

**An Interview with Dr. Stan Alluisi, Faculty Member and Veteran
at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, with Dr. Tara Hembrough**

-- Interview conducted in 2015

TH: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your military background?

SA: Okay. I went to the University of Maryland, graduated in 1980 in ROTC. I went to the ROTC program there. I was commissioned in December of 1980 and went active duty in 1981. I was a weapons controller, which is a person who watches the radar scope and directs the good guy dots against the bad guy dots. I went to school during the first summer at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. I then went to Tinker Air Force Base, where I spent most of the rest of my career as a weapons controller for AWACS, Airborne Warning and Control System, which you can see behind you. I did that for a couple of years and then became an instructor weapons controller. I then applied for and was accepted to and went to undergraduate navigator training to become a navigator in 1984. I came back to Tinker in the spring of 1985 and was an instructor navigator.

In August of 1990, I had a permanent change of station to Saudi Arabia. I got there just in time for Desert Shield and Desert Storm and was flying with the Royal Saudi Air Force. Our squadron was made up of instructors of each crew position, and we would fly with the Saudi instructors, so we were sort of the “adult supervision.” We were there because we were experts, and we were there to help their instructors teach their students because they had six E-3 AWACS and eight KE-3 tankers. During the war, we were flying with Saudi airplanes, so we were actually flying with the Royal Saudi Air Force crew. I left the kingdom in late November and came back to Tinker and took a bonus to get out because after the war draw down and the Cold War draw down, I elected to take the money and run rather than risk getting kicked out for less money.

With veteran status, I came back and had a small business with a friend, which I later left due business disagreements with my friend. I went back to school in the summer of 1993. I went to Oklahoma State and got my Master’s and started my Doctoral work and graduated in December of 1997. I worked for OU (University of Oklahoma) Health Sciences for a while as a computer geek. I then got the job here in fall of 1998. I’ve been here ever since, and the rest, as they say, is history.

TH: Why did you want to come back here and take this job at Southeastern?

SA: I was willing to take almost any job at that point. I just graduated. I had actually applied earlier. A friend of mine had been with the government and the Defense Mapping Agency, now the National Mapping and Imagery Agency, and I had applied with them, and they had a hiring freeze. Once I graduated, I wasn’t able to get a job; there were no openings at Oklahoma State, where I would have been happy to stay. I was just looking for a job and took the job as a accident almost with the OU Health Sciences Center; a friend of mine was in charge of the computer services and asked if he had any job openings, and literally he had a job opening as a computer lab monitor, which meant you got to put paper in printers and help people log on. This was over Christmas break, so everyone was gone. I just did that. I was a brand new EDD, and my co-worker was a Chinese M.D., working on his Ph.D. in biostatistics in epidemiology, so we had

two doctors working there as lab assistants. That turned into a Help Desk job, and I was literally just waiting for a real job. My former boss at OSU moved down here, and he was looking for somebody and mentioned it to me. I came down and applied. It's turned out to be a good gig.

TH: Can you tell me about any experiences with student veterans? I'm interested in classes they like being together, if they seem to find each other in classes, if they like to hang out together after classes.

SA: I think, in general, I have found that veterans tend to find each other and stick together. Although one of the things I've noticed as I spoke with Dr. [Virginia] Parrish's class is that the question is "What's a veteran?" A friend of mine was in the last group to be drafted at the end of the Vietnam War. His philosophy was the Army didn't really want him, and I don't really want the Army. How do I get out of this as painlessly as possible? Instead of doing two years of active duty, he did six years of National Guard. He just became a cook because he realized that they got there early, but they left really early. He's a veteran, but all he did was show up and cook food. At the same time, you have someone who comes back and is missing a limb and saw all sorts of horrible stuff. They're both veterans. It's such a huge term. You can't just say they're all one thing. I've seen this even in ROTC when there were guys, who were prior enlisted, they got out of high school, went to a couple of years of active duty, then came off active duty and went to school. I've noticed typically as a group, they are more mature, more focused, more dedicated to getting their education; they're less willing to put up with bullshit.

