of the colored soldiers and lots of the white soldiers come in there because lots of them was buddy buddy's you know.

**Rick:** Did you ever have any occasion having to use your 45?

**Allan:** No, no. We never did. Just sweet-talking to them. If you sweet-talking – you catch them and they're disorderly you take their booze away from them and call a cab and send them to the base.

**Rick:** Well that stuff's very interesting. Are there any other experiences around Salt Lake City (I'm sure you had plenty) but are there any others that you can think of to share with us?

**Allan:** Well after I come back here in 1949 as a civilian I had a wife and two kids here. I married a year and we was going back to Detroit and we got to Chicago and we had a two hour layover and the man come to us and said "*all the boys from Salt Lake City return your tickets in and come back to Salt Lake*" and I've been here ever since.

**Rick:** You've been here ever since and that was 1949?

**Allan:** 1949. And then I started to working. I come back and I moved on 2<sup>nd</sup> South among all of the people that I knew and at that time there was a detective named '*Dale Duncan*' and '*Gale Rogers*' and '*KD Lee*' who used to ride in a black pickup and they told me –

They said "*Jackson you back here to live*"?

I say "*yeah*".

So they made me honorary Mayor of 2<sup>nd</sup> South only because of my duty with the MP, you know, how I kept things in order down there. But then every Monday at my job I had at Salt Lake...first off everybody was LDS. Jacobson Construction was LDS, Paulson Construction was LDS. You know, everybody was LDS. No smoking, no swearing on the jobs you know. And so eventually I got off of that and I worked for Marsden Knudsen when they picked up the railroad track from Tooele Depot all around Fairview into Lehi by the turkey farm. I worked on a four-lane railroad hauling out there. And then I came back and got rid of that then I owned my own hotel on 2<sup>nd</sup>

South for a while. That's when I had to be really *'Iron Jaw Jackson'*. I controlled that with a baseball bat and a 38 special it was so rough down there.

**Rick:** What was the name of the hotel?

**Allan:** Babe Ruth Hotel.

**Rick:** Babe Ruth Hotel on west 2<sup>nd</sup> South?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** Was that a time when the prostitutes were active?

**Allan:** That was the *'Broadway High Society'*. That was the *'Broadway'* of Salt Lake City and I controlled it until everybody from far and near come in with their groups, you know, and they got out of control. And then they said, "*well we better close it down*". So they closed it down but what made it final was when they called the Bishop down there of the church, I don't recall his name. They tightened down and began to close it down.

**Rick:** Let go back, I want to go back to 1944 and '45 when you were an MP and just try to give us some more stories and a picture of what wartime Salt Lake City was like. What the servicemen did for fun and any other stories that you can tell us.

**Allan:** Well the best story I ever had was when the Army beaches was open – Sunset Beach was open, Black Rock Beach was open, the Great Saltair was open. We always went out there to find a form of recreation because they didn't invite us in the Old Mill. We couldn't go out to the Old Mill so we had to take off to the Great Saltair.

**Rick:** So even though you were an MP you couldn't go out to the Old Mill or any of the other clubs or the Wild West?

**Allan:** No, that was not my jurisdiction anyway but I mean a black soldier couldn't go to the Old Mill. The only place that they would go was – Missunders (sp) had a club down on Beck Street, North Beck Street just where the highway is now. We'd go out there and that's where we'd head on Friday night and then eventually there were two hotels here in Salt Lake for the blacks. That was the Hampton Hotel and then down the street was the Lone Stone Café and the Post Exchange Bar down on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> West and South Temple was a club. Finally, everybody went in there because he didn't care, he was there to make money because that's where all the

porters go and drink their little beer and such only they were from the railroad where you could always go in there. But all of the other places was off limits to the blacks.

**Rick:** Do you remember the Entrée New Club?

**Allan:** Yeah, that was on 2<sup>nd</sup> North – it was upstairs over there – oh shoot – the horseshoe place was there. It's a candy place now.

**Rick:** Did you ever have any soldiers that would give you a lot of trouble?

**Allan:** No, no, no, I never did.

**Rick:** So it was a pretty good job even though when you were off duty you wore your MP badge and your 45?

**Allan:** Yeah. Did I tell you some Italians would come in to town and they just had the same thing and I didn't have no trouble out there. They'd look for me when they come to town.

