

Transcription: Ralph Meier

Today is Friday, May 3rd, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Ralph Meier. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, and Mr. Meier is at his home in Austin, Texas, as well. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to join us today. Sir, the first question I always like to start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered into the military.

Ralph Meier: OK, I grew up on a farm out near Manor, Texas. I went to high school in Manor and after I finished high school it was about time for World War II to begin, and I took a training class through Mason Youth Administration at that time, and went to work in Corpus Christi as a machinist. I worked there for six or eight months I guess, and they were not giving any deferments, so my buddy and I decided we wanted to join the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps had some nice little 6x6 trucks with machines, little machine shops on 'em, and that's what we wanted to do. Of course as usual, the military decided something different.

So you were in the National Youth Corps when the war started?

Ralph Meier: No, I was working at a naval air station in Corpus Christi. Oh, the war started prior to my going to class.

OK, yes sir. So you went down to Corpus Christi and you were working down there, and then at some point you decided that you and your friends were going to go ahead and enter the Marine Corps.

Ralph Meier: Right, because we were going to be drafted anyway.

Sure. What was it that attracted you to the Marine Corps?

Ralph Meier: Well, they had these little trucks or these trucks with little machine shops. They did optics, a little of everything, small things, and since we worked in a machine shop that's what we wanted to continue to do.

Did the recruiter tell you you could do that?

Ralph Meier: Well of course. They promised the world at that time.

How old were you when you signed up?

Ralph Meier: About 19.

So you and your buddy signed up there in Corpus Christi. How long was it before they shipped you off to boot camp?

Ralph Meier: About three months.

And did they send you to San Diego?

Ralph Meier: Yes, we went to San Diego.

Was it by train?

Ralph Meier: Yes.

So tell us, sir, what your memories are of arriving at the recruit depot in San Diego.

Ralph Meier: Oh my goodness, I think we went through some in Mexico. We went through some of the mountainous areas. I think we avoided every city and wound up in Salt Lake City I remember and then we went on in to San Diego, and of course everything there was kind of out on the playground, all the tents and everything we stayed in was out on playground. We had no buildings, I guess it didn't have enough buildings.

Probably too many people going through there.

Ralph Meier: Oh sure.

I know the depot, because I went to boot camp in the late 90s and most of the depot was built in the 1920s but I'm sure with so many recruits coming through there they just didn't have enough barrack space.

Ralph Meier: That's right, I'm sure that's true.

So tell us, sir, what your memories are of boot camp in terms of the drill instructors and the other recruits in your platoon and that sort of thing.

Ralph Meier: We had a good DI. He was just a fine man. I forget his name or rank, but he was really good. We goofed off some and we went up to Pendleton for the firing ranges and all that kind of stuff. You probably did the same thing.

Yes sir. Except our drill instructors, they were good Marines but they definitely weren't easy on us. I'm sure your drill instructor was probably pretty demanding as well.

Ralph Meier: Well that's true, because you know, we were just raw farm boys, both of us, and they had to whip us into shape in six weeks, I think it was six weeks at that time.

Yeah, that might've been right. When I went through it was 13 weeks, but obviously you were at World War II and there was definitely a need for Marines. Did your buddy that enlisted with you, did he go to boot camp the same time?

Ralph Meier: We went the same time and I've never seen him since. I cannot find him. His name was Johnny Putnam and he said he was from Spur, Texas. But I've met friends from Spur and they did not know of him. His mother from what I understood owned a hotel or a motel there, but friends I have did not remember him.

So was he in the same platoon with you or did you get separated once you got to boot camp?

Ralph Meier: We were separated.

I bet there's a way to find out, sir.

Ralph Meier: I've looked on the Internet. If he's in Texas, I haven't found him.

Yeah, there's got to be a way that maybe we can help you with that in terms of the national records service should have it somewhere, should be able to see if we could request a copy of his records or something along those lines.

Ralph Meier: That'd be wonderful.

I know it takes some homework or some sleuthing to do it but I would think if he enlisted in the Marine Corps in World War II there's got to be a record out there somewhere.

Ralph Meier: It should be, right.

So when you get to boot camp, what are your thoughts at that point? Were you excited or were you kind of -- ?

