

Transcription: Manuel R. Reyes

Good afternoon. Today is Friday, September 5, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I'm interviewing Mr. Manuel Reyes. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Today we're at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to share your stories with us today. It's an honor for our program.

Manuel R. Reyes: My name is Manuel R. Reyes.

Okay, I'll make sure I'll put that in there then. My apologies. 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 went into the military.

Manuel R. Reyes: Okay. My remembrance. To the best of my knowledge, I started school at Stephen F. Austin in Kingsville.

Kingsville.

Manuel R. Reyes: Texas. My first teacher was Mrs. Orange. I was about six years and a half. I couldn't start earlier because, well, my mother had not registered me. As I can remember, my first year in school, I flunked my first. The grades then were zero and then you graduated to one. Grade one.

Were you from Kingsville? Were you born in Kingsville?

Manuel R. Reyes: I was born in Kingsville. October the 25th, 1922. My mother, Calixtra Revilla.

Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?

Manuel R. Reyes: As I can remember, I was the only one until my brother, Hilario Revilla Reyes, was born. As I can remember, like everybody else, we were very poor, you know. It was right before the Depression. Well, 1922 still wasn't the Depression. It was the years that everybody was making fairly well living. But then, as the administration began to change and our country started growing, that's about the time the Depression came about. Our President Roosevelt was elected and the first thing that came about was the relief to make people come up in their way of living. And he installed the WPA which was a war . . .

The Works Project Administration?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. For all the people that met the age to start working.

You were still too young though. You would have been 10 years old.

Manuel R. Reyes: Oh yes. I was about 11 years old when President Roosevelt came about. But I can still remember that things began to change in a way that we could not have things like we used to before, you know. Of course, there was more farming, and people was growing their own little chickens, and a little hogs, and a little cows, so we can have milk and everything like that, you know.

Sir, were you still living in Kingsville when the war started? When World War II started, were you still in Kingsville?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes, I was still in Kingsville. As a matter of fact, December the seventh, when Pearl Harbor came about, we were at church. The church I used to go then was a Presbyterian church in Kingsville. The pastor announced that there had been a big catastrophe, that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. So everybody was very much impressed on that notice. Of course, I was just a little kid.

Were you maybe 18? About 19 years old I guess?

Manuel R. Reyes: The seventh, let's see. From '22. Eight to 30, and 19 . . .

So you would have been about 19? Let me ask you, sir, when you heard that the war had started, did you think you were going to be drafted or you were going to have to go yourself at some point?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes. In '41, so I must have been, yeah, like you say, I must have been around 18, yes sir.

Did you want to go or did you think you were going to get called up?

Manuel R. Reyes: No, I wanted to go because all of my friends and all of my people at my age had already volunteered. I said, "I can't be left out of this." So I volunteered to go in the service. I was working as an attendant at the service station for Mr. Paul Elliot in Kingsville, Texas.

What did your family think of you wanting to join the military during the war?

Manuel R. Reyes: My mother, she didn't want me to go.

Because you were the oldest, right?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes. My daddy, well, he more or less didn't want me to because I was a help to doing things around the place. But I myself was very excited because if could go I would be able to get a little something to help the family. And Mr. Paul Elliot was also a notary public and he didn't want me to go in the service because I was a pretty good help at his service station. He said, "But if you want, and your mother and your daddy agree, all we have to do is fill out this little form and I'll get my stamp and my signature and I think that will be sufficient for the people in the Army recruiting to accept you, and you're in."

What made you choose to go into the Army out of the branches of service?

Manuel R. Reyes: For one thing, the Navy, you had to pass several different tests, written tests. And the Army was very simple because, well, anybody, if you could pass a simple test, you would be in. And if you were in good health, that's it. That's what they want somebody in good health. And to understand things.

And you went into the Army Air Corps, right?

Manuel R. Reyes: Well, no, I wanted. Yes, at first I wanted to be a pilot because I could see the Navy planes flying around there, around Corpus Christi and all of that. So I says, "I want to be

one of those people that fly,” you know. But I found out very soon after I joined the service that you had to finish high school, which I didn’t finish. I left out when I was a sophomore in high school. That was in 1941, in May, when I left the school. So I started working and doing different jobs, and this one man hired me as a service station attendant. Well, that gave me a chance to meet people and develop my ways of doing things. I went in the service, like I said, he signed my acceptance as a notary public, and my mother agreed, and my daddy agreed.

