Transcription: Bill Meier

Good morning. Today is Tuesday, February 19th, 2013, and my name is James Crabtree today I'm interviewing Mr. Bill Meier. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Meier's residence in Austin, Texas, and it's in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much and ma'am as well for taking the time to let me come and interview you today for our program. It's an honor. Sir, the first question we always start off with is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Bill Meier: Well, I was born in a farm house northeast of Manor, Texas on May the 8th of 1924. My dad was leasing a farm there. In 1941, he bought a place southeast of Manor, Texas, and I lived there and I didn't want to farm all my life, so I went to work at the naval air station in Corpus Christi. And then war broke out and they disbanded that camp.

Had you already enlisted in the Navy?

Bill Meier: No, no.

A civilian employee.

Bill Meier: Yes.

OK.

Bill Meier: Well then they disbanded that because all the boys my age were being drafted. I went back home to the farm.

So you were working there when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Bill Meier: No, I would be home on that weekend.

You were home that weekend. Tell us about that. Do you remember that day?

Bill Meier: It was a Sunday afternoon. We were sitting there listening to the radio, well we had no television, listening to the radio, and all of a sudden that came on. We were all shocked of course.

Did you think at that point that you were probably going to go to war yourself?

Bill Meier: More than likely, yes, because they were drafting all of our age.

Sure. So the war had started. How long was it then before you got the notice that you were drafted?

Bill Meier: Well, my brother, I only had one brother and he enlisted in the early part of '42, and I was going well, I'm not going to enlist. I'm going to wait to be drafted. And so I stayed and every six months I got a notice that I was being exempt for another six months.

Is that because you were working on a farm?

Bill Meier: On a farm, yes.

And your parents, you were the only son left -

Bill Meier: Yes, correct. And so I didn't get drafted until 1944, June or first part of July.

Now what branch of the service did your brother go into?

Bill Meier: Marine, Air Force. He was out at S__smiths.

When he went in, how did your parents feel about that? Were they concerned or were they proud?

Bill Meier: Well both. You get concerned but you're also proud. So -

Sure. He was older than you?

Bill Meier: Yes.

How did that feel seeing your brother go off?

Bill Meier: Well, it was kind of weird in a way. It's hard to explain. You don't want to see anybody lose their life, but fortunately he was with a ground crew, so he was in the background. He wasn't at the front.

Sure.

Bill Meier: Then I got drafted in '44, went through 17 weeks of basic training at Fort Hood, Texas.

So not all that far away then. Did they send you by bus up to Fort Hood?

Bill Meier: By train. From Fort Sam Houston.

At that time, Fort Hood was a pretty new installation, right?

Bill Meier: Yes.

They were just building it.

Bill Meier: Yes.

What type of building did you live in?

Bill Meier: A barracks.

Wooden barracks?

Bill Meier: Yeah, wooden barracks.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about your memories of basic training, some of the guys that were in your platoon.

Bill Meier: Well, it's hard to remember any names, but they was tough. They put us there were a lot ____ weights, preparing a scale. That's what it was.

Tell us sir, about your instructors. What do you remember at all about your instructors?

Bill Meier: Well, we had some good ones. They taught us all about fighting. That's what it was all about was fighting.

Had some of them been in combat themselves previously and then had come back to be instructors?

Bill Meier: No, not that I know of. I'm not sure about that.

So you went through the 17 weeks, which is a pretty long time for training. At that time, did you know what your specialty was going to be?

Bill Meier: No, not at all. You were trained for all types of fighting, whether it was up close, whether it was at a distance.

Sure, I imagine that most of the guys that were in your boot camp with you were young like yourself.

Bill Meier: Oh, definitely.

Were they primarily from Texas?

Bill Meier: No, from all over. Had some from California even.

So you go through the 17 weeks and then you graduate. Did you get a chance to come back home?

Bill Meier: Yes, we spent one week at home before we went to Fort Mead, Maryland.

So you went to Fort Mead, was this late '44?

Bill Meier: Just before Christmas, really.