Ralph Meier: Sure, we were gun-ho. I mean that was just the way it was then. The United States, we were in war and I didn't have a lot of education, but we could handle ourselves and we could do a job.

Sure, when was it that you found out that you weren't going to be able to do what you thought you were going to do in the Marine Corps? Was that during basic training?

Ralph Meier: Basically yeah. Of course we did all kind of aptitude tests and all that kind of stuff and they determined that I should go to aircraft mechanic school in Chicago. I spent about three weeks on North Island out there on guard duty before I went and took a train to Chicago and I went to aircraft mechanic school there at Navy Pier in Chicago.

So you must've scored pretty well on your aptitude test then.

Ralph Meier: I fooled somebody.

They don't just send anybody to be an aircraft mechanic. The odds at that time most likely they were putting most of the guys in the infantry and that sort of thing.

Ralph Meier: Well that's where most of them were needed.

That's right. So when you found out you were going to be an aircraft mechanic, were you disappointed or - ?

Ralph Meier: Not really because I loved to work on some kind of machinery. That was just an opportunity. It didn't do any good to gripe anyway.

Sure, so when did you graduate from boot camp? Do you remember kind of the month and year?

Ralph Meier: It was in early 1943 because I went in November the 2nd of 1942.

So sometime in early '43, and you said you had to do guard duty at North Island for a period of time.

Ralph Meier: Right, for about three weeks, yeah.

Where did they keep you? Did you stay in barracks there at North Island?

Ralph Meier: Yes, we were in barracks there at North Island, yeah. Undoubtedly that was about the time radar came out because they brought in an aircraft – we were there by a runway for aircraft and they brought in aircraft and they put one at each point of the aircraft, at the tail and on the wings and on the front, so nobody gets near this aircraft. And we wondered what in the world was going on, why this was so different. I think it was probably radar, I'm not sure.

You're probably right. Definitely something they didn't want the enemy to know about.

Ralph Meier: Well, they didn't want us knowing it either.

Well sure, I guess fewer people that know about it, the less chance the word was gonna get out. So when you went to Chicago, were you at Great Lakes?

Ralph Meier: No, at Navy Pier. Navy Pier was a large training center for the Marine Corps for aircraft mechanics, anything on aircraft, I mean from engines to propellers to hydraulics and whatever. I forget how long – I have the paperwork but I don't remember offhand.

I'm sure you spent some time there though, right, learning all the different things about being a mechanic I would think.

Ralph Meier: Right, you know, tolerances, high pressures, hydraulics, all that. Then I followed that by going to hydraulic school at 87th & Anthony in south Chicago. I spent six weeks there as learning hydraulics mechanics because the aircraft we worked on, most of them at that time, the landing gear and all of that, the flaps and all were operated by hydraulics, and runs under about 1500 pounds of pressure.

So you got to spend some time in Chicago then learning – I imagine by the time you came out of there, you felt like you had a pretty good understanding of what you were going to be doing as a mechanic in the Marine Corps.

Ralph Meier: Right, we didn't know at that time what aircraft we'd be working on, so we had to learn a little bit, well there's so much similarities from one to the other, until you get in the bombers or something like that. And Marine Corps doesn't have any bombers. It's all fighter stuff.

So where did they send you then after you finished all that initial mechanic's training?

Ralph Meier: I went to Newburn, North Carolina.

I know where that is.

Ralph Meier: A little old dirt, it was a dirt field, and we had trainers the first aircraft we received. We were just starting a squadron. I don't remember how large, but there weren't very

many personnel there at the time I arrived, just starting a squadron. We had a dirt air field and we built our own supports for working on aircraft. We didn't have any lifts or anything like that. We built our own out of 2x4's and what not.

Pretty much starting up that air field on your own, right? It's still a pretty rural area, but I'm sure at that time it was even more rural.

Ralph Meier: Well it was, like I say, we had a dirt air field and we couldn't fly when it was rainy, couldn't move aircraft.

Wow. And what aircraft did you work in primarily there?

