

# Company Records Seniors' Oral Histories

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They call themselves "story keepers."

The Sun City-based company Visiting Angels has begun collecting the personal tales of homebound and infirm senior citizens.

Duplicates of those oral histories collected from military veterans will be turned over to the Library of Congress, which has been cataloging their service for several years.

The life experiences of other seniors will become part of their families' legacies.

"Families cherish heritage," said Greg Maasberg, director of Visiting Angels, which provides nonmedical care and companions for seniors. "You capture their stories. They become part of history. It's nice to hear people tell their stories."

Visiting Angels is working with hospices, senior centers, assisted-living facilities, the Veterans Administration and local chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to record oral histories.

Maasberg said that even people afflicted with Alzheimer's disease and short-term memory difficulties can often recall events from their long-ago youth, so recording their oral histories remains worthwhile and often poignant. The service is offered throughout Riverside County.



David Bauman / The Press-Enterprise  
Shari Ide, from left, and Greg Maasberg, both of Visiting Angels, greet World War II veteran George Allen, 84, at his Sun City home.

## A Veteran's Story

Maasberg and Shari Ide, the group's community liaison, sat down last week in the Sun City kitchen of World War II infantry Sgt. George Allen, who fought with the 4th Infantry Division, was wounded in Germany and spent eight months as a prisoner of war.

"I'm like an old sea dog," he said. "I've got lots of stories."

Over two hours, the pair guided Allen through a series of questions.

They gave him plenty of time and leeway to talk about his life before the war as a spray painter in Akron, Ohio, his time fighting with the 4th Infantry Division through France and when he was wounded by German shrapnel while at a forward observation post.

He easily recalled details of his training in the U.S., time spent in England before the Allied invasion of occupied Europe and marching across hundreds of miles of French countryside as a radio operator and assistant squad leader.

Allen, 84, talked about encountering American Gen. George Patton along a road in France, enduring a three-day artillery barrage that sliced through the trees above him "like a giant scythe," and seeing buddies blown apart by mortar fire. He was awarded the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, a Meritorious Unit Citation and a Presidential Unit Citation.

After the war, Allen returned to the Goodyear Corp., worked as a milkman and became an ordained minister.

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Allen laughed and cried and joked and choked up as he told his Army service story, emotions that Ide said often emerge during an oral interview. He was particularly reluctant to recount

Sept. 19, 1944, the day he was wounded. He spoke about it only after repeated prompts from the two interviewers.

Allen said the sit-down was the first time he ever spoke in such detail about his wartime experiences.



"God, this brought back memories," Allen said. "I didn't think I had it in me."

## Off to Washington

Transcripts of the interview will be sent to Washington, D.C., as part of the Veterans History Project.

The Library of Congress is storing recollections of U.S. veterans to gain as complete an understanding as possible of the thoughts and motivations of those who fought in combat or supported the war on the home front.

Visiting Angels isn't the only group collecting veterans' oral histories, and Ide said the company is just as interested in capturing the stories of nonveterans as those who served.

Ide recounted the story of one woman, a prolific pianist, who recorded her story shortly before she died. At the woman's funeral, a selection from her oral history was played.

"These stories are so wonderful," Ide said. "That's why it's important to collect them while people are still alive."



To learn more about the Visiting Angels "Capturing Life's Stories" project visit [www.visitngangels.com](http://www.visitngangels.com)