At the same time, the good story is a guy, who came in this morning; he's just one of those guys that when you meet him, you know he's sharp, he's really on the ball, got through the flight course with almost the minimum number of hours, send me more of that guy. Then I had another person, who was in the Marine Corps. Usually when I meet vets or they tell me they are a veteran, I think, "This person is going to be sharp or on the ball, and I won't have to worry about them," but this other guy would show up to class the first few weeks, and then you wouldn't see him and couldn't get a hold of him. I was driving up Highway 75 from the airport to go to class, and someone's tailgating me. There's no one on the highway, so I pull over to the left lane, and he pulls over behind me. I pull over again, and he pulls over behind me. I exit at Washington, and the guy is right behind me. I turn left, and he's right behind me. I finally just pulled over and stopped. He pulls up behind me and stops and gets out of his vehicle. Now, I'm worried about road rage. It's my student, and he comes up to me, and he has his VA form he needs me to sign, so he can get his VA payments. He won't show up to class, disappears and won't return phone calls or emails, but he will track me down on the highway to sign his VA form.

TH: And that's how you get the financial aid, right?

SA: Yeah, and he's also the same student, who holds the record to the best of my knowledge for taking an accounting course eleven times before passing it. He was the guy, who was a zero; he would disappear and then show back up with another excuse. He says, "Yeah, I should have called." Yeah, he should have, but he didn't. He was the opposite end. Every veteran has to have a DD214 discharge form; it will tell when you were discharged and what kind of discharge you

had like honorable discharge, less than honorable, or dishonorable. I often wonder what his said because he was the worst vet student I ever had.

TH: Would their funding be different if they got dishonorably discharged?

SA: If he got a dishonorable discharge, he wouldn't be able to get funding. There is also general discharge, and sometimes it's just to get rid of a guy. The point that I make is for the most part that they are better students and more motivated, but that's not always the case. I have not had any students, who have the horror stories, who are the stereotyped Hollywood psycho returning war vet; never had any of them. We've had any number of vets. We have about three or four at least, and that's the other thing. In general, I have no way of knowing that they are veterans unless they tell me.

TH: In your classes, do you tell students that you are a veteran or not?

SA: It tends to come up. I started showing a slideshow for my orientation students, and I basically start from being born a poor white child in Baltimore in 1957, and just sort of go through some of the big events in my life. I mention my college career. I show them actual slides of my transcript, which shows that I was a very mediocre student at best as a motivation. I do mention my military background and other stuff just to let them know who I am and what's going on. Hopefully, they will find one or two things in there that will help them make a connection.

TH: Do we have ROTC here?

SA: Unfortunately, no, not here. There was going to be a program the Guard called the GOLD program, which would sort of be like an ROTC program for the Army National Guard, but they ended up not getting funding. We also lost two students because they wanted to go into flying, but they had to go to a place with ROTC, so we lost two students to OU.

TH: What's your opinion of a class with veteran students and non-traditionals? Are they going to like being with the non-traditional students?

SA: I think they would like something where they can meet and gather with other vets, even the opportunity to get together. You see all the people around with VFW vet hats, and there are some people where that represents only three or four years of their life, but that's something they connect with their whole life. It defines them. Other people are more like, "No, I did that, and that was part of my life, but that was twenty years ago." Some of them may be interested, maybe even a significant number. They may feel that if they have to take English Composition, maybe they would rather do it in this venue [of being in a military cohort]. If they don't want to be in this section, they don't have to be. As for non-traditional students, if you define them as older students, especially those that come back to school, typically I find most of those people, since they are paying for it themselves, are a little more focused and less likely to put up with b. s. Older students and veterans may have some common cause there. Some of the older vet students may also be married and have kids. Of course these days, more and more female vets, and you get that. It can be good and bad, but it's mostly better. In the past, that was sometimes a little bumpier.

TH: Are there things that you've seen with your students that are active duty veterans that are coming back really having hard time in the classroom?

SA: Things like they are less willing to put up with not seeing their grades posted promptly, getting quick feedback. That's something I still have to work on. They are less willing to put up with it and more willing to let you know about it than other students. Younger students usually more easily cowed and more easily, "me teacher and you student."

TH: Is it because the younger students have been in high school recently, and they are still like, "This is the way it was in high school"?

SA: Yeah, they are still used to, "Sit down and shut up." I was that way through college. It wasn't until I was in grad school, and I taught class, and my feeling was there are twenty-five or thirty students out there, and they can take me; I'm defenseless, it's thirty to one. Then I thought about why are they afraid of me; I'm the man, I'm the authority figure with the grade. Military students are less likely to be cowed and take an "I'll do it later" mentality.