So when you signed up, where did they send you for your basic training? Do you remember where you went?

Manuel R. Reyes: Well, the first thing was . . . They sent me to Corpus Christi to be sworn in. And to have my physical checked, you know. That was my big start. And then they sent me to San Antonio after I passed the physical, after I passed the different tests the Army wanted to fill out. I was sworn in and they gave me some meal tickets that evening and they said, apart from that, I had a recruiter just like you in a way, handed me some trip tickets to go on the train. “And don’t forget, you be there at certain times or the train will leave.” You know, when you’re excited, you wanted to be there.

Where did they send you to? Where was your first . . . ?

Manuel R. Reyes: San Antonio.

Fort Sam Houston?

Manuel R. Reyes: Fort Sam Houston. Dodd Field. It was a little field right next to Fort Sam Houston.

Is that where you did your basic training? Boot camp?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, to start marching, get my clothes, and all was exciting, very exciting, you know. Some of my clothes, I wanted to wear, you know, be a soldier. Although I had to have them fitted, you know.

Have them tailored?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. But the first field after Fort Sam Houston was Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls.

Okay. Sheppard Air Field. Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: Sheppard Field. Wichita Falls. And that gave me a chance to see different country and meet with different people, because some of those people that was going like me, for the first time in the service.

Was that your first time away from home? When you went into the Army? First time away from Kingsville?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. Some of those people were from New York, some from Illinois, different part of the country. And California, New Mexico. Anyway, and whenever you meet those kind of people, you know, well, you more or less expose your experiences, how you came

about joining the service. “Well, you going to be my buddy the rest of the service here.” We’d shake hands.

So everybody got along pretty well together from what you saw?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes. At least I did. And some of them, they agree to meet with the rest of the people from different races of people, you know. There was Anglos and some Hispanics and some Indians too there that they’d been recruited, they didn’t volunteer, you know.

Got drafted?

Manuel R. Reyes: Drafted. Yes. Like I say, six weeks I spent at Sheppard Field.

At Sheppard? Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: And during that time, we used to get up in the morning at five-thirty and dress up, make our beds, because they taught us how to make beds, clean up, and report for muster, and then after we report for muster, we went to, ooh, there was a big line on breakfast. But we still had to be in the line to get our breakfast meal. By the time we finished it, well, the sergeant, the duty sergeant, was waiting for us, and he would say, “Go back to your rooms.” It wasn’t rooms. It was barracks, you know. “Go back to your place, and after you’re finished taking care of yourself at the place, you fall out and we’ll give you your duties.” March, march, march, march. And from in the morning until in the afternoon, even at night sometimes, nine-thirty we’d be still marching. By the time we hit the . . .

So when you were at Sheppard Air Field, it was still kind of a basic training boot camp-type environment?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, it was.

Did you know at that point what you were going to be doing once you left Sheppard? Did you know what unit you were going to or what your specialty was going to be?

Manuel R. Reyes: No. Well, for one thing, the people that had been there the longest, they had a bulletin board and they would give the names and numbers of the people that would be going to different places, different camps. Like, just for saying, Fort Jackson. Some would come back to San Antonio, some will come to that famous Randolph Field, or some were sent to well, different places.

Is that how you learned where you were going to be going? By looking at that bulletin board and seeing your name on there one day?

Manuel R. Reyes: Right, right. We had to check. “Make sure to check it before you go to bed.” Because, like I say, they went by the days, like some would come in in January the 15th. All of those would go, they would assign different places where to go. And if you came a little later, January the 20th, you know, you would be another group.

Where did they send you to when you looked at the bulletin board? Where did you get sent to next?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. They sent me to Jackson.

Fort Jackson?

Manuel R. Reyes: Mississippi, yes.

Jackson, Mississippi, okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. In Jackson, Mississippi, that was when I first . . . I had already learned Army regulations that if you don't live up to the Army, they would punish you. And if you tried to get away and go home, well, they would give you a different kind of punishment. If you would be fighting, that was one thing . . . They didn't want that to be happening. You'd get another punishment. So all of those things, you begin to learn, along with the marching and the Army bible. They would say the Army bible because it would tell you all the different kind of things that you shouldn't do. You shouldn't talk about where you're going to be going, and you shouldn't be talking where you came from. When you begin to learn the different things that pertain to the service. You had to be very cautious what kind of information you would give out, you know.