Just before Christmas of '44. So you arrive at Fort Mead, and at that point were you designated as an infantryman? Or did you have another specialty?

Bill Meier: You were infantry.

You were an infantryman. Tell us sir what you did at Fort Mead. Was that just a short period of time you were there?

Bill Meier: Maybe two nights, and then they sent me off to Boston to wait to get on the boat to go overseas. It was really odd because of winter time, and snow all over the place, cold as the dickens, and they assigned me to stand guard duty inside of the walk-in cooler that they had there.

Why did they have you doing that? You were guarding food I guess?

Bill Meier: You know, to assign me something to do I guess. Only thing I could figure. You know, the first day of January, '45, we boarded the ship, the Gray's Line ship. 3,000 men on board, 3,000 soldiers on board and you couldn't hardly move, it was such a small ship.

How long did you spend aboard that ship crossing the Atlantic?

Bill Meier: 8 days. That ship went this way and this way at the same time. They assigned me to guard duty on D deck, if you know where that is.

Kind of down low?

Bill Meier: That's the bottom of the boat, ship. I was supposed to stand guard duty at the drain. And when I got on board the ship, I didn't feel good so I didn't go to the first meal, and I couldn't make the second one. I was sick. So I couldn't stand that guard duty. I found a water bucket and I turned it over and sat down on it, and was still held it on. All of a sudden they come by and knocked on it and still held it. You're supposed to be standing at this guard duty. I said you'll have to get somebody that can stand it. I was trying to go to sick bay, and they won't let me go to sick bay. They didn't take me off that guard duty.

Did they finally send you to sick bay?

Bill Meier: No, the sailors on board, they drove into our Px and took all our stuff out of our Px. I found a guy with a whole box of Hershey chocolates, 24 bars I bought for $12. They sold them for a dollar apiece. So I lived on chocolate, the only way I got over that sickness. It sounds weird, but that's what happened. I was sick about four or five days.

It's definitely not an enjoyable time aboard the ship.

Bill Meier: No.

Where did you disembark?

Bill Meier: At Lehar, France.

In France. What do you remember about France and about getting off the ship that day?

Bill Meier: Well, of course the ice and snow, and ___ on top, you slide, then slip and fall, but you had your backpack on so when you fell backwards you could land on the backpack and it didn't hurt you. Then they had all the little trains that they had. They sent us up to Hocken, Germany was where I wound up, where we joined up.

So at this point you were still pretty much a replacement soldier. You didn't have a designated unit, and you were just on your way to fill in where you were needed.

Bill Meier: Right, right.

So all the other guys aboard the ship probably were pretty much in the same situation.

Bill Meier: Same thing, all replacements.

What was the general mood or feeling aboard the ship at that time? I'm sure there was a lot of uncertainty.

Bill Meier: Yeah, but you were young, carefree as the dickens, ready to go. You'd been trained and you were ready to go.

So you get aboard the transport trains there in France, and where do they send you to next?

Bill Meier: Hocken, Germany.

Hocken, Germany, directly there -

Bill Meier: Yeah.

So you get off the train, then tell us, sir, what happens then when you arrive.

Bill Meier: They had a nice barracks there. I'm sure the Germans had used it, that we stayed in, and of course when we were going over we had no weapon. The first weapons that they shipped in to us there were Springfield OC rifles. You had the clean the ____, and go out on the fire range, but you were ___. And I wanted to take that rifle with me to the front because that's one of the best ones I think ever made.

Yeah, it's definitely popular.

Bill Meier: About a week later then sent in M-1's.

So they took your Springfield away and gave you a Marand?

Bill Meier: Yeah. We had to play those, zero those in. That's what I took to the front with me.

Then at that point, sir, were you assigned to a unit?

Bill Meier: Not yet. I didn't know until the first day of February where I was going. I went to the 78th Lightning Division.

78th Lightning Division.

Bill Meier: Yeah.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about that division.

