

## **Transcription: Joe McPhail**

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*Good morning. Today is Friday, June 3, 2011. My name is James Crabtree. This morning I'll be interviewing Colonel Joe McPhail. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. Mr. McPhail is at his home in the Houston area. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.*

**Joe McPhail:** Sure. It is for me too.

*Great. Sir, the first question I always like to start off with in these interviews is to ask you just to tell us a little bit about your boyhood and your life before you went in the service.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it wasn't very interesting. I was born in Grand Saline, Texas. That's kind of between Dallas and Shreveport, on Highway 80. We moved around. My dad was tax assessor-collector of Van Zandt County, and Canton is the county seat. We moved over there from 1930 to '35. Then moved back to Grand Saline, then we moved to Tyler. I graduated from high school in Tyler in 1939. Then we moved to Corpus and he was with the Railroad Commission at that time. I went to junior college in Corpus and a lot of people say, "You mean Del Mar." I said, "No, it was junior college." It didn't last many years. But then, you know, in 1941, I had this civilian pilot training that the government sponsored that summer. And so, I got to fly and got hooked on airplanes. And while I was at Corpus, going to junior college, they had the naval air station and I got to see all these airplanes going, and the guys in their uniforms and everything. So, I was anxious to get in, but I couldn't get in until I was 20. So eight days after I was 20, October the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941, I was sworn in at the Allen Building in Dallas. But wasn't called active duty until the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, 1941, at the Naval Air Station, Dallas.

*Did you have any brothers or sisters?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. I had three brothers and a sister. No, I had two brothers and a sister.

*Were any of them already in the service?*

**Joe McPhail:** No sir. They weren't. Sure weren't. My older brother, who is four years older than I am, Hugh, he had TB, back in the '30s, so he didn't have to go in the service at all. And my sister, you know, she was born in 1910. And my younger brother, Larry, I was telling you about, he lives in Austin. He was born in 1930, yeah.

*And were your parents supportive of you going in the service?*

**Joe McPhail:** Oh, I think so. My dad passed away in 1940. But my mother, you know, she was supportive but she was anxious too. She told me to fly low and slow.

*So you sign up and you said they sent you to Dallas?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. It's what they called, during that time, was E-Base, elimination base. They just wanted to see if you could fly. So, you know, we flew 30 or 40 hours, I guess, while I was there. I was there nearly four months. I left there the 1<sup>st</sup> of April of '42.

*I guess at that time that was called Hensley Field. Is that right?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, no sir. It was the Naval Air Station, Dallas. You know, now, Hensley Field, was the Air Force's side. You know, they even had, well, I guess, Ling-Temco-Vought was even there. I guess then. I don't know. I don't remember. They are now.

*Now at that time, sir, the war was raging in Europe and there was a lot of debate as to whether or not America should get involved. In the back of your mind, did you think at some point we'd be in the war and you'd be part of it.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, yes sir, I did. I liked to fly so much that that didn't worry me at all. In fact, I was kind of looking forward to it.

*What do you remember best about the training? Was there anything that stood out as being particularly difficult?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, yeah, you know, instrument training is kinda tough. You know, you're in the back seat of a, you know, what we called an SNJ, a North American trainer, with a hood over your head. So it was pretty tough. But, you know, it was really good training. It got you out of a lot of trouble.

*I imagine, though, that there were probably quite a few guys that you went through training with that just didn't make it. Is that right?*

**Joe McPhail:** Oh, yes sir. Yeah, we had quite a few that didn't make it.

*Was there ever a point though in your training that you ever worried or did you pretty much feel confident throughout the training that you were going to get through it?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, you got those check rides and you always worried about 'em. I did get one down in a check ride and it was when I was at Corpus. He said, well, I wasn't doing the acrobatic maneuvers right. So, another instructor took me up and he kinda showed me how to do 'em right and so it wasn't a problem.

*So were you in Dallas then when Pearl Harbor was bombed?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, I'd been on active duty three days. I went on active duty on Thursday, December the 4<sup>th</sup>, and Pearl Harbor was bombed on the 7<sup>th</sup>, yeah.

*How did you learn about it? Did somebody tell you or did you hear it on the radio?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, yeah, we heard it on the radio. You know it was on a Sunday and we didn't have much going on on Sunday. So, we were sitting around the barracks and heard about it there on the radio.