So what were you doing in Jackson? Were you doing infantry training at that point?

Manuel R. Reyes: Well, in Jackson, I, like I say, I had my lectures on different things that needed to be done in the service. They classify you according to your dates and everything after finishing Sheppard Field. They class you. You're going to be able to, according to your learning, you're going to be able to, if you want to fly, you're going to be a gunner, or you'll be a pilot. But you knew how much. If you had finished high school and you were able to figure a lot of things that pertain to flying, they would give you all of that, you know, as a classification, you know. And then after you were classified, well, you begin to think, "Well, if I'm going to be this, if I'm going to be a navigator, or a bombardier, better learn different booklets and pamphlets."

What classification did they give you?

Manuel R. Reyes: My classification was air mechanic.

So you would fly?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, engineer. I would fly. Learn all about the mechanics of the airplanes.

Were you excited when you found out about that?

Manuel R. Reyes: Very much excited. Yeah. Because I was going to be able to do a lot of things that was familiar to me. Working with tools and learning the different sizes of parts of the . . . Like nuts and bolts and screws and everything like that, you know. Things that you're never familiar with, you know. Because as you begin to train in that classification, they would give you what they called on the job training. There would be this mechanic and he would have about four other trainees and he would tell the trainees, "This is where you put the oil, and this is where you put the gas, and these are the gauges that measure all those things. And this is where the pilot works to fly," and all of those things. Not too much about gunnery yet, you know. Because my gunnery, I took it after I got to Tampa, Florida.

They sent you to MacDill Field?

Manuel R. Reyes: MacDill Field. Yes.

Okay. So you had a lot of stops along the way to do all the training.

Manuel R. Reyes: Oh yes.

Were you eager, at some point, to get overseas, to be actually in the war?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes. In Jackson, South Carolina, I was real excited in a way because I had just left Jackson, Mississippi, to go to Jackson, South Carolina. And it was there where they first were arming the group of flyers that was going to go to bomb Japan. With Jimmy Doolittle.

The Doolittle Raiders.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. They was going to be flying the B-25s, the Millie Mitchell, they called those planes.

The Mitchell Bombers.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. And then, from there, you had to train. If you were chosen to be part of that group, you were going to be chosen to learn how to read the map on different terrains. You would be flying and if you happen to be the ones that fall down, you had to make your way out to not be caught. And don't give your name or serial number unless it was an officer that would be asking for it. Even the Japanese, you know, they had Americans that would interview.

That would speak in English.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. And they would get that information. And don't give your group number or . . . But they knew already when . . . Jimmy Doolittle. The Japanese knew or had an idea that there would be something like that taking place. But when, they didn't know exactly, you know.

So where did you go when you finally left . . . You finally left the States at some point, right? You went through all that training. Where did they send you when you finally left? When you went overseas?

Manuel R. Reyes: First of all, I trained at Tampa with the MacDill Field. We trained on the B-26s and Martin Marauders. But we were supposed to get our new planes that were going to go overseas. We were going to pick them up in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: And from there we were going to organize as a squadron and fly back into Florida again. And then the first stop would be . . . We didn't know about it, you know. But later we found out that it was Puerto Rico. And from there, from Puerto Rico, we went to Trinidad. And from Trinidad we went to British Columbia in North Africa. I mean North . . . It's right next to Venezuela and those places. British Columbia. Well, we were learning different places as we left.

So you were going towards Europe then. You were going to Europe? The European Theater?

Manuel R. Reyes: No, we was going to North Africa.

North Africa, okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: So from there, from this British Columbia, we went to Brazil. Belém, Brazil. And Belém, Brazil, was the place that all our planes . . . We had the 320th Bomb Group, was composed of four squadrons. The 444, the 443, 442, 441. We was there. We was going to be flying with a whole crew and luggage and everything. And if fuel consumption was too high, we would take off some of the crew.

Lighten the load?

Manuel R. Reyes: Some of the luggage and it'll still fly, and it was a better consumption of fuel. Those were the people that was going to be flying. Some of us was left out and we was going to fly on regular cargo planes.

Sure. Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: There was one little island in the south Atlantic. I'm trying to think of that name of that little island.