Ralph Meier: Well, at first it was AT6 which is a two-seated trainer. The pilots were all crazy. They were 19, 20-year-old like we were. They'd fly, they'd bring fence wire in, they'd fly under bridges and everything else. We'd fly with 'em a lot, but we finally figured out they were crazier than we were. We put sandbags in the back seat and let 'em fly along. But it was great. Then we finally received our first Corsair's, gold-winged fight plane. Boy, that was something else because this thing was the real deal. It had 50-caliber guns on it and everything on it was hydraulics. The wings lowered because they use them on aircraft -

That's right. Yeah, that's a beautiful aircraft. And I bet especially at that time, and that was cutting edge technology, state of the art.

Ralph Meier: That's true.

And how old were you at this time?

Ralph Meier: Probably 20.

20 years old getting to work on that. It had to have been kind of thrilling I would think.

Ralph Meier: Oh certainly, but we couldn't fly in 'em because they was only a single seat aircraft. But you know, young guys, if we had an opportunity to fly, we'd fly. It was just fun.

Sure. What were your days like there at the air field? I guess you spent most of the day just doing routine maintenance on aircraft?

Ralph Meier: Routine maintenance, that's right. We helped each other, and if I didn't have a hydraulics problem, somebody was saying it's spark plugs or whatever on the aircraft, we'd go help 'em. It was just camaraderie, that's how it works.

And where did you live there? Did they build some wooden barracks for you?

Ralph Meier: We had tents.

So it didn't even have the wooden barracks yet, just the tents.

Ralph Meier: As far as I know, we never had [other than] tents while we were there. Everything, headquarters, mess hall, everything was tents.

You were probably there when they were starting up the air field. I would think that was the early days.

Ralph Meier: Sounds like it, yeah. We finally got some hardtop on our runways where we could at least fly all the time. They had to do night flying, learn night flying as well, and fly out over, because we were right there at the ocean, fly out over the ocean, but it was quite interesting. Every day was a new day.

Can you still visualize the Corsair's engine in your mind?

Ralph Meier: Oh yes, 18-soldier, 9 in a bank, 2800 horsepower.

I would imagine doing as much work as you did on something like that, that that sort of thing just stays with you, that you can still remember.

Ralph Meier: Oh sure.

How long did you end up spending there at Newburn?

Ralph Meier: I think it was about nine months. Then we moved up to Kingston.

Kingston, North Carolina?

Ralph Meier: Right.

I know where that is, too.

Ralph Meier: And we could do a little bit more training. We weren't there but about a couple of months and then we moved everything to San Diego to go overseas.

OK. Tell us, sir, about going to San Diego and the preparations for deploying.

Ralph Meier: We had aircraft that would go down or whatever and we'd steal all the parts we could, you know, for future maintenance, and we packed all this stuff up and we took a train. We loaded it all on trains and went to California. But that was the last we saw of that equipment. Somebody else got it.

I could see how that could happen, especially at that time.

Ralph Meier: Oh sure.

So you get to San Diego, do you know where your final destination is going to be?

Ralph Meier: Oh no, we didn't. In fact, we didn't know, I don't remember, all we knew, we were going overseas at that time. They put us on a small carrier. We were, I don't remember, it was very shortly, I mean after we arrived at San Diego, that we got on small carriers to go to Hawaii.

Do you remember the name of the carrier?

Ralph Meier: Not offhand. I have that information, but I don't remember.

So they send you to Hawaii, I imagine I guess to Pearl Harbor?

Ralph Meier: Right. We all floated there and the first thing you know, we were almost individually flying either a few in, anything we could go, we went to Midway Island, and spent about a year and a half there. But that was after the Battle of Midway. We saw the wreckage and all of that, remains from that battle because they hadn't cleaned it up. And our pilots flew, I don't remember, that's about 1200 miles from Pearl Harbor.

That's a long way to go. They kind of ferried you there I guess. You'd jump on different planes.

Ralph Meier: Right, the airfield, got us out there, you know, in the best way possible.

Were you a squadron?

Ralph Meier: Yes.

What was your squadron?

Ralph Meier: VMF-324.

Did you have a nickname?

Ralph Meier: Yeah, we had a nickname but I don't remember what it was offhand.

I'll have to look it up. So tell us, sir, about Midway because I know it's not that big of an island.