*And at that point, what happened?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, they had us go around the perimeter of the base with a rifle with no bullets.

*Kind of a hasty reaction to make sure that it was secure?*

**Joe McPhail:** Sure, sure. You know they were worried about saboteurs and things like that. But, you know, we never did have a problem in Dallas.

*Sure. Describe then, sir, what happened at that point because, obviously, President Roosevelt gives his famous speech about going to war. A day that will live in infamy. At that point, people started signing up and people started being, the draft and that sort of thing. How did things change?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, there were quite a few airplanes they were transferring from the east coast to the west coast and nearly all of 'em came through Dallas. We were out there pushing airplanes around and helping refuel 'em and get 'em all ready. So, you know, that was pretty exciting to see some first-line airplanes which weren't much to begin with. You know, the Wildcats. I remember some observation airplanes that looked real weird that came through there. You know, it just increased the intensity of the training, I think. Trying to get you ready. You know, before the war, the requirements was to be 20 years old and have 60 hours of college. Soon as the war started, they lowered that to high school graduates. That was it, yeah.

*I should go back, sir. How was it that you ended up going into the Marine Corps and not into the Navy or the Army Air Corps?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, I went in as a seaman second class in what they called the Navy's V-5 program. That was requiring 60 hours and being 20. Then, after I left Dallas, I was an aviation cadet in Corpus. And when you go to advanced, you have to determine what you're going to do. And at that time, the Marine Corps was only getting' about 10 percent of the cadets. I wanted to fly fighters and I felt that if I could stand a better chance in the Marine Corps than I could in the Navy. I was afraid they'd put me in a P-boat or something in the Navy. So, in fact, before, a guy named Mangrum, he was big down in Guadalcanal, aviator, he was the head of the Marine detachment. And he asked, "Why do you want to go into the Marine Corps?" I told him, I said I wanted to fly fighters and he said, "Well, you stand a good chance." So I did, so I went over to Kingsville, you know, for my advanced.

*So how far along, sir, were you in your training when you got to make that decision?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, I probably had maybe, you know, maybe 150 hours of training by then. I had about 225 when I think I graduated, when I got my wings.

*Were you married during this time?*

**Joe McPhail:** No sir.

*Still single.*

**Joe McPhail:** Didn't get married until 1948.

*Forty-eight. Yes sir. So you go through your training. When is it that you finally hit the fleet and get shipped out?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, okay. After Corpus I went to Miami, to Opa Locka Naval Air Station and was there for what they call pre-operational training. We did some, what they call, field carrier landing practice. FCLPs. But we were doing it in this trainer, SNJ. And I also got to fly an F2A,

which is a Brewster Buffalo. At that time was a first-line fighter. You know, it was one of the ones at Midway. They had 'em at Midway, which happened in June of '42. They had, I don't know, 20 or 30 out on Midway and every one of 'em got shot down. They weren't very good against the Zero at all. But, after Miami, then they had me go to North Island in San Diego. I stayed there a little over a month. I got there in December of '42, and I went overseas January the 16<sup>th</sup> of 1943.

*Were you joined to a squadron at the point or were you kind of more like an individual augmentee, where they would send one guy here and . . . ?*

**Joe McPhail:** We were individual. We weren't in a squadron at all. There at San Diego. This is kind of a, what they call, a replacement draft. The second time I went overseas, it was about the same way. But you know, there was already squadrons overseas and we just went into the squadrons. I went to Samoa, is where I went. American Samoa.

*Do you remember the year and month that was?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. It was January of 1943.

*January of '43.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. And I joined VMF-441 that was a Grumman Wildcat squadron. They were furnishing pilots for Guadalcanal. So they sent a bunch over so we just kind of augmented the squadron when we got there.

*What was the name of your squadron? Did it have a nickname?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, no sir. Yeah, it does. Hold it just a minute. Just a minute. I have a patch on my flight jacket. The Blackjacks. Blackjacks. I don't think we ever used that term at all while I was there, but later on I guess they did.

*What were the men like in your squadron?*

**Joe McPhail:** The men? Well, they were all young guys just like me. They were probably about 10 of the guys that went overseas. We went over on the cruise line, Matsonia. You know, there were probably 50 aviators and only 10 went into 441. Then they had a dive bomber squadron there on Samoa. I think that was 242, or something like that. Then they also had another fighter squadron, 111, that was on British Samoa, which was just an island just west of American Samoa. But, you know, heck, our CO was a young captain named Waldo Meyer. The exec was a guy named Gaffney, William Lightfoot Gaffney. He was older than the CO.