Landed there to refuel and keep going?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. On that one little island, yeah, it was a refueling station. From there, from Belém, you'd fly to that little island and have enough area for a fairly sized group of planes come in, refuel, and then you would be flying over to British West Columbia, no, British West Africa, where it is -. That's the name of the place now. Anyway, from there, the people that were not able to fly across the Sahara Desert would fly . . . The people that would fly across the Sahara Desert would come to a place they call Marrakech.

Marrakech, okay. In Morocco?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. Marrakech, Morocco. And from there, you would fly to a place that the Germans had left just a few weeks before January 1943. Tafraoui. That was the name of the place. And that was Algiers.

So when you got to North Africa, there was still fighting going on in North Africa with the Germans?

Manuel R. Reyes: Oh yes.

What were your thoughts at that time? Were you excited, scared? Tell us about what you were thinking.

Manuel R. Reyes: I was ready, very excited. Yes. Because I felt this way. That I wanted to be of help and get the war over. My job there was to be there, to do some fighting, and I didn't know whether I was going to be able to either be on artillery or up in infantry, or whatever. But I was already there as a flyer. I had been trained for gunnery. First missions was to be flying over to support General Patton who was fighting against General Rommel.

General Rommel.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, the Desert Fox. And the tanks, that was a big job for the people that had signed up for tanks because that was the number one mission then. But we were supposed to support them. Bomb the different bridges, bomb the different road crossings, bomb their ammunition storage. So we had a job to do too.

Sure. Tell us about the first time you went on a mission.

Manuel R. Reyes: My first time I went on a mission it was a submarine chase. Because as it was, some of our ground troops coming to North Africa were coming by boat, and the Germans had quite a few submarines around that area. So our job was to spot some of those submarines and drop bombs or even drop one of those, well, it was bigger than a bomb, you know, when we could spot some submarines.

Were you able to spot any of the U-boats when you were flying on that first mission?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. If we see 'em, we would bomb 'em. No, but we won't fight 'em.

My question is, did you see any of them on that first mission? Did you see any submarines on that first mission?

Manuel R. Reyes: As I can remember, we just saw . . . You could spot in the water, where they were going on the water, you know. No, we didn't see a submarine, but they were there.

Oh sure, absolutely.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, that's how the Navy was being torpedoed, you know. And well, as far as I know, the Germans had those submarines there because they was going from Italy to supply General Rommel with merchandise, ammunition, food, or whatever, you know. But they were there, so the submarines were protecting them from any ships that our Navy would have around the Mediterranean Sea.

Did you see any German aircraft during the times you would be on missions? Any German planes?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, I saw some of the planes they had, the Germans. They weren't the real fighters. They were more bombers.

Okay, German bombers?

Manuel R. Reyes: Bombers, yeah. Our fighters, they generally took care of that themselves. The only time I could remember seeing them was after they were shot down. I'd see 'em on the ground, you know. But on the air, no.

So as a gunner, you never had to fire on any German planes?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes, but it was later. We got the Messerschmitts, the Germans' Messerschmitts, and there was some Italian planes, but the Italian planes were not too good.

Not too good?

Manuel R. Reyes: No. They wouldn't stand up to attack, the bombers, you know. It was the Messerschmitts, German fighters that would be. They had another German fighter, I forget the name. But anyway, Messerschmitts were the ones that really took care of the bombers. Anyway, my first experience with shooting some of those planes was over Sicily.

Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: And we had this squadron that was attacked by the German Messerschmitt fighters, and as I can remember, it was in July, in summer of 1943, that I shot this one plane. Let me show you.

Sure.

Manuel R. Reyes: I'm sorry, I'm a little ahead of myself.

Oh no, I'm eager to hear about it.

Manuel R. Reyes: This is the part. We're here. This is the plane, the B-26s.

This is great. So right now we're looking at what looks like newspaper clippings. That's you. And the headline says, "Local Gunner Brings Down Nazi Fighter." Is this your local hometown paper? Was this back in Kingsville?

Manuel R. Reyes: Kingsville, yeah. Even Corpus Christi. Of course, even the news media from the service, you know. They put this notice, you know. I didn't know anything about it until I got home, and they told me. Of course they wrote me, "Say, you've been doing some good work, shooting down some planes."

Says here you were a tail gunner on a Marauder bomber, and that day, the Army Air Force counted for 42 Axis airplanes shot down over Sicily. You have a quote here that says, "He kind of caught me by surprise, coming up from underneath, but he was so close I couldn't miss and he folded up."