Bill Meier: Well, I was assigned to Lightning C gun section, which is 11 men, and we never had over 6. As fast as they came, they got hit or something. Couldn't get replacements in fast

enough. So I was carrying ammunition for the machine gun, I don't know how long, a week or two. Then I carried the gun for a week or two. And then somebody got hit, and I was assigned as a leader of that machine gun section. That's what I was doing when I got hit.

Did many of the guys you came over with, were they assigned to your unit as well? Did you know those guys ahead of time?

Bill Meier: Yes, but I didn't know where they went.

So when you arrived to your unit, that Light Machine Gun section, you were the rookie, I guess, the new guy and everyone else had been there prior?

Bill Meier: Yes.

How did the soldiers treat you as the new guy? Did they look out for you? Or did they view you as kind of a burden, as someone they had to train up?

Bill Meier: Well, you knew what you had to do. So they didn't have to tell you anything. You knew what you had to do, so you were prepared to feed that ammunition to that gun, whatever the men used, and that light machine gun, you could fire from the hip. It had a handle on it. They still don't have those anymore.

Yeah, they don't fire them from the hip, but they still have different types of crew surf weapons and that sort of thing. So you'd work as a 6-man squad I guess then, right?

Bill Meier: Yeah, 11 it was supposed to be.

So it wasn't full. What was the nomenclature on the weapon, do you remember the name?

Bill Meier: No.

It was just a light machine gun.

Bill Meier: All I remember is my serial number.

Your personal serial number, yeah. So then tell us, sir, did you have a sergeant that was over you, or a lieutenant or platoon commander, or anyone above you?

Bill Meier: Yeah, we had a first lieutenant, who had a platoon, but we hardly ever saw him because you were moving all the time.

So it was really your 6-man squad, and so you were pretty much always foot mobile, always on foot?

Bill Meier: Yes.

So you get to that unit, sir, on February 1st, 1945, in Hocken, Germany. Tell us where you went from there.

Bill Meier: Well, that was when they were first straightening out the Battle of the Bulge, and the next project was the Ruhr River, swarming all down on the Ruhr River, and that was the first big battle I got into, to try to secure that damn before the Germans blew it. They were trying to blow it. Our men got there and cut all the wire. And they blew part of it, but not enough to damage the damn that much. It took a while to take that thing because they were fighting to hold it.

How long was a while? A few days? A week?

Bill Meier: Maybe a week at the most. The main thing I remember about that was line patrol. It must've been probably 200 or 300 yards from the damn, and so down to the damn and back at night, to make sure nobody was coming to our side, and that's a scary thing to do. I was on the point there. You heard every twig snap and everything else.

Sure. Obviously like you said, being on point, being in a war zone like that, what thoughts go through your head when you go out that first time on patrol like that?

Bill Meier: I hope I don't run into anybody. I hope somebody don't start shooting.

How long a patrol would you normally do? Was it several miles?

Bill Meier: It was just down 300 yards or so to the damn and back, and so -

Then how long did that go on for? How long did you have to do night patrols?

Bill Meier: I didn't do it but a couple of nights because we had other men.

Rotated them through. With the damn, you were able to finally I guess force the Germans to flee or surrender?

Bill Meier: They left because we had so many that was going and fighting, and they kept backing up, so they had to back away.

Tell us then, sir, at that point after the Germans had fled, did your unit pursue them or did you keep moving?

Bill Meier: They moved us in to help somebody else. We were in a division that they sent from one place to another, 9th Armored Division, 1st Armored, whatever they needed is where they sent us to help.

So you were moving around quite a bit. During this time, did you have a chance to send any letters back home or get letters from home?

Bill Meier: No sir. You were moving.

And you didn't really know I guess then what was going on in the rest of the world or even the big picture of the battle. You were just focused on your unit.

Bill Meier: No, that's what we had to do. One time during that 6 weeks, I got three or four hours to go to the back, rest. I thought it would be longer than that. They sent me to Liege,

Belgium, and there was a guy standing on the corner of the street in Liege with a charcoal drawing, a picture that he drew me. It cost me $2 for that picture. I wrote a letter on the back of that and sent it to my mother.

That's great. So she got that in the mail probably a few weeks later.