Ralph Meier: There's only two runways there, but we have a sub base there, the Navy was there, and we were there, and then we had a defense battalion that had 90 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, but most of it is just daily work, keeping things going, but that's when we got up to full strength on our squadron and our aircraft, so we were flying day and night and we learned how to make napalm in 500-pound bombs that hang under the aircraft. A bunch of GI's, we think of something, we figured out how to lay them – there's a 3/4-inch thick, bulletproof, or a protective behind the pilot, so we figured out how to fold that thing down and put two seats in it, which was against the rules. So we started with the first sergeant and worked our way down through the squadron, let everybody try to fly. So that didn't last very long. Somebody at Pearl Harbor heard about it and we got a cease and desist order for that. We goofed around, and we built little carts and what have you that we could get around the island on. Of course they give us women almost anywhere.

What was the island itself like? Was it pretty crowded?

Ralph Meier: Oh no, it really wasn't. It's large enough. Our squadron, probably 150 or maybe 200 with all our pilots. It wasn't too large.

In my mind, I've always thought of Midway as being a small island and thought boy, they must have had so many troops out there that the island would have felt kind of confining or crowded.

Ralph Meier: No, there's two islands. There's an eastern island and a sand island. We were on the sand island with the runways, but eastern island was where the sub base was. We'd visit those guys and get fresh milk.

What was your living conditions like? Were you in a barracks?

Ralph Meier: No, we were in Quonset huts. 16 guys to a Quonset hut. You could play pinochle all night long, what have you. Of course by that time, they had laundries and all this, so we didn't have to wash our own clothes.

I guess chow was pretty good?

Ralph Meier: Oh yeah. We had some of the best cooks. They made good ice cream out of powdered milk. Most people wouldn't even fool with that. I'm one of these fellows that gets along with whatever I have circumstances. We had guys, just like every organization, that get mad about everything and gripe and all that business, but what does it get you? It doesn't get you anywhere.

Especially in a situation like that.

Ralph Meier: And we had good officers. We had a Lieutenant Boshier. I think he lives in Corpus. I don't know whether he's still there or not, but he'd come by every Sunday morning with a Jeep, who wants to go to church? Who wants to go to worship services? So there were just things like this made a lot of difference in your relationship with the officers.

Yeah absolutely, that's an important thing, and I imagine I guess you probably had pretty good staff NCO's as well?

Ralph Meier: Yes, we did. We had a good organization and worked well together. We lost one aircraft. We had just done a maintenance, you know that 100-hour checkups and this sort of thing is periodic checkups for aircraft and how many hours they fly – we'd just done a major, we didn't do overhauls or anything like that, but spark plugs and all that stuff needs to be changed out frequently. But anyway we'd just done a workup on this aircraft and one of our majors took it up. It was right at noon one day, and so he takes off and it's just normal, and all of a sudden we hear, when an aircraft is in a dive, it overruns and it makes a lot of noise. All of a sudden this thing started, we hear this noise and we knew what it was. We thought he was playing around. Well he came right down through the middle of a hangar, and bearded it up for the tail, tail wheel. That was terrible. We dug that out and we found his body in pieces. But that's the only aircraft we lost that I remember in training.

Did you ever figure out what caused the crash?

Ralph Meier: Oh gosh no. Well it was all bearded down in the concrete. It just went right through that hangar. But it happened to be at noon, so we didn't lose anybody other than that pilot. Whether it was in teesle or whether the aircraft itself, we never did know, I never did know.

I would think probably something went wrong.

Ralph Meier: I would think so because I don't think he would do that intentionally, not a major.

Definitely not to aim at a hangar either. I can understand flying out somewhere by yourself, but I wouldn't think he would –

Ralph Meier: Right, no ocean.

Yeah, that's a tragic loss.

Ralph Meier: It was, and it really affected us because everybody liked the guy. He was a fine man. Of course you lose one of your, because our CO was a major, Major Lundley, so you don't have many majors in an organization.

Sure, that's right. How often would they fly? What type of missions would they fly, do you remember?

Ralph Meier: Well a lot of it they flew out to Guam or they'd go shoot seals on some islands. I don't know where they dumped their napalm. We'd make the dang napalm and fill the tank. I don't know where they practiced that. Then we had another thing we had was they had a fishing vessel, and every squadron or every group would provide three or four guys to go out fishing once a week, so we'd catch our own fish for the mess halls. I never did go because I'm not much of a fisherman, but we had guys that would go out and do that as well and catch their own fish, have fresh fish for your mess hall.

