

'If not for my dad'

■ Lt. Col. David Allen brings retirement ceremony to Willow Trace to be with father

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — "My dad is my rock," an emotional Lt. Colonel David Allen, Jr., told the crowd who had gathered at Willow Trace Nursing Center on Friday.

In an emotion-drenched ceremony that held patriotic tribute, military pomp, and poignant family memories, family and friends joined together to celebrate the retirement of a 20-year veteran of the United States Air Force. A decorated serviceman with a long list of accomplishments and accolades to his credit, Lt. Col. Allen ended his military career with a celebration that was more than a little extraordinary.

It was a celebration that paid tribute not only to a military hero who had served his country well, but to those in his life who had been there to support him along the way — in particular his father, David Allen, Sr.

"Retirement ceremonies are usually held on base," Lt. Col. Allen explained, "but I wanted to come here to be with my dad."

Before him, in his flag-laden wheelchair, the senior Allen sat watching his son, hands resting on the folded American flag that his son had presented to him just moments before.

Confined to his wheelchair since the accident that took his wife's life in March of last year, Allen has been undergoing rehabilitation at Willow Trace for the past several months. Although his progress has been phenomenal, he was not yet able to travel to attend his son's ceremony.

But on Friday, the U.S. Air Force brought the ceremony to him. It was a venue that would allow him to witness a moving tribute to his son and his myriad of accomplishments since joining the military in 1986.

A 1981 graduate of Choctaw County High School, the younger Allen earned his B.S. degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Alabama in 1986, and in May of that year, he received his commission in the United States Air Force. Later, Allen went on to earn a Master's degree in Administration from Central Michigan University.

His military career has primarily involved test and evaluation, acquisition management, and staff officer positions within the Air Force Material Command, Air Combat Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center.

As his first assignment, Allen was stationed at Edwards Air Force Base in California, where he served as Lead Radar Test Engineer in the Integration Facility for Avionics Systems Testing. It was during his first assignment that he led the effort to establish the first developmental test and evaluation ground-based F-16 radar test system.

In 1990, Allen was moved closer to his Alabama home when he was transferred to Eglin AFB in Florida, where he served as Project Engineer for the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air



Choctaw Sun photos by Dee Ann Campbell
In an emotional and patriotic ceremony, Lt. Col. David Allen, Jr., retired last Friday after 20 years in the U. S. Air Force. The ceremony was held at Willow Trace Nursing Center in Butler, where his father, David Allen, Sr., is undergoing rehabilitation.



Allen receives honor from the presiding officer during Friday's ceremony.

Missile program. He also served as Deputy Assistant for Operational Mat-

ters within that program's Joint System Program Office.

Colonel Allen was transferred to Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio in 1995, where he served as Program Manager for the \$70-million F-16 Unit Training Device program. In October of the following year, he was chosen to serve as Executive Officer to the Training Systems Product Group Director.

In 1999, he was transferred back to Florida where, among other duties, he was responsible for integrating and focusing all Air Force Material Command support for the Air Force Special Operations Command warfighter.

In 2002, Colonel Allen was transferred back to Eglin AFB where he would achieve one of his most prestigious accomplishments. He served as Test Manager for the \$1.2 billion Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures Program. While working with the program, he successfully achieved Initial Operational Capability of that system. His efforts provided protection for the

C-17 fleet against the infrared missile threat in Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror. He later led efforts to assist the Department of Homeland Security in developing a similar system for civilian aircraft.

Most recently, Allen served as Chief of the Electronic Warfare Division at Eglin, where he directed test and evaluation efforts for over \$6.4 billion in electronic warfare programs.

Throughout his career, Lt. Col. Allen has received numerous military decorations including the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Air Force Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Medal, and the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. He has twice been honored as Company Grade Officer of the Year, has earned the Training Systems Product Group Director's Award for Excellence, and the Tester of the Year Award, to name a few.

During Friday's ceremony, Air Force officers praised Lt. Col. Allen for his accomplishments, honoring him with accolades for his service. Included in the accolades were proclamations by high-ranking Air Force officers, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, as well as President George W. Bush.

The ceremony included a tribute to his wife, Dana Cooper Allen, and his children, Josh, 16, and Kate, 15, as well as other members of his extended family, including his sisters Paula, Cheryl, and Janet and his wife's parents, Gary and Lillie Copper, of Butler.

In a moving tribute, Lt. Col. Allen offered roses in memory of his mother, the late Esther Allen, and his step-mother, the late Geraldine Allen.

As the ceremony drew to a close, Allen paused again to honor the man he credits as the source for his success, his strength, and his faith.

"He's been my teacher, my leader, and my friend," Allen said, nodding toward his father whose hands were still folded on the American flag in his lap. "He's the strongest person I know."

"I wouldn't be where I am today," he added, "if not for my dad."



Photo by Teresa May
Lt. Col. Allen is pictured with his father, David Allen, Sr., his son Josh, wife Dana Cooper Allen, daughter Kate, mother- and father-in-law, Gary and Lillie Cooper.

■ Tommy

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