Bill Meier: Oh yes.

So I'm sure she loved getting that. That's a prize for her, that's great. So then, at what point do you remember first making contact with the German troops coming into battle with them. Was that at the damn?

Bill Meier: Yes, that was the first that I encountered.

Did you have any that were taken prisoners?

Bill Meier: Not at that point. Later on we took a lot of prisoners.

So tell us then, sir, after you had it was about a three or four hour break in Belgium, so it was really a lot shorter than you would've thought, right?

Bill Meier: Yes.

How did you know that your break was over? How did you know it was already time to go back?

Bill Meier: There was somebody there to tell you.

OK, so did you take a train to get there?

Bill Meier: No, a truck.

They put you back on the trucks and sent you back again.

Bill Meier: Here we go, yeah.

So I think people that know about the Battle of the Bulge, it was very cold, snow on the ground and that sort of thing. So I imagine it was still that way when you were there.

Bill Meier: Yes it was.

Tell us then, sir, what happened after that.

Bill Meier: Oh, we had a lot of cross country to go through, securing all the towns, all the villages. I don't know how many we went through, clearing out all the German soldiers.

What were most of the towns like? Were they largely deserted or did they have civilians in them?

Bill Meier: Well, there weren't civilians in any of them. We gathered them all together in one spot. But that was a small town.

What was the reaction of most of the civilians towards you and your fellow troops?

Bill Meier: Of course, we didn't actually encounter them that often. They got them all together. We moved on.

So you all were moving very quickly, so I imagine that the MPs and the others would deal with the civilians.

Bill Meier: Right, correct.

So during this time, were you pretty much always on foot?

Bill Meier: Mostly on foot.

Any idea how many miles you'd go each day on foot?

Bill Meier: That's what my granddaughter's trying to figure out, how many miles I might have gone. It was a lot.

I imagine it was a full day every day.

Bill Meier: Oh, day and night. We hardly ever stopped to even dig a foxhole. We were just moving.

So at that point I guess you had to have known though that the Germans were falling back, that the U.S. forces were pushing them back because you guys were pursuing them so quickly.

Bill Meier: Yes.

On into Germany, right?

Bill Meier: Yes, definitely.

Did you know usually where you were on a map in relation to things?

Bill Meier: No.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about the men in your squad, the gun crew.

Bill Meier: You didn't get to know them that well. There was such a changeover. They would get in and gone. And one guy one night, and he was in the same foxhole as I was. I told him, I said do you smoke? He says yes. When you were getting ready to light a cigarette you'd stay down in that foxhole.

Yeah, so they don't see it.

Bill Meier: He stood up the next morning, struck a match and he didn't get to puff. Bang, he was gone. He didn't listen. You learned pretty quickly that you can crawl up inside that steel helmet, or you can dig a foxhole in this concrete.

Sure. So I take it then because so many guys were coming and going that there just wasn't really the time to get to know them.

Bill Meier: Not at all.

It was probably a way of coping with the harsh reality of the war, too, to not form a real tight bond.

Bill Meier: Right, because if you bonded to closely with somebody and they got hit or something, it would tear you up.

When you were facing combat in a situation that most people in their lives will never encounter, what was going through your head? Did you pray a lot or did you become kind of fatalistic and not worry about what was going to happen next because it was going to happen, or how did you cope with being in that type of situation?

Bill Meier: Both. You prayed and took it as it came. You were facing, you'd been trained to face it. You did what you had to do.

So during this time you keep moving very quickly on foot, almost continuously –

Bill Meier: Day and night. I walked, hold onto the guy in front of me and sleeping.

Holding on to the pack in front of you.

Bill Meier: Yup.

And how much gear would you carry? Quite a bit I'd guess.

Bill Meier: Well, you threw away what you didn't use.

What did you normally carry on your pack?

Bill Meier: A raincoat, a blanket, a station ranger and a toothbrush.

Then I guess the ammo they issued you, would you carry that in the pack?

Bill Meier: Yeah.

And then your weapon. You had a personal weapon as well as -

Bill Meier: No, all I had was the M-1.