Did you get a lot of mail? I would imagine mail came through pretty regularly?

Ralph Meier: No, it was very seldom. In fact my brother was in Germany and was wounded and it was three weeks before I got a letter from my mother about it. The Red Cross, I better shut up, but the Red Cross never did much for us.

Yeah, that's too bad.

Ralph Meier: Well the girls had their vehicles and ran around with officers and we never did see 'em, which is probably just as well.

I've heard some folks complain about the Red Cross and how there were certain situations where they would charge for drinks and stuff.

Ralph Meier: I got off the ship when we came back from overseas, and here they were selling donuts out on the dock. And people give millions to the Red Cross.

Yeah, I've heard about that. I've heard about them selling coffee and things like that.

Ralph Meier: Other organizations, it was all free. We didn't ask for anything free, but I hate to pay for something where somebody else probably paid for it.

Exactly, I've heard some of those stories from other World War II veterans. You're not the first one.

Ralph Meier: I hate to condemn an organization, but -

So as a mechanic, what did you find to be the most difficult part of working on the aircraft? Was there any particular things about the planes you worked on that was troublesome?

Ralph Meier: No, on the landing gear retractor which is hydraulic, there's two lines. One line is pressure in and the other line is to relieve it. We had a kid that said oh, I can fix that. The aircraft needed one. You could take it off while the aircraft was standing still. You didn't have to jack it up or anything like that. We advised him he better not do this. Well, oh yes I can do this. So we marked the lines and everything, and he had reversed them. So when he put it on the aircraft and started the engine, well down went the landing gear on that side and it messed up the wing and all that. But I had two guys working in the shop with me, I was kind of over the shop. We all, when the CO had us all, why this happened, did the investigation, we kind of had, we all had the same story.

So did the guy get in trouble, or did you kind of cover for him?

Ralph Meier: No, I didn't cover for him. We were all in trouble, but that's the way it works. Everything's not perfect. We got by that OK. It didn't damage the wing too much but we had to jack up the aircraft and all of that.

What was your rank at that time?

Ralph Meier: I was a sergeant.

That's pretty impressive. How quickly did you pick up sergeant?

Ralph Meier: Well I'd been in about two and a half years, and I'd been in the squadron from the very beginning. When I got to the squadron, I'd just gotten out of school, so I was a private, but I guess I was fortunate that I was the first guy there.

Well you must've done a pretty good job though to pick up sergeant.

Ralph Meier: Well, we kept our nose clean. If you don't get in trouble, and overseas you can't get in much trouble because we had beer chips. I didn't drink. I smoked at the time, but I traded my beer chips for cigarettes. We had coupons, you could only buy so much. And the beer that they got overseas or cigarettes even was the worst, I mean brands. But you talk about smell of that Camel, remember that add they used to have that you could smell a Camel for a mile? That's true. We knew when a guy came from stateside and landed on ours, and he lighted a cigarette and it was a Camel, you could always tell it.

A different aroma I guess.

Ralph Meier: It did. It was terrible. But there's some people that used the stuff anyway.

Did you have a pretty good idea while you were there of what was going on in the world? I know you said mail wasn't very quick, but did you have kind of an idea of what was going on with the rest of the war?

Ralph Meier: No, once in a while we'd get some information. We had a paper, I think it was once a week – I have some copies of that – it would tell something, but that was already a week old. We kind of kept up a little bit but not a whole lot of information. We did night flying as

well but sometimes we were working 24 hours a day or in shifts. We divided up and we'd be working -

I'm sure every day was just like the next, it's 24/7 and there's no Sundays or holidays.

Ralph Meier: That's right, it was war time, it was tough.

I know exactly what you're talking about.

Ralph Meier: Fortunately I never shot at anyone, I was never shot at, so the Lord just watched over me through the whole deal. I was very blessed.

Were you still at Midway Island when the war ended?

Ralph Meier: In Japan, yes.

Oh, you were in Japan. Do you remember where you were when you learned that the atomic bomb had been dropped? Were you at Midway at that time?

Ralph Meier: Yes.

Tell us about that day if you remember it.