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes sir. What it was, on your guns, you had on the sides, you had, they call them rats. The rings, you know. And whenever a _ they were a little far out, but when they're coming down real close, that's it, you know, you really had to get busy and shoot but don't let too much shooting because your guns would burn and the barrel . . .

The barrel would get too hot?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, the gun, all the bullets would freeze.

You'd control your fire.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, yeah. To get 'em to go away or if you get a, like in this case, he came real close and got in. Yeah. But not too many times they would do that, you know. They would stay at a distance because they knew the gunners were ready too. That's how come, if you can remember, the B-17s got shot down by fighters, because B-17 was a lot slower plane. They would fly about 160 miles after the bombing mission because of the flak, you know. Probably some of them were damaged and that's when the fighters would really attack you.

Yeah, single them out. That's right.

Manuel R. Reyes: But on the B-26s and the B-25s . . .

A lot quicker?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, a lot quicker. They would bomb and get away from your mission and get back home if you can, you know.

Were you with the same crew this whole time? Were you flying with the same crew in North Africa and in Sicily?

Manuel R. Reyes: This is the same crew I used to fly. The one over here.

Where are you in that picture?

Manuel R. Reyes: Right there.

The lower left? Kind of kneeling down?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, right next to the pilot. This is my pilot right there in the front. And this is my copilot over there standing up, you know.

So there's eight of you.

Manuel R. Reyes: Next to him was the bombardier.

Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: I generally, when we got a picture, I generally stood right there next to my pilot, you know.

That's great. What about this other photograph beneath it? Is that you in this photograph here?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, that was Daniel Turner. That was after I came back. That's another experience I have to record if you want to.

Sure, sure.

Manuel R. Reyes: When I completed my missions in Sardinia, I wanted to come home because I had completed my commitment, my missions.

Did you have the point system at that time? At that time did they have the point system so you could come home? Did you have enough points to go back?

Manuel R. Reyes: No, no. That was later on, at the end of the war. Not this time. But I had asked for a furlough to be home for Christmas. This was in December, the 21st, I asked the group commander if I could . . . Since I had completed my tour of duty over there, and I wasn't going to be flying because I had completed 46 missions.

Forty-six missions. That's a lot of missions.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes. I was granted to leave Sardinia and I would be granted a 10-day leave in between, but I would have to report in Santa Monica on January the 12th, 1944. That was for R&R which was, you know, to give you a different place that you're going to be serving, you know.

Did your family know you were coming?

Manuel R. Reyes: Recreation. No, nobody knew nothing. When I got my notice and my orders to report in Santa Monica, there was another friend of mine who was a radio operator and he was supposed to be going to California. I forgot now the place he was going to be going to in California. We were to be leaving and catch the courier to go to Tunis. Well, in Tunis, my friend decided that he would look up some of his buddies there, and I was so eager to get back and make sure that I'd be home for Christmas that right away, after we landed, after the courier plane got us to Tunis, I went to the air operation and found out if there was planes flying out of there. Well, they said, "No, there are no planes flying although there's a British bomber flying out of here that will be flying to Montesquieu, Algiers." Well, I says, "Is there any possibility? This is my orders to be home for Christmas and report after I get my leave in Christmas, in Kingsville, report at Santa Monica." "Well, I don't know. You have to check with the pilot, the British." Okay. So I waited for him. That was the only plane that I could find out that would be flying closer to my trip. So he said, "Well, if you get a parachute. If you go get a parachute, we'll take you." So right away, I went to the . . . I asked the flight operations people where I could get a parachute. They said, "Well, you have to check with the airport people to see if they got any parachutes available." So sure enough, they had a parachute. And I put my luggage and everything right there in flight operations so that when the plane was ready to take off I could load up and go. All I had is a duffel bag and a B-4 bag. You know what a B-4 bag is, right?

Yes.

Manuel R. Reyes: So I got everything. I got to Montesquieu and right away I looked and see if there was any planes flying out of Montesquieu going west. They say, "Well, we have but I don't know. It's a B-47. They're flying. They'll be flying. They're taking some wounded people." Oh, they're flying to Algiers. So I got on. I asked the pilot if I could get on the manifest. And they said, "Well, it'll be later on about five-thirty we'll be going out." "Okay." So I went and get in the manifest on that C-47. And I flew into Algiers. After I got in there it was already late. Must have been almost nine o'clock. So I asked the people in flight operations if there was any other planes flying out of there. They said, "Well, we have a C-122." It was a Cessna, twin-engine Cessna plane. "It will be flying to Marrakech, Morocco."