So what I meant though was you had the M-1 and then your squad had the light automatic that was operated -

Bill Meier: Yeah.

So when would you know that it was time to set up the crew weapon and to get firing. You would get word from your sergeant, or platoon commander? How would you know when it was time to dig a foxhole or set up?

Bill Meier: Whenever they said we had to do that. We were moving so much. So we came to a spot where we had to set up and they'd say it.

How often when you were pursuing the Germans was it that you made contact with them first and how many times do you think it was that you were dug in and the Germans made contact with you?

Bill Meier: I probably didn't dig in maybe three times in that length of time.

You were pursuing them.

Bill Meier: Yes.

Were there many occasions when you came in contact with German troops that had dug in?

Bill Meier: No, they were always gone. They were moving so fast. We were trying to catch up though.

Sure. So this is moving I guess maybe kind of into March of '45? How long were you on foot in Europe? I know you arrived over there in February of '45. How long was it that you were over there in Germany?

Bill Meier: I was in Germany the whole time.

But was it into like April or May of '45, June of '45? I'm trying to figure out, sir, how many months you were in Germany.

Bill Meier: I was in Germany the whole time because the whole outfit was right outside of Hocken, and stayed there until I got hit.

Tell us, sir, when that was.

Bill Meier: Well, that was the next big battle I guess, was the Rhine River and ___ bridge, that railroad bridge. We had ours pull to the Rhine River and hold. When we got there, there was so little resistance because they had just gone across. Well, this bridge, the Germans were trying to blow the bridge, but our outfit got there in time to cut all the wires to keep it from blowing, so they were trying to shell it, and dive bombers come in. The dive bombers tried to bomb that bridge. I was one of the first foot soldiers across that bridge. They had already blown holes in it. But our outfit had heavy metal plates half as big as this room, that they'd cover those holes with because halftracks went across, whenever those carriers went across, and we went across.

So that was a very key point to keep that bridge and seize it.

Bill Meier: Definitely.

So you were one of the first to cross. Tell us what that was like.

Bill Meier: Well it was kind of weird because daylight came, and when we crossed that bridge, there was a big mountain, pretty good side of a mountain, and the Germans had a cave up on the top of it. It was 100 prisoners came out with their hands up.

Just when you got across.

Bill Meier: Yes, they were ready to give up.

What was that like seeing the Germans surrendering? Did you take any of them prisoner yourself?

Bill Meier: No, we had guys, there were guys assigned.

Probably MPs. So you get across the bridge, and I'm asking you if your whole squad goes across with you –

Bill Meier: What was left of us, and on that railroad before coming onto that bridge, the Germans had railroad cars with big guns on 'em, and ammunition stacked up out there, and nobody to fire 'em. The Germans were gone.

Yeah, they fled.

Bill Meier: So we started, we had to turn one way or the other, and we turned to the right and down the road, right beside the railroad track, and they had to keep that dirt from falling down, they had a rock wall built, and as the hill got smaller, the rock wall got smaller. It was about this tall -

Yeah, I guess about 3 feet tall.

Bill Meier: 2 and a half or so. I looked up and I saw what they called a potato masher, a hand grenade looked like a potato masher. I saw one floating out and then it hit on this side of the wall when I was on this side.

So just on the other side of the wall.

Bill Meier: Yeah, I was down to where I didn't get hit.

Wow, so what did you do then? Just get up and keep going I guess.

Bill Meier: Yeah, we had to go.

Sure. And when was it that you were wounded? Was that at the same time?

Bill Meier: No, about 10 days later where I got hit.

Where were you when that occurred?