**Rick:** And these were Italian prisoners of war?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** They didn't have guards with them or anything else?

**Allan:** No they walked free. They walked free like me.

**Rick:** How about German prisoners. Did they have any German prisoners that could do that?

**Allan:** Not that I knew about, I never did come in contact with any but there was...they might have had some out to the base but I wasn't ever on the base but once a month.

**Rick:** Sounds like you had pretty good duty here.

**Allan:** I had it pretty good. That's why I became to be known over Salt Lake, you know, like I am now. You can go anywhere over Salt Lake and I don't care what nationality you are, people are always saying '*Grandpa Jackson*' or '*Uncle Jackie*'.

**Rick:** Can you give us a description of what Camp Kearns was like during the war years?

**Allan:** Well when you're coming in off of 600 West, I guess, you come in and here was the MP Headquarters and there was the canal going down this way. The white social club was up here; the black was way down at the end, down here. And on the main road you come around and you go up this way where you come into the warehouses and the transportation places and all was up there. And on the road when you come into Kearns off the number Two Train it said *"through this gateway is the damndest soldiers in the world"*.

**Rick:** There's a sign there like that?

**Allan:** Yeah and on the sign when you're going it says, *"through this gateway is the best soldiers in the world"*. You see two blocks down this way was the whites dormitory and right on to the white's dormitory was the regional hospital. That's where I had my operation and everything. But everything else was segregated out there.

**Rick:** Were there many black soldiers out there?

**Allan:** Oh was there? There was a lot but they was coming and going, coming and going. Not too many. I say there was more...as I ever counted there was 300.

**Rick:** And there were two sections – one for basic training and special training and the other was for...

**Allan:** Firing party, they wasn't going nowhere. My first Sergeant was Jack Garrison and I forget about Reese's name and my Company Commander was John Kelley. He was our Base Commander and when I look back everybody whether black and white that got discharged from Kearns got a job at Hotel Utah.

**Rick:** Both the black and white huh? They were all going there? Will you tell us about what the two areas of Camp Kearns was like?

**Allan:** Well over the railroad track there was a bunker where we'd go for rifle training and all. We trained by ourselves, the black soldiers, they'd go up and train by themselves. The only training we got was 45's, 38's and the M2 and M1. We never did get trained to throw no hand grenades or nothing like that. All the blacks parade by themselves, the white's parade by themselves and what we'd do – the main drag where we parade would go around outside the railroad track and come down in front of the headquarters and by this last street (by the service club) and then back down the corner and that's where we'd disband there.

**Rick:** Did you have black officers or were there only Caucasian officers?

**Allan:** They were Caucasian officers.

**Rick:** And then the second part of Kearns was deportation or holding?

**Allan:** Yeah, holding. Well the second part, they were there for basic training and all and then they'd be shipped out. But the one's coming in that had been overseas, they would come in and be reprocessed and everything and then they were discharged, they were gone. They were out of there.

**Rick:** So they'd come into Kearns and stay there for a while and get discharged?

**Allan:** Yeah. And see lots of them was coming in from different bases getting their basic training before they shipped out overseas. Black and white it was the same thing.

**Rick:** How many white soldiers did they have at Camp Kearns?

**Allan:** Whew, I guess it's pretty close to 5,000.

**Rick:** 5,000 and just 3 or 4 hundred blacks?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** When you performed with Shirley Temple, what hospital did you perform at?

**Allan:** The Base Hospital.

**Rick:** Just at Camp Kearns then?

**Allan:** Yeah. Because you see I was down there and they said I had sickle cell anemia. That's why I was there.

**Rick:** And did Shirley Temple sing for the troops?

**Allan:** She was dancing, doing her little routine, you know, and her little comical things to the soldiers and I would be...I'd come out and do my little tap dancing and they'd give me a tray and

I'd spin it around on my finger then I'd get up and tap dance. On my hands I had leather pads with taps on them and I'd get up and tap dance with my heels up in the air and played around, it was fun.

**Rick:** What do you account for your longevity? You have so much vigor and you have so much brainpower, what's the cause of that?

**Allan:** First I learned from my parents to love myself then I can love everybody else and stretch my hand out to them. I never seen nobody I hate physically. I hate some of their ways of action but physically I've never hated a man in my life.