*That's interesting.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, it was, yeah. You know, I think he was, you know, a reserve, and where Waldo was a regular at the time. But now, Waldo did make major later on, yeah.

*At that point, sir, were you eager to see action? Were you eager to get into the fight?*

**Joe McPhail:** Oh yeah, we sure were. You know, they sent a contingent up to a little island of Funafuti, which is in the central Pacific, about 700 miles below Tarawa. And, so, gosh, being

second lieutenants and not having much time or anything, so we didn't get to go until we went up there a little bit later. I think it was probably, maybe, April that the whole squadron moved up to Funafuti. That's F-u-n-a-f-u-t-i. Two words.

*Tell us, sir, about the first time you flew a mission there, in combat.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it really wasn't a lot of combat there. You know, I never did see a Japanese airplane the whole time I was overseas, 13 months. But we did run these patrols up a series of islands going toward Tarawa, you know, to keep the Japanese off of 'em. Our job was just to beat the Japanese to these islands. So we really didn't do it. We had one guy, a guy named Bill Boland, shot down two airplanes. He was on one of these patrols up there and just happened to see these, one was a Nell, they called it. They were down scoutin' out these islands themselves, I think, you know, to see if the United States was preparing them, yeah.

*I know too, later in the war, I believe it was, I forget his name now, one of the top-ranked Japanese general was killed when his aircraft was shot down by American . . .*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, that's right. He was an admiral.

*That's right, admiral.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, Yamamoto.

*Yamamoto, that's right.*

**Joe McPhail:** That was really an interesting, I read a lot about it. You know, they used the P-38s and they were flying out of Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. But, you know, heck, the Wildcats they had down there and what we had just didn't have the range. We, heck, you couldn't go 300 miles and then come back. So they had those belly tanks on the P-38s and they were able to go up there. And that was really a feat, I think. The timing and everything.

*I think they had gotten some codes too where I think they kind of knew. They knew where he was going to be in general, what his plan was going to look like and were able to take him out.*

**Joe McPhail:** And they knew that he was pretty punctual too. He was an on-time guy, so it really worked out good for 'em.

*That's right. What were your living conditions like there? Did you have pretty good food and mail, and things of that sort?*

**Joe McPhail:** No, we really didn't. The food wasn't all that great so we got a lot of, oh, what we call mutton, from Australia and New Zealand. It wasn't very good. It really wasn't. You know, they had a lot of beans and stuff like that. You know, naturally, they didn't have any kind of vegetables or, you know, milk, or anything like that.

*Nothing very fresh, I guess.*

**Joe McPhail:** No, nothing very fresh. Sure wasn't. We were pretty remote place. But, you know, young guy, they can put up with a lot. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

*Sure. Did you get much news of kind of what was going on in the big picture of the war? That sort of thing?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, yes sir, we did. You know, I even got me a radio, kind of a, it was called Hallicrafter, was the make. It was kind of a shortwave deal. You know, sometimes you could pick up San Francisco.

*Wow. So you could get a little bit of news that way too?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, that's right, sure could. So it was interesting to kind of follow what was going on. We, like I say, some of our guys, early when I went over there, went to Guadalcanal. I knew several of 'em, and you know, we were always anxious to hear how the going was down there. When I first got over there, one time we were in kind of a recreation room. They had a pool table and everything. We were messing around, young guys, and somebody said, "You know, if the Marine Corps knew it, we'd pay them to let us fly these airplanes." A guy, Art Neff, who'd been to Guadalcanal, he says, "You wait'll you get a few arrows in your ass and you'll think you're grossly underpaid."

*I imagine that's right. Did you get much in the way of letters or packages from back home?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. Pretty often, yeah. My brother worked for the Tyler Morning Telegraph paper, and he, you know, hunt and pecked on the typewriter. And, you know, they had this, they called it V-mail I believe it was.

*That's right, yeah.*

**Joe McPhail:** And you know it looked like most of his letters had been censored, although they hadn't. He was scratching out either thoughts or misspelled or something. But now and then my mother, you know, she'd always send me, and it was good to get those correspondences, yeah.