Bill Meier: We had gotten to the first superhighway, and we were set up there and ready for the Germans coming back, trying to take it, and I only had three men with me at the time. We hit the

old coal mine. They had a barracks there that the Germans used, stacked with rifles and ammunition, nobody in there, and B Company called and said we're pinned down over here. We need help. I took a rifleman, myself, a machine gunner, and a BAR man. We went up out of this coal mine, walked up this road, the road was down, with trees and stuff on either side, and got up to where it was only about 6 feet I guess to the top. I told the machine gunner, I said get up right over there, put your backpack down, and then start firing. He did and the BAR man said I don't want in on this. I said get on your knees just above him. He stood up. He didn't get to pull the trigger, he got shot. The machine gunner had already been firing quite a bit, and I could see probably 200 yards down the road the Germans were moving back across the road, so I don't want to get hit, and when the BAR man got hit, I said let's get out of here. It was just enough to get B Company out, and we helped B Company out of that. It was a few days later before I got hit.

What did you do, sir, with your fellow soldier, the automatic rifle man was hit, were you able to pull him out, did you drag him out?

Bill Meier: I don't remember what happened to him at all. I try to remember. The MAs got to him I guess. I don't think he lived.

So you fall back from that, and then you said it was a few days later?

Bill Meier: Yeah, a few days later we were at the super highway, set up a machine gun, in case there was any Germans coming back, and our mess hall and first aid had moved up close to us, so I only had two guys with me. I sent them back to eat, and I stayed with the gun. I was reading the Stars and Stripes from my newspaper that we had. I was laying up against the stump of a tree reading that paper when I got hit.

What was it that hit you?

Bill Meier: A sniper.

A German sniper.

Bill Meier: Yeah, he was about 250 yards away. He was in a house in the middle of the town, and we didn't want to go over there because there were tanks in there, had a big battle of tanks. But I saw when I got back to San Antonio, that year I saw a guy that was in my outfit. He said that they had found that guy in that house, and they had pinched him off.

Where were you hit?

Bill Meier: Right here.

Right in your chest.

Bill Meier: Right here, right there, and went out back there. Across 44 ribs.

When you got hit, what did you think? I'm sure it was a surprise to you, right, because you were reading the paper, and probably didn't expect it.

Bill Meier: Nope.

Were you able to call for help or did somebody hear it?

Bill Meier: Knocked the breath out of me. Of course I had shock and couldn't get my breath. The guy that dug in with me came back pretty quick and found me and called for the medics. That's right there where I was hit.

Did you lose consciousness?

Bill Meier: No.

You were conscious the whole time.

Bill Meier: Yeah.

So it's just amazing that you're still alive today. It sounds like it was a shot that could have very easily killed you.

Bill Meier: Oh yeah.

So it missed all the vital organs and went through you, just broke your ribs. But you didn't know that at the time.

Bill Meier: No, they finally cut all the clothes enough to find where I was hit, and doctored it, put me on a stretcher, and at that time they laid the windshield down on a Jeep and put you on top. They put me on that going back to the hedge station and shells started falling in the sky and then the driving Jeep stopped in a hole, and I was like…I couldn't do anything.

Were you in pain at that point?

Bill Meier: No.

You were just numb, you were in shock you said?

Bill Meier: They gave me a shot of morphine, too.

So then finally they get you back I guess to a mobile hospital.

Bill Meier: At the Rhine River, there was a MASH unit where they operate.

When did you find out you were going to be OK?

Bill Meier: I really didn't know I guess, until I woke up from the operation.

Did one of the Army doctors there tell you that you were going to be all right, or did you know?

Bill Meier: Yeah. I was there about 10 days I guess, and then there was a pilot, piker cub airplane, red-lined a pilot. They had a piece of mouth where they could open it and slide a stretcher in there. They put me in there and he started flying back to where the C-46's and 47's were equipped to carry litter, people on stretchers over to England. So that little old piker cub,

this was his spot was there. He said look over here, look over here, P-38, and the airplane, that was the first they came out. I never saw the P-38's.

That's pretty neat. So you saw a P-38 flying during your being Medi-vac'd out of there.

Bill Meier: And P-51's. And we got closer to where we were going to catch the big plane, and he said there's something going on up here. There's too many fighters in the air. We landed and there was seven generals on the ground from England, France, and Vienna staged, I don't know where all.

Having a conference of some sort I guess or a meeting.