TH: What do you think about grades? Are they more willing to push you if they aren't happy with their grade? Are there more grade disputes with them?

SA: Most of the time, they understand. Here's the rules, follow the rules; they are usually good rule followers as long as they know what the rules are. Don't change the rules. Make it clear what you want and then follow that rule. Most of the time if they didn't do well on the test, they are usually introspective, like "I should have done more studying or something." Some of the students find it easier than others. Some students are working really hard to get a C, and other students aren't working hard at all and getting A's. That's normal.

TH: That's interesting because I have been talking to some students, and they talked about how in boot camp that they weren't allowed to ask questions and talk without permission, but they are not willing to put up with papers coming back slowly.

SA: We have had several students, who went to boot camp or officer training school. The whole point there is to be broken down. You go in as an individual, but you come out as a group; you are there to follow directions and do what you're told. Some of the vets I've noticed, you tell them to do it, and they go and do it, and then they get pissed off when other students didn't follow the directions and either get extra time or you coddle them.

TH: They watch what the instructor does for the other students?

SA: Yeah, they wonder why that idiot didn't just follow directions.

TH: Do they say that out loud?

SA: Sometimes. Sometimes you can see it from the eye rolls. I've never had any open dissension of a veteran calling out another student. Sometimes you get some of that. It's usually more black and white to them. You told me to do this, and it was due this day.

TH: Have you had anything like veterans not able to see another viewpoint?

SA: I wish we could get something exciting like that in class. The closest thing we ever get to anything like that is in the law class where you have examples of the McDonald's Coffee Cup case, the lady who spilled coffee in her lap. There is a whole mythology built up around that case that people have bought into, like "That stupid [woman] shouldn't have been driving while drinking coffee," and "She wasn't driving but stationary. She wasn't the driver." During those times you get factions in the class, where some of the students get what the law is about and what happened, and other people, who say they were just suing to get rich. The military and other stuff, [the veterans might say], "I've seen in other venues what you describe, I may only be a couple years older than you, but I've been around the world, and I've been there, done that, and you don't know what you are talking about." As an instructor, it's kind of hard to say, don't just tell them to shut the fuck up, but tell them why they're wrong and tell them the facts and have a discussion. Telling them to shut up just shuts down the conversation, and the purpose here is to learn and to discuss.

I remember how easy it is to be cowed, and I was in ROTC, and there was a guy, who was a couple of years older than me, and he was a junior or senior and I was a freshman or sophomore, and he had been in the Army for several years, and something as simple as which cartridge the M16 fired, and I was saying it was a specific type of cartridge, and he was saying it was a different type of cartridge, which is fired in bigger weapons. I was pretty sure I knew which cartridge was supposed to be used, but he was older; he had been in the army, the authority figure. Today, I would have told him to shut the fuck up, you're wrong, but in that case, I deferred, and it was easy to stifle other people's ideas, whether they're right or not. There's not a clear right or wrong in some cases. I haven't seen that, but I could easily see it devolve into that. Most of the students we've had have been pretty polite, but I've also run into the not-so-polite.

TH: Is there something in the military they learned that from, or were they like that even before the military?

SA: Even in the military, you find people who are, we're a cross section of the country, but at the same time, you can easily see that there is a specific branch that can be very egoistical and the country right or wrong stuff. I had a friend, who was in missiles, and I asked him if he ever thought twice about having to turn the key. His initial response surprised me; he said he didn't give a shit. He said if they told him to turn the key, he would turn the key. He didn't have second thoughts. At the same time, that's why we have deterrents. They need to know that we have crazy people, who will do it if we say to. Basically, there were people like that, who were unthinking, unflinching. At the same time, you will have philosophers in the military and who those are artists. I've seen both sides. There were certainly some tendencies to baser instincts.

TH: You wonder about if that group being all together is fostering that tendency.

SA: The military is supposed to be a microcosm of society. However, we are a separate culture in many respects. In many ways, we are a strange subset of culture. It used to be more racialized, but you have a group in the military that is more typically integrated both by race and gender lines, more egalitarian, where people move up by accomplishments, not because they know somebody. You have that sort of thing, and I think it's important to be integrated with other

folks, for both sides to challenge each other. I've had students here, who have barely left Bryan County. Then you have people who have been around the world three times. It's worth the risk in my opinion.