**Rick:** So you don't hate anybody, is there anything you eat or drink that helps your longevity?

**Allan:** Well, I drank and I smoked for 72 years. Smoking – I never did inhale I just “*poof*” and blow it out. But food, I was never too fancy on fast food. I just like regular food and I eat everything on the table. I like pig feet, pig tails, pig snoots, ham hocks, and soft pork. You name it I eat it. I don't care too much about french fries and hamburgers and hotdogs.

**Rick:** Yeah those pickled pig feet are pretty tasty.

**Allan:** Oh back in those days they were tasty but now I like to boil them.

**Rick:** Well Jackson you've been just a delight, tell us when the war ended where were you and what happened and what your thoughts were on VJ-Day.

**Allan:** Let's see, what year was that?

**Rick:** August of 1945 in Salt Lake, when the Japanese surrendered.

**Allan:** I was on a 45-day leave. I had been missing [from home] for three years.

**Rick:** So you were on leave?

**Allan:** Yeah I was on leave. I was in Montgomery Alabama.

**Rick:** Well tell us what happened in Montgomery Alabama when the war ended.

**Allan:** Well when they told me the war ended I went out to where I was working, over to Macks Trail (sp) Alabama. I went out there with a bunch of soldiers I knew from back there and we celebrated at the Officers Club that night because we were so glad! Then I came back to Kearns and then in I think the latter part of September I bought a tour for three more years. I just wanted to make a career out of it, you know, to take care of my family.

**Rick:** Well now you've got 38 children is that right?

**Allan:** Yeah.

**Rick:** From how many different wives?

**Allan:** Seven.

**Rick:** And how many of them are from Utah?

**Allan:** Two. Well they're not naturally from Utah. The first one she was from (who lives up the hill) she was from Greeley Colorado and this other one she was from Palo Alto Colorado and the last wife number seven she was from Chehalis Washington that's between the twin cities Chehalis and Centralia just on this side of Mount Olympus in Tacoma Washington.

**Rick:** Were you married while you were in the service here in Utah?

**Allan:** One of my wives' divorced me in 1944 when I got in the regular Army because she wanted me home.

**Rick:** Can you describe what Fort Douglas looked like the first time you were there in 1937?

**Allan:** Well there were a few red brick buildings and then it had what looked like a mule's stall or a horse stall way back off toward the back of the mountain and there were a few little brick buildings there and all. And we were in a wooden structure two-story building and I can't place exactly where it was but I know it was coming in on the main entrance going into Fort Douglas.

**Rick:** Did they have that U-shaped turn like it is today?

**Allan:** No, no.

**Rick:** How about in 1944 and '45 – had it changed very much?

**Allan:** Oh yeah it changed greatly.

**Rick:** From 1937, tell us a little bit about what it looked like in 1944.

**Allan:** Well Fort Douglas was all brick structures and all and the Commanding Chief was more yielding to a man of my complexion than he was when I first came here.

**Elizabeth:** You said you took Pearl Harbor more seriously after it happened, can you tell us why?

**Allan:** Well, you know when they first said that Pearl Harbor got bombed I just couldn't believe it, you know, with such tight security on it. And all of a sudden it was the real thing and that's when I began to feel sorry for myself and for this country too. Because they got so close to us to destroy us and how did they get through that gap of security?

**Rick:** Were you aware that we might be at war with Japan before Pearl Harbor?

**Allan:** No. It was a big surprise. It was a surprise to this whole country. I looked at it during that time – we had a great relationship with trading state to state with Japan. Everything you looked at in the USA was made in Japan – Japan, Taiwan and China.

**Rick:** When you were here as an MP and even after, did you get acquainted with any of the Governors or Mayors of Salt Lake?

**Allan:** No, I didn't get acquainted with most of them, none of them. The only government that I got acquainted with was sister Olean Walker.

**Rick:** Okay, and how about Jay Bracken Lee?

**Allan:** Oh I got a chance to meet him a couple of times, let's see where was it? What's that hotel down there?

**Elizabeth:** Do you remember when they sold war bonds downtown in Salt Lake? Do you remember people doing things for the war effort at home?

**Allan:** No.

**Rick:** Well Jackson, thank you so much for sharing those thoughts with us.

**Allan:** I'm glad to be here to share them with you.

**Rick:** We will all be so lucky to be in your condition at your age and thanks again for coming by and we appreciate your comments.

**Allan:** Well take care.