Bill Meier: Yeah, trying to figure out their strategy to go on. I spent the night there and then the next day over to England, Redding, England hospital. I was there until the end of June before I came back to the States.

So you were there in the hospital I guess when the war in Europe ended, is that right?

Bill Meier: Yes. Ended on my birthday. The 8th of May. That's when it was supposed to end.

So I imagine, did your folks get a telegram or some sort of notice that you were wounded?

Bill Meier: Yeah, they got a letter.

What did it tell them? Did it tell them that you were going to be OK, or did it just say you had been wounded?

Bill Meier: It said I'd been wounded, and they didn't know anything. They were quite worried.

Yeah. When was it that you were finally able to get word to them that you were going to be OK?

Bill Meier: I don't remember. I guess it was in the hospital in England when I could write.

And so eventually they sent you back to the United States?

Bill Meier: Yes, in June, end of June.

End of June, 1945.

Bill Meier: Yeah.

Did you get to come back home at that point, or did they keep you at base?

Bill Meier: No, I was on the hospital ship, and landed in Newport News, Virginia, and flew to Fort Sam Houston on the 4th of July.

Of 1945.

Bill Meier: Yeah.

How long was it at that point before you were able to see your family again?

Bill Meier: Well, my parents came down of course to San Antonio to see me shortly after I got there, and it wasn't long when I was able to come home on weekends.

When was it that you received your Purple Heart?

Bill Meier: As far as I can remember, it was there at the hospital.

In England?

Bill Meier: No, in San Antonio, when I got back.

You can't remember them coming and pinning it on you or anything of that sort.

Bill Meier: No, I think all they did at that time, they came into the hospital there where I was by the bed, and they had a lot of Purple Hearts. They just handed them out.

Sure. At this time, were you all married during the war?

Bill Meier: No, her first husband was my best buddy in high school. I sang in her wedding, and he died early in 1980, only 52 years old. She was living in Houston, and I had divorced in '84. In '95, she had an elder aunt here in Austin, and fell and broke ___ so she retired and moved to Austin to take care of her aunt. She called me, you know, for coffee in '95, and we got married in '96.

That's great. So you all have known each other for a long time, went to high school?

Bill Meier: No, I didn't know her until she married my best buddy.

OK, but he went to high school with you up in Manor?

Bill Meier: Yes.

So when the war ended, when was it you finally got discharged from the Army? Did you stay in for a while?

Bill Meier: I had to stay in because at that time you had to earn so many points to get out, and I didn't have enough.

Even with your wound, you still didn't have enough points.

Bill Meier: Yeah, until June 26 of 1946 when I got discharged.

So where did they send you then after you got out of Fort Sam Houston, or out of the hospital? Did they keep you at Fort Sam?

Bill Meier: For a while, September until -

What did they have you doing during that time?

Bill Meier: Nothing.

Nothing? The war was over and you were still an infantryman, but you didn't have anything to do.

Bill Meier: No, just piddle around. Then they sent me to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the ___ barracks where they had guys that were charged with something that they were supposed to have done, that they either got a dishonorable discharge or reinstated back in their units.

Were you assigned to guard them up there?

Bill Meier: Yeah. But I didn't have to guard, I was working in the office, using one of these old machines that they make copies.

Oh, the mimeograph machine?

Bill Meier: Yeah, had to turn it out.

With the ink, was there kind of a purple ink on there?

Bill Meier: Yeah.

And so that's where you left the Army then, right, discharged at that point?

Bill Meier: Yeah.

What was your rank when you left?

Bill Meier: Corporal.

Corporal. So you get out and then at that point you come back home to Manor, back to the farm?

Bill Meier: No, my dad couldn't have it at all, so he sold out and moved to Austin.

So he sold it while you and your brother were fighting in the war.

Bill Meier: Yes, so I came back to Austin looking for a job. I got a job at Safeway grocery store, training to be a manager, and had some friends of ours, and my parents had a church in Austin, said why don't you take the exam for the post office? I did, and they called me just before Christmas, quarter to 6, to go to work at the post office. I said is it permanent? No, it's just temporary. I said well I don't want it. Then I went to work first day of February '47, I went to work at the post office.