*So at some point during the war, did you have a pretty good feel that our side was winning, that the Japanese were being pushed back?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, yes sir, I think so. You know, after all that went down at Guadalcanal and then they landed on Tarawa in November of '43, and, like I say, they'd come down and bomb us, you know, nearly every moonlit night. And they were coming down from Tarawa and the Marshalls also with Kwajalein and up in there. But, you know, that Tarawa thing was really a tough tough thing. It's like so many of 'em were. Like Peleliu for one and Iwo. But, you know, I just felt that if we can take those places, we can take anything.

*What was the typical, if there was such a thing, a typical day like for you? Would you fly a mission every day or every other day?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes, probably more like every other day is what it was. You know, we had about, oh, 40 guys in the squadron and probably only had 20 or 24 airplanes most of the time. But sometimes when they'd come down and bomb the strip there at Funafuti, they'd tear up our airplanes and they'd have to repair 'em and get 'em in the air. You know that Wildcat airplane, the first one, the F4F, was a pretty primitive airplane, it really was. It didn't have any kind of hydraulic system, and you know, you crank the gear up and you crank the gear down. It didn't

have a starter. You fired a shotgun shell. The breech was in the right wheel well, and it would spin the prop around, and you know, most of the time would start it but sometimes it would take several shells.

*Wow.*

**Joe McPhail:** And then just so many other things. We used to laugh. They'd take off, the first flight in a Wildcat, and you know, you have your right hand on the stick and the left hand on the throttle, and as soon as you get off then, you switch from your right hand to the crank for the gear, and the left hand is on the stick. And so you'd see a guy, he'd been cranking the gear up and the stick would move back with each crank. You know, he was kind of like a porpoise after take-off, yeah, but you finally get used to that.

*Was that your favorite aircraft to fly or were there others?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, no, later I got to fly F4U Corsairs, and that was my favorite.

*I didn't know if there any sentimentality attached to particular aircraft.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, there was to the Wildcat. It was, it was, you know, it was the first-line fighter that we had, the Navy and the Marine Corps. And it was big, you know, down on Guadalcanal until about '43. But, yeah, it just wasn't the airplane that the Corsair was. You know, the Corsair had a lot of power, and, you know, it had speed and altitude and everything else.

*So then, at what point, sir, where were you, to jump ahead a little bit, where were you when the atomic bomb was first dropped on Japan?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, I was at Peleliu, yeah. You know I went overseas again. I came home in February of '44, and then I volunteered to go back in January of '45, and ended up in Espiritu Santo, which is about 500 miles east of Guadalcanal, and joined VMF-323, the Death Rattlers, who had been overseas about four or five months then. But, and then we ended up, you know, going to Okinawa, and in Okinawa I went ashore on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and D-Day was April the 1<sup>st</sup>. I was on the LST since I'd just joined the squadron. The old guys got to fly, so it took 38 days in this LST to go from Espiritu Santo to Okinawa, but we stopped at Ulithi for, oh, three or four days, had a big anchorage there. So we set down southwest of Okinawa and Kerama Retto was a group of islands. We stayed there for actually six days, and one of the other squadrons, there were three squadrons there at Kadena on Okinawa. The 322-LST got hit by a kamikaze while we were down there, and it burned up all their gear and everything so the two other squadrons had to kinda share squadron gear with 'em. But, like I say, we got to the beach on the 6<sup>th</sup> and got ashore on the 7<sup>th</sup>. And I stayed at Okinawa until the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, and then they sent a bunch of relief pilots in, and so they sent us then, hadn't been overseas very long, to Peleliu. And so that's where I was when they dropped the bomb.

*At that point, sir, were you guys beginning to make preparations for an invasion of the mainland of Japan?*

**Joe McPhail:** Not really. You know, I think we were gonna be involved but I didn't know of any special preparations.

*What was your reaction when you heard the bomb was dropped? Was that a, I'm sure it was complete surprise.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it was a complete surprise. You know, they really kept it hush hush but, you know, we thought it was great. We were getting kinda burnt out.

*Yeah. And then shortly after, after the second bomb was dropped and Japan surrendered, tell us what V-J Day was like for you.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it was exciting, and there wasn't any big deal like, you know, in Okinawa they claimed that they fired all the weapons and guys were getting shrapnel falling down from the sky, and all that kind of bit. We didn't have that but it was, you know, you had a beer or two.