So you were just hopping all the way?

Manuel R. Reyes: I was hopping because I wanted to get home for Christmas.

Did you make it?

Manuel R. Reyes: I sure did. And all I had was my orders and that's all I could show.

And a couple of bags?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah.

Tell me, sir, when you got home . . . You said your parents didn't know you were coming home. You had no way of telling them even if you could tell them. So what was that like, getting home for Christmas and surprising your family? Can you tell us about that?

Manuel R. Reyes: Well, yes. My last flight, I couldn't get it at Mobile, Alabama. I couldn't get it because . . . You see, I first landed in the United States at Miami. And I had my flight jacket. On my flight jacket I had a lot of little bombs marked there, you know. Well, all of my bombs, and I had my swastika plane that I had shot down. We landed and then we were escorted to go get some breakfast because it was pretty late. I mean pretty early in the morning that I had landed there. This sergeant right away said, "Say, that jacket looks pretty ragged, doesn't it?" "Well, it's my jacket and I have been wearing it." He says, "What if I get you a new jacket?" "You can?" "Yeah." "A new flight jacket?" "Yeah." _ . So, after I got my jacket he says, "What are you going to do with that old jacket?" "Throw it away, I guess." He says, "Would you give it to me?" "Yeah, you can take it." And later, my son and my wife and everybody said, "Boy, you were really foolish. That was one of your best . . ."

Had all your stuff on it?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. I says, "With all my baggage, you know, two bags."

You got a new jacket.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, I didn't want to carry it. So I did get a new jacket. Then I got to Mobile and it was fog. You know, around December and Christmas, it's foggy around there. And the plane couldn't go no more. They were, you know, grounded. So right away, after I got to Mobile, I went to the . . . I asked one of those people around the airport, I says, "Could you take me or tell me which way to go to the railroad station?" She said, "Railroad station? Yeah, it ain't too far from here." "Oh? Can I get somebody to take me over there? I need to go to my home for my furlough. My next stop would be Santa Monica, and I would like to be with my people for Christmas." He said, "Yeah." So I went and he said, "The passenger train shouldn't be there too long now. You're going to have to hurry up." So I went and I barely got the money to buy the ticket to Houston. And I got lucky. I got one of the fastest passenger trains there. The Hummingbird. So I did get to Houston that evening. After I got to Houston, I was lucky enough because they was going to leave to go to Kingsville. About three o'clock in the morning. So I got on that train and I got to Kingsville. It must have been almost seven o'clock in the morning. I didn't know how to get home. This one man that used to work at the depot, he used to carry, whenever people would come in the train, would carry their baggage and things to different places in the little truck. But he recognized me. He said, "¿Manuel, sabías tú que la gente aquí te está esperando porque tú has sido un as (ace)?" "Yeah? No sabía yo." "Sí." Entonces dice, "Yo te llevo allí con tu papa." "Bueno." So, él me ayudó. He put all the baggage, two bags, in the little truck, and he said, "Don't get down. Let me get down and I'll tell your papá that I got somebody very important here to see him."

Was this Christmas Day or the day before Christmas?

Manuel R. Reyes: No, it was right on the 25th.

So it was Christmas Day?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, it was Christmas Day. So he went and knocked on the door and my daddy came out, you know, still sleepy. “Mr. Reyes, aquí traigo un señor que quiere verlo.” Then he showed who it was, you know. Right away, you know, hugged me. He says, “How did you get here? ¿Por qué no llamaste?” You know, telephones was not available. Not too easy then.

That had to have been the best Christmas gift they could have ever gotten.

Manuel R. Reyes: It was the best Christmas that I ever enjoyed, ever can remember having.

That’s a great story. Thank you for telling us that. It’s an awesome story.

Manuel R. Reyes: So, right away . . . And that’s when the next morning, the next day, that morning, I was ready to sleep, you know, because I had been traveling all the time.

That’s a long way to travel.

Manuel R. Reyes: And I slept good but I had people from the *Kingsville Record* that wanted to interview me and they wanted a story. And I had some people from the *Caller-Times* that they had called. And they wanted to interview me.