Really. And how long did you do that for?

Bill Meier: 32 years.

32 years, that's great. Were you in the main branch there in Austin?

Bill Meier: Yeah, that's all they had at that time.

Yeah, it was a much smaller town then, I guess.

Bill Meier: Do you know where the ___ school is on 45th Street?

I do.

Bill Meier: That was outside of the city limits in 1947.

So you've seen Austin grow and change considerably.

Bill Meier: Gollee, yeah.

I think we mentioned before we started recording, your granddaughter has gotten interested in the story about your time in the service.

Bill Meier: She got my division book, all kinds of things she's gotten from me. I says use it. She's writing a story.

Well, she's the one that put us in contact with you, and we appreciate that, because that's how we find most of these interviews. And it's important, too, to save these stories for future generations and so people don't forget the service and sacrifice.

Bill Meier: The family didn't know anything about it, you know, when they finally got me to talking, that's the first they had heard about it.

Why was it you think you were so reticent to talk about it?

Bill Meier: It's painful, very painful.

Does it help to be able to talk to your granddaughter?

Bill Meier: Yeah.

That's good.

Bill Meier: She's got a masters degree in broadcast, so she knows what questions to ask and when to ask 'em. She'd come and interview me, and I guess she's done it half a dozen times, and I could go for so long and then I have to quit.

Sure.

Bill Meier: 'Til this day I cannot watch a war movie either. I have nightmares. I don't watch 'em.

Well that's probably best if it bothers you.

Bill Meier: Oh boy, and you'd think after this length of time that something would fade away, but it's still there. After 68 years.

Well I'm sure there are certain things in life that just are indelible, they leave such a permanent memory, good or bad.

Bill Meier: Found my serial number that I had. I still remember it.

Just because it's probably something that was so ingrained in you.

Bill Meier: That's it.

I know in my circumstance, I still remember my rifle serial number from boot camp. That was several years back now, many years back, so I think you're right. There are some things that are just for good or bad stay with you. But we appreciate, sir, the fact that you've shared those stories with your granddaughter and that she called us and that now we've been able to interview you as well. As I mentioned before we started recording, we have archives at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s, and so we're going to add this interview to that archive, and if you have any photographs, and I can probably get these from your granddaughter, any photographs that you would want to share with us, we can put those on our web site as well. So this program is just a very small way for the state of Texas to thank you for your service and your sacrifice to our nation.

Bill Meier: Well, it took me a long time to even accept the fact that I did anything worthwhile. I didn't feel like I did anything that was worth talking about. But since I've been able to talk about it, it's changed my way of thinking, that I did do something that was good for the country.

Oh, and for the world. To beat the Nazis and Hitler and what they represented, and anybody that's familiar with the Holocaust and all the other horrific things done over there. It no doubt changed the course of the world, and if it hadn't been for the U.S. forces leading the way over there, it would be a much different, darker world. I think there's no doubt about that.

Bill Meier: No doubt.

You played a part in that even though you might think a small part, you are a part of that. So we're thankful for that. We don't have very many World War II veterans left either, so that's why it's so important.

Bill Meier: What do they say, there's a 1,000 a day dying?

It's got to be pretty high. It might even be more than that. My grandfather served in World War II and he's very elderly now as well. Most of the World War II veterans that we interview now were young guys like yourself. The guys that were officers or senior enlisted, they are not with us anymore, so a lot of young guys.

Bill Meier: My dad was in World War I. He never did make it to the front lines. He was over there in France ready to go when the war ended.

Did he ever talk to you about it?

Bill Meier: No.

Never did. What branch was he in, do you know?

Bill Meier: No, I don't remember.

But he was from Manor, do you know if he was drafted?

Bill Meier: I'm sure he was.

Well I'm glad that you've been able to share this story with us, sir, and in about a week or two we will send you copies of this interview on CDs and we're also going to send you a nice letter from Commissioner Patterson, the commissioner of the General Land Office, along with a nice certificate, and we put it in a commemorative binder. So