*I imagine it had to have been just a great euphoric feeling.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it really was, you know. The war was less than four years old but it seems like it was a long time, yeah. It really did.

*A long way from home too.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, that's right.

*At that point, how long was it before you were able to actually come back home?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it was in September, you know, actually after they signed on the Missouri there in Tokyo Bay, that I left Peleliu and went up to Guam. And I had to sit there about two or three weeks waiting for a ship to go home. You know, they had a point system, and I thought I had pretty good points but it wasn't enough to get, especially an airplane. You know, I went over on a ship and back the first time, and I went over on a ship and back the second time, and then even going to Korea I went over on a ship. But I finally got to fly home from Korea.

*Tell us, sir, what that was like when you finally got home and were reunited with family.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it was neat, yeah. Oh heck, everybody was, you know, it was a big deal for the whole world I think, for the thing to end. It had been pretty tough on a lot of people, and even the people at home, you know. They didn't have tires or gasoline or butter or anything.

*Sure, all the rationing.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, it was pretty exciting, sure was.

*And then at that point you remained in the Marine Reserves? Is that right?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir, I did. Yeah. I didn't, I wasn't active at all and I should have been but I wasn't. I went to school at SMU there in Dallas in '46, in the fall of '46, and I graduated in '48.

*And that's when you said you got married. Did you meet your wife in college?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, no. I met her at Cherry Point, North Carolina. She was a Marines master sergeant.

*Interesting.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, isn't that something? She was tower operator there at Cherry Point, and I met her and we dated a couple of times. But when I moved to, when I got off active duty, I went to Dallas to go to school, and so she got off active duty and went to work for Delta Airlines. So she moved to Dallas so we were able to get together again.

*That's great. Was she at Love Field then at that time? Delta Airlines at Love Field?*

**Joe McPhail:** No sir, she was in the reservation system, you know, downtown.

*So then to jump ahead a bit, when the Korean war starts, do you think that you're going to be called up or do you think that's something that's going to bypass you?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know I just didn't even consider anything like that at all. I went to work in Tyler for this John Young, it was a Ford dealer. And one day there was a guy came in there, a guy named John Reeder, who worked for Ford in Dallas, and he said, "You know, you ought to come get in the squadron. We need some guys." And I said, "Okay, I'd like to do that." So in May of '50, I went to Dallas and was, you know, in the squadron 111, VMF-111 then. And so I got to fly about two or three hours that weekend, and then the next time that the squadron 111 went to Cherry Point, North Carolina, on two weeks active duty, well, heck, I couldn't get off and so I didn't get to go. Well, when they came back, the Korean War had started, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June. And so, yeah, I sure didn't expect that and I didn't have a lot of time. You know, I didn't fly any from 1946 to 1950, yeah. But I still stayed in the Reserve. You know, I've got a piece of paper here, I lacked eight days of having 40 years in the Reserve.

*Wow, that's a long time.*

**Joe McPhail:** You know, when I signed up eight days after I was 20, you know, from 20 to 60, so I lacked eight days of being in the Reserve for 40 years.

*When you did get called up, with your wife having been a Marine, could she understand better?*

**Joe McPhail:** Oh yeah, I think she did, yeah. She sure did. You know, that started, like I say, say, in June, and we were called up August the 1<sup>st</sup> of '50, went to Naval Air Station at Dallas and stayed there two or three weeks, and then went to El Toro.

*In California.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, yeah. She had to drive out there. Another wife, I think they kinda car-pooled going out there. Darn, my wife was pregnant then with our first baby, so they put us in a, no I guess that was the second time. I was going to say they put us in a quonset hut, half of a quonset hut there on the base at El Toro, and it wasn't very clean or anything. My wife didn't like that at all but we finally ended up getting us, renting a house in Laguna Beach. It was pretty nice. Have you ever been out there?

*I've been to Orange County. I went through some of my training at Camp Pendleton. I know how nice it is. I know El Toro is gone now too. They closed it down.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it sure is. I've been to Miramar a couple of times.

*Yes sir, I've been there as well.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, since they moved down there.