Ralph Meier: Oh, that was a joyful day. The war is over, the war is over. That portion of it where we were. That was just a joyful day. I think we just stopped flying and everybody just enjoyed the day. You get on your knees and say thank God, that mess is over with. Because we were sending pilots out every six or eight weeks. They'd train and we'd get a new bunch in and a whole bunch would go out and fly, go to some other squadron and be into the war itself.

Do you remember how you found out? Did they make an announcement or just kind of word of mouth?

Ralph Meier: I think it was kind of word of mouth.

I'm sure that news traveled pretty fast though.

Ralph Meier: And no radio, we had no radios or anything, so whatever information headquarters got or the field would receive, then he'd pass it down through the squadron.

I bet that news traveled very quickly.

Ralph Meier: Golly, don't you know it, particularly on those islands.

So then after the atomic bombs were dropped and Japan finally surrendered, you said you actually went to mainland Japan?

Ralph Meier: Oh no, I did not.

OK, I thought maybe you said you'd gone there. So you were at Midway then all the way up until the end of the war.

Ralph Meier: That's correct.

And then you got to come back to the States?

Ralph Meier: Yeah, our CO, since we were not needed, we got back to Hawaii. I mean every aircraft or anything of transportation, one or two, I flew back I forget, I was the only person on there other than the crew. We got back to Pearl Harbor as best we could, and then once the squadron was all there, then we were dispatched home or back to the States just a few at a time. I came back on a destroyer and spent the time with the destroyer crew playing pinochle.

How long did it take you to ride the destroyer back?

Ralph Meier: It took seven days. Everything we saw, we'd run around it. We were never allowed on deck, but the engine crew kind of knew what was going on and they'd say well, we're circling something else. We saw something else and we'd go out there and see what it was and piddle around and piddle around, but I was hoping we'd come back under the Golden Gate because I wanted to see it, but we came back into San Diego.

And at that point I guess were you pretty much discharged?

Ralph Meier: We had to have a bunch of points to get off, and I lacked a few points. So I was placed in a discharge center and I would take a group of guys through discharge. You get a little ___ and you go to the hospital and all of this, so I was kind of a DI, drill instructor for different groups as we'd go through and I spent about three months there.

And that was in San Diego?

Ralph Meier: Yeah. That was at the recruit depot.

That's interesting. Still a lot of people going through a pretty small area I would guess.

Ralph Meier: Well, you had all your clothing, all your boots, and of course we had to turn in our weapons and this sort of thing, and we had rooms full of shoes or trousers or jackets or shirts or socks or whatever. I mean we just had rooms full of this stuff. I don't know what they ever did with it. No one wanted it, they were going home.

I'm sure you were right, they were ready to get back. So when you finally did get enough points, about three months later, then you got discharged at that point?

Ralph Meier: Right, I had a friend I met when I first went in. He was a corporal and he and I went to church together. We didn't drink and we did some things together and became pretty good friends, but I didn't see him after that because I went overseas and all that. I came back and here he was at this discharge center. He was a tech sergeant or a first sergeant, I forgot what. We renewed our friendship and he was, he had made a colonel, and he was starting a new squadron to go back overseas, and they twisted my arm. I came very close to signing over. I probably should have looking back now, but I wanted to go home. But this colonel, I've never had a colonel visit me and ask me to work in his squadron, but he was starting a new squadron and kind of knew a little of my reputation and wanted me to be a part of the squadron, but I chose not to.

Sure, well I imagine you were ready to get home at that point.

Ralph Meier: Well yeah, you know, a dumb young kid. You don't think much about the future, you want to get home.

What was that like finally getting back to Texas and seeing your family again?

Ralph Meier: Oh, that was wonderful, it really was because my brother had been in Germany and was wounded there, and he was in a hospital in San Antonio at the time and so my parents were really worried about their kids, you know, but then I had to go to work.

Did you take any time off at all after you got home? Did you take a week off or something before you went to work?

Ralph Meier: Well at that time you'd draw \$20 a week for 52 weeks, and I said baloney, because a couple of guys I knew before I left here were home and they were goofing around and running around, and that wasn't for me. So I went out and applied at Bergstrom Air Force Base at that time, and a week after I got home I went to work. I wasn't going to goof around and take government money for doing nothing. I'm just not built that way. They had a job in the hydraulics shop and I went to work out there.