TH: What did you talk about when you went to Dr. Virginia Parrish's classes, anything that would help me?

SA: I just talked briefly about photography in the wars. I talked about how technology had changed, about the introduction of 35mm handheld cameras. Then I talked about the digital manipulation of images. Mostly I talked about technical issues, but there were a couple of vets in the class and mostly non-veterans, so I talked about what it was like to be a vet and how politicized imagery has become since WWII, seeing pictures of dead bodies, Vietnam, and seeing dead bodies again. I didn't have an agenda per se, but it was pretty general I thought, and they seemed pretty receptive.

TH: What about women and minorities coming in? Are they having a more difficult time coming into the classroom than white males?

SA: We haven't had that many. Mostly, it has been white male veterans, but we have one female veteran, who is also an amputee, which she got in a motorcycle accident. She just got picked up for helicopter training; she has a couple of tests to go. I've always found it fascinating that people, who are not in a position of power, wanting to do something will work that much harder to accomplish it. I've always had a soft spot in my heart for the underdog. My first wife was in the Army, and she used to tell me stories about the crap she would have to put up with. The mediocre man was somehow better than the best woman. The problem is there just not have been that many women or minority vets here. That's been a problem here even for just women in general. Some semesters, we might have one or two women, who are freshmen come to the Aviation Department and other semesters four or five. We do our best to support it. I think if a person of a less represented demographic was to tell me I was doing it wrong, I would be more likely to pay attention.

TH: What about Native American veterans?

SA: My biggest experience here has been with Native Americans in general. Most of the time, I don't even know they are Native Americans unless I have to do an EAR report on them.

TH: Have you had any veterans, who were Native Americans in your classes? Were they active duty? What was that experience like? How they might have thought about that differently or not?

SA: I don't recall specifically any of our veteran students that were Native American. Most of the students we get are not specifically from right around here. They're usually from North Texas. Here where the demographic is much larger, we're more likely to get African American students than Native Americans.

TH: Can you talk about what kind of writing you did while in the military and how that's different from academic writing? Reports, memos, documents? What kinds of skills people coming from the military have?

SA: Not very much. As a crew member, I didn't have a whole lot of reports to write. Probably the biggest thing I had to write was that they lost some pieces of equipment, and I got to be the outside investigator because I was outside the chain. This was at Tinker. I got to go around the base and see how the logistics system worked, which was pretty interesting. I determined that because things were so complicated, they couldn't determine if items had actually been lost, stolen, or misplaced.

Most of the writing I've done has been recreational. I've written articles for a newsletter of a Mensa group out of Oklahoma City. I was also the editor of that publication for a couple of years. That's really where I started doing most of my writing.

TH: Was that through the military or connected to the military?

SA: No, that was me. I did learn some stuff from the military writing book, the *Tongue and Quill*. It teaches you how to write a memo for record, how to format stuff, etc.

TH: Do you think that makes it hard for students coming from the military to write stuff for school?

SA: It's just that they haven't written much at all. Things that shouldn't be concise are too concise. Mostly you understand what they are trying to say, but they aren't doing a very good job of explaining it. It's not that the military taught them to write a specific way, it's that most of these people were enlisted people, and they didn't write much. When they write things, they know what they mean, but they find very ambiguous ways to describe it.

TH: If they wrote something like that, did it get sent back to be rewritten or not?

SA: That's what I try to do. Just about every class, I have has some kind of writing assignment in it.

TH: What about in the military, do they [written documents being created] get sent back?

SA: The problem I see is that, for the military, they didn't have to write very much. They wouldn't have got much feedback. Only if they were moving up the ranks and had to write reports, then they would go back and forth. It would be reviewed, but a lot of other stuff would just go off into the ether.

TH: Do you mind telling me your age please?

SA: I'm 57.

TH: Race?

SA: Caucasian.

TH: Do you have any Native American heritage?

SA: None that I'm aware of. It's all Italians, Sicilians, and some Irish.

TH: You were born in Baltimore?

SA: Yes. Born and raised. If you had told me I would have spent most of my adult life in Oklahoma, I probably would have shot myself.