*Yeah, I never got to see El Toro but I have seen Miramar. And I remember Miramar when, as a kid I lived out in San Diego for a few years. I remember when it used to be the naval air station.*

**Joe McPhail:** Oh yeah. You mean . . .

*Before it was MCAS Miramar, it used to be Naval Air Station Miramar.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, that's right, that's right. That's where the top gun was. What I was thinking about was the one in San Diego. My mind's blank.

*Well, there's the North Island.*

**Joe McPhail:** North Island, yeah.

*They used to have North Island Naval Air Station, they'd fly a lot out of there. Yes sir. What aircraft were you guys flying then in 1950?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, we're flying Corsairs, yeah.

*Was that a lot different then, to go from the props to the jets?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, now the Corsair I'm talking is a prop.

*Oh, you're still talking about the prop Corsair, okay sir.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, you know there is a Corsair jet, they call it a Corsair 2.

*You're still in props, okay.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. And we did it all during Korea, yeah. Sure did. It was a different, a little more advanced Corsair than the one we had in World War II. It had a four-blade prop and a little more horsepower and everything but it was still a Corsair.

*And what was it they had you all doing once you got to Korea? What type of missions?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, okay. I went to, got there in October of '50, and it was at Wonsan, this was in North Korea, and I went in as operations, and I was a briefing officer. So I stayed in that for about a month, and then I went into VMF-214, Black Sheep Squadron, and started, but I flew some missions. I flew nine missions in the group in operations, when I was in operations. But then I started flying regularly when I got in 214.

*Any of those missions that particularly stand out to you that are memorable?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, yes sir. You know, we were supporting the First Marine Division in the Chosin Reservoir area. I remember, and I read a lot about it since. You know, there was a guy, I believe it was a Lieutenant Colonel Murray, that was in charge of a group that went up to Yudam-ni which is just kind of northwest of the Chosin Reservoir. I remember, you know we

would say, “Yudam-ni, you damn right.” You know, supporting the First Marine Division, that was a big deal for us. It was.

*I think that every Marine that’s ever gone to basic training or officer candidate school has heard about the frozen Chosin and the Marines that fought there.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, you know, I’m a member of what they call the Chosin Few. It’s a national organization and they have a chapter here with a guy named Jesse Harper that’s president. And he was, in fact, he was on Okinawa, and then also at the Reservoir. And they meet once a month, and you know, these guys, there’re probably 30 or 40 of ’em, and you know, boy, they just had a tough time.

*Absolutely.*

**Joe McPhail:** Every one of ’em has got disabilities of some kind.

*Yeah, it was really heroic the way the Marines fought through that.*

**Joe McPhail:** But they let me join because I did support ’em. But then, you know, my squadron, 214, had come off the carrier, and then I joined ’em and then we moved up to a place called Yang Po, which is up close to Hamhung, but then when we got run out of the Reservoir, they went back aboard the carrier. Well, a lot of the reserves weren’t carrier qualified so we went back to Japan and qualified aboard, did our field carrier landing practice at Atami. Somebody trying to get you, you think?

*No sir. It might be your phone. Nobody’s calling on this line.*

**Joe McPhail:** We went back to Atami which is near Osaka in Japan and did our field carrier landing practice. It was interesting. I think that I really felt after that that I could handle most anything the Corsair could give me. This guy that did our, was landing signal officer, was the first Marine to be a landing signal officer in World War II, a guy named Duncan, and he was real good and got us all qualified pretty quick, yeah.

*What was that like, the first time you actually landed on a carrier?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, it was interesting. It sure, sure was. Darn, we went up on a ship and joined the group off the west coast of Korea, and, in fact, we had to get on one of these, what they called breeches buoy, and go from the transport over to the carrier. While we were doing this, they were loading some supplies up front, and the cable broke and the supplies fell in the sea. But we were worried about it. Oh, it wasn’t a big deal. And so we, heck, the next day they had either all the airplanes on the hanger deck or all the airplanes in the air so they they’re letting us qualify. So we’d do what they call a deck launch, just get all the way at the back and, we were on a CVE, 118 Sicily, and it’s only 600 feet. But it wasn’t any problem making those deck launches, so we got our six landings. So the next day I went to, and then they come around and say, the first time, you know, you’re a little apprehensive. But, you know, the LSO tells you what to do and if you can do it, well, you don’t have a problem. So I didn’t get any wave-offs or anything, at least I walked away from ’em. But, you know, I have a story to tell. The next day I was goin’ on a mission and so we had to do catapults with other airplanes on the deck, on the flight deck, and all the ordnances you were carrying, this airplane couldn’t get near, and so they had to do