So you went right into aviation maintenance then. So you were able to take a skill you'd learned in the Marine Corps and use that, that's great.

Ralph Meier: Of course they had different kind of aircraft out here, but that didn't make any difference. The system works basically the same.

How long did you end up doing that for?

Ralph Meier: I'm thinking about four or five months. And then, well they had the Air Force Reserves had students out here at UT and they'd come out and fly. We had a P-51, we had a P-38, we had three or four different kind of aircraft. We tried to keep the guys happy, they loved to fly. And then they transferred this unit to Houston and at that time they did not have an opening, so that ended that for my career working on aircraft.

Did you stay in the Austin area I guess?

Ralph Meier: Well yeah, a mechanic for a Crossley dealer at one time, I don't know if you remember the little Crossley cars or not, but we had a neighbor that had a Crossley dealership out I think E. 1st Street or E. 5th Street, somewhere back in there. Anyway we'd work on these little Crossley cars, but that didn't last very long and my father and I bought a cotton gin at the Lund community. That doesn't exist anymore, but northeast of Elgin. We ran that for about three years, and it caught fire one day and burned out a business. So that's when I changed careers again. But all in all, I don't regret my military time at all.

Oh no, absolutely, that was such a crucial conflict as well, and to serve in the Marine Corps.

Ralph Meier: Then this last year, I assume you are aware of Honor Flight – last fall my son kind of pushed this and did an application and he and I went to Washington with the Honor Flight group.

Oh that's excellent, that's great.

Ralph Meier: Oh, we had a wonderful time, just a marvelous organization.

It is, it's just a great thing to do that and we've lost so many World War II veterans that it's important just to get those that we can up there to see it. Tell us about that trip and what your thoughts and emotions were.

Ralph Meier: Well, you don't know what to expect when you start out. We met out at Bergstrom at the air base at the hotel there, and I met a friend of mine and here he grabbed my bags and he said you're not gonna carry your bags, I am. Anyway, they put you in wheelchairs – I assume you know that – and my son was, I'm not used to riding in a wheelchair, but that's one of the rules, and then we flew to Washington. I have never been received so greatly in my life. There must have been 100 people there on both sides. The ladies would hug you and they were patting their hands welcoming you to Washington, it was just a wonderful experience. Then the first night I finally get to the hotel and things close this time to go to dinner. And here's colonels and majors waiting on us. But my son had made arrangements that we would go see the monuments at night, and beautiful. So you have to have one of the representatives of Honor Flight with you if you leave the group. So this Jeff Burton went with us, peach of a guy. And he and my son are pretty close to age, and so we got over to the Lincoln Memorial, and there was just a pile of steps going up there. Here Jeff's on one side and my son's on the other side and we walked all the way up to the top and walked around there, and walked all the way back down. We got down at the bottom and here's this guard and he said, we were just huffing and puffing, and he said why didn't you take the elevator? We didn't know there was elevators. But anyway, then we went over by the White House. We walked by that direction and then he had gotten like a small limo so we called the guy on the cell phone and said meet us and take us over to the Capitol. Well we go over to the Capitol and here's about four guards standing out in front. Well Jeff goes up and he says hey, can we get in the Capitol? We're from Texas and we're the Honor Flight and all that. No, they had some kind of, I don't know whether it was planning or whatever, so we piddled around and we stood out there, and thought let's try again. So we all three go up there and asked, and they almost apologized for not letting us in. We said the state of Texas, our Capitol is open 24 hours a day and here we can't get in the nation's Capitol. Well no, I'm sorry, but they almost apologized about letting us go in the Capitol. But we just had a wonderful time, and I want to give you before we finish, I want to give you a couple of names of guys that you need to talk with.

Oh absolutely, and let's have you give those names to me off the recording. That way we're not giving out their phone numbers for anybody else to hear. I'll definitely want to get those from you.

Ralph Meier: Oh, by the way, after we came back from our trip to Washington, oh, a week or two later, I forget the gentleman's name, but he called and said I have something for you. Can I leave it with out? He came out and he gave me a book about the World War II memorial, beautiful book, and then a medallion about, oh, it's larger than a silver dollar. I have it and I put it in one of these little glass cases. It's just precious. They're wonderful people.