That’s great.

Manuel R. Reyes: There were no movies then, TVs, or radio. There was radio, not that common. I’m talking about ’43, you know. Well, to make a long story short, I spent my Christmas there. I met, for the first time, my good-looking wife.

So it really was a good Christmas.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. Because after I slept that night, they was having Christmas celebration at church. I got up and I wanted to be over there, you know. Well, there was a lot of girls, a lot of ladies there that wanted to see me. Lot of people. And the pastor. Oh, I didn’t bring the Bible.

Daughter of Mr. Reyes: Do you want me to show him your picture?

Sure.

Manuel R. Reyes: My daughter wanted me to bring this because that was when I . . .

Daughter of Mr. Reyes: That was what he looked like when he was home.

That’s great.

Manuel R. Reyes: I got to Santa Monica.

That’s where you had it taken, in Santa Monica?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. Yes.

That’s great. Did you wear this uniform to church? When you went to church?

Manuel R. Reyes: Oh yeah.

That's great.

Manuel R. Reyes: It was quite an impression.

So at church, that evening at church, was the first time you saw your future wife?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, because she had just come from her school. She was going to Taft, a Presbyterian school. She was going to graduate that following May. We just happened to meet that night, you know. Not only her, I met several other ladies, girls. They were all very excited to see me, you know, in my uniform. You know, people in uniform back then were very welcome, you know.

Yeah. That's great. So you made a good first impression on her, I'm sure.

Manuel R. Reyes: Oh yeah. Yeah, I sure did. We had a good life. This is the lady that's part of the inherits of my wife.

Daughter of Mr. Reyes: I'm the daughter. She's the great-granddaughter.

Manuel R. Reyes: And this is my first daughter. That's proof that we had a very nice get-together, you know.

Yeah. That's great.

Manuel R. Reyes: After I got my stay in Santa Monica, I flew back to MacDill again.

That's where that photo right there was taken? Was at MacDill?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah. Daniel Turner. We was going to be training on a new airplane, A-26s. And we were supposed to be ready for D-Day, but the planes didn't get in in time, you know. It was a new plane, A-26. It had more firing power, more bombs to carry, everything. It was more of a powerful plane, you know. It was a medium bomber. But anyway, we never did get 'em ready for D-Day.

Where were you when the war ended? Were you back in the States when the war was over?

Manuel R. Reyes: No. When the war was over, I was flying the A-26s. We was in France. We were flying, hitting Cologne, Germany, and hitting, I forget now the name of the place close to Berlin. We was hitting marshalling yards with the A-26. We had the same mission that I had before in the B-26s, we had 'em in the A-26. Bombing bridges. That was when Patton was really rolling all the way over to get to Berlin. And we were supporting Patton most of the time.

Once the war ended, how long was it before you were able to get back home? Pretty quick?

Manuel R. Reyes: Well, the war ended in, I think, ended in April.

In '45. In June '45. In Europe.

Manuel R. Reyes: In Europe. It was June? No.

It was April?

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, somewhere in April.

Okay.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yes, because June, it was . . .

Because I know it ended in the Pacific in September. September '45 is when it ended in the Pacific.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah.

In the Pacific. V-J Day.

Manuel R. Reyes: V-J, yeah. General . . .

MacArthur.

Manuel R. Reyes: MacArthur was signing the cessation of the war. Yeah. And Mr. Truman was the president then.

So once everything ended, how long was it before you were able . . . Did you get married pretty quickly after the war was over then? Did you get back home and get married?

Manuel R. Reyes: No, it wasn't that way. I got out in '45, in October. I think it was the 13th, October the 13th, '45, and I got married in May the fifth, 1946. So it was all that time . . .

So pretty quickly, within a year or so later.

Manuel R. Reyes: Yeah, more or less.

Well sir, I want to thank you for coming in and sharing these stories with us. And I want to thank you all as well for being here.

Manuel R. Reyes: Will that be sufficient?

This is excellent, sir. We could talk all day.

Manuel R. Reyes: I never did show you.

We've actually spoken for about an hour and a half, believe it or not. Pretty amazing.

Daughter of Mr. Reyes: The holster, Daddy.

Manuel R. Reyes: The holster.

Daughter of Mr. Reyes: He just wants to show you that.

Let me go ahead and finish up the recording part. So again, sir, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service.