catapults. So I taxied, they taxied me over to the port cat and hooked me up to the cat and gived me the off-brake signal, and we set there and watched them shoot a guy off on the right cat. So then he tells you to run up to 30 inches and check your bags, then you go to full power, and then you salute him and away you go. So I come back from the mission and there's a big letters on the chalkboard, "McPhail a reluctant warrior." And I said, "What's this?" And they said, "You took off with your brakes on." And I know exactly what I did. When I pushed that throttle up, I didn't want that airplane rolling down that deck. It was purely unconscious. I would definitely not do it if I knew, if I was thinking. But just automatically my feet went up on the pedals, but it didn't hurt 'em much. You know, they can see the blue smoke, but I went anyway.

*That's great. Then, sir, after the Korean War was over, you came back to Texas and stayed with the squadron, the reserve squadron?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir. I sure did, yeah. I came back and I was having a heck of a time finding a job. So I went to El Toro for a while, and then I came back. So the guy that was the CO of the, well, it was the operations officer there in Korea was a guy named Earl Crow from Texas here, and he was CO of the Marine Air Reserve Training detachment in Dallas there at the air station. And so he said, "Well, heck, you know the exec up here is a guy named \_\_. He's got to go to Korea." And this was in '52, and he said, "Why don't you come up here and be my exec?" And I said, "I'd like to." So I went up there from May of '52 to May of '55, for three years. And then I got this job here in Houston on August the 1<sup>st</sup> of 1955, and flying for a gas transmission company here in Houston for 33 years.

*Oh, that's great.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, it was. It was for me.

*And you still stayed in the reserves?*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir, I did, but gosh, they got so much rank that finally they said, "Well, that guy's gonna have to get out." And it wasn't a bad deal for me.

*Yeah, because you made it all the way to colonel, right sir?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, yes but now this was later. I was a lieutenant colonel as I got off in '55. But then, like I said, I stayed in for three years, and, you know, guys from my company was wanting me to fly on the weekends sometimes, and I was in Dallas, and so my boss here, you know, he didn't say anything but he didn't like it too much. And so they said, "Well, we got so many lieutenant colonels that, you know, you're gonna have to get out." That was in '58. And so I said, "Well, okay." And so I went into what they call a VTU, volunteer training unit, here in Houston. And, you know, we'd go and meet once a month or so. We had some correspondence courses and everything, and that's when, you know, I finally got my 20 years of satisfactory service. And like I told ya, I wrote this letter to get out and this guy said, "Well, stick around. You're in a zone for bird colonel." And I said, "Well, cancel my request." And I stayed until, in that VTU. I'd go on two weeks active duty. A lot of times I went to El Toro, nearly every time. I liked it out there so.

*I don't blame you.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, right?

*Sure. Well, sir, I tell you, we really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us and share with us some of your stories.*

**Joe McPhail:** Glad to do it, yeah. Sure was, yeah.

*As we talked before the interview, you know Commissioner Patterson is a retired marine as well, and myself, and there's a lot of folks here that are veterans. But even people at the Land Office that aren't veterans want to thank you for your service.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, well, thank you.

*This program is just a small way of saying thanks and, in fact, in another couple weeks we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs as well as a nice letter and certificate in a commemorative binder from Commissioner Patterson. And then, ultimately, what this program is about is saving these interviews for posterity. We have archives here that go back to the Spanish land grants. We have Stephen F. Austin's original register of settlers that he kept in his own hand. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our idea is that these will be added to those archives so that potentially hundreds of years from now, people can listen to these interviews and learn something from them. With that in mind, is there anything that you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview perhaps a hundred years from now?*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, no sir. I wouldn't know of anything to say. Sure wouldn't.

*Well, I think hopefully if they listen to it though, they'll learn a little bit about your service, and I think they'd be appreciative of it as we are today.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yeah, right, okay.

*Well sir, I really appreciate it.*

**Joe McPhail:** Well, all right sir, I appreciate it too. Thank you.

*Yes sir. And I want to turn the recorder off, and then I want to get your address but I want to get it off the recording so that will conclude the interview. Again, sir, thank you very much.*

**Joe McPhail:** Yes sir.