Well that's excellent. I'm glad that you were able to take part in that because I know it's a great program. I went down there for one of the flights when they left from Bergstrom, and it's just a great thing that they've done.

Ralph Meier: It sure is.

It took a long time for them to even build a World War II memorial. It was kind of an afterthought I guess.

Ralph Meier: It's a massive thing. It's just massive.

That's excellent. Sir, I really appreciate you taking the time today to share some of these stories and memories with us.

Ralph Meier: Well I appreciate you calling me. I've enjoyed this time together.

Yes sir, and as I told you before we did this interview, I'm a Marine myself, so anytime I get to talk to a fellow Marine, especially one that served in World War II -

Ralph Meier: What part were you in?

I'm still in. I'm in the Reserves currently with an artillery battalion out of Grand Prairie. I'm an adjutant, so I've been with the infantry battalion as well. I was with an infantry unit in Iraq and when I was enlisted during college, I was a mortar man, so I've done a little bit of both. I've always been combat arms. I've always either been with infantry or artillery. But the Marine Corps to this day still does a great job of teaching our history and heritage to any new recruit and we definitely know about World War II and all that the Marines did at that time. So it's an honor for me just to be able to talk to you and then to hear you talk about the aircraft you worked on in Midway and that sort of thing.

Ralph Meier: I tell you what, every person I've seen in uniform, I either go talk to them or pat 'em on the back and say thank you because I'm so appreciative of them. We still have a volunteer army.

That's right.

Ralph Meier: And all the Reserves are still volunteer.

It's all volunteer force.

Ralph Meier: Right, so I'm very appreciative of all these, all you fellows that are still working. By the way I went in after when my dad and I bought the cotton gin at Elgin, I bought a car from Lawson Rivers who was a Chevrolet dealer there in Elgin, and he said hey, you were in the service weren't you? And so we got to talking and he said if you take an exam through the National Guard, you can be an officer. And so I'm young, so I took this exam and got my second lieutenant, and that's when I got in the National Guard and we were meeting at Camp Swift at that time, and then they moved it up here to Austin.

That's right, Camp Mabry.

Ralph Meier: Mabry, and I'd have stayed in, I made first lieutenant, and I stayed in long enough to make first lieutenant, and then my job here changed and I moved to Dallas. Well, they had an organization out at, I think it was Fort Worth or somewhere out there, Grand Prairie, anyway, we had worked with him before and we did not like the organization at all or anything, so I just got a discharge. So I have two discharges, one from the Marine Corps and one from the National Guard.

That's excellent though, that's good stuff.

Ralph Meier: Once in the military, military life kind of has a draw for you.

Yeah, that's probably right.

Ralph Meier: Anyway, I'm going to shut up.

Yes sir, and what I'm going to do, sir, I'll give you a call later this afternoon, and I'll get those names and numbers from you of your friends that were also on that Honor Flight because I would be honored to interview them as well. I just don't want to give out their phone numbers because this interview, anyone can listen to it and I don't want their phone numbers out in the public like that. But sir, I'll go ahead and wrap up the interview for now and like I mentioned before, in a couple of weeks, be looking for the CD's we're going to send you that are copies of this interview as well as a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson, and he's a Marine veteran as well.

Ralph Meier: Right, I knew that, yeah.

A back seater in F-4's, so he's an aviation guy, Marine aviator. But everybody here, sir, at the Land Office really appreciates your service for our nation, and this is just a small way of saying thank you and we have archives here that go back to the 1700s. We have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo, so our goal is to take these interviews as well and save them for posterity. And with that in mind is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?

Ralph Meier: Well the only thing I'd say is that I'm very appreciative of you doing this, your organization doing this, and Mr. Patterson trying to keep up with all the veterans because it's important to our nation and the spirit d'corps that we have as a nation, when we have a problem everybody shows up and everybody starts doing their job, and it's real important. Fortunately our nation is based on God's principles and if we follow them, it makes our nation strong.

I agree. Yes sir.

Ralph Meier: Just thank you so much for your efforts and what you're doing.

And sir, the honor is all ours. Thank you again for your service and for taking the time to share today with us some of your memories.

Ralph Meier: Well James, thank you for calling.

Yes sir, and I'll give you call later this afternoon and get those other names and numbers from you. Take care.

Ralph Meier: Bye.

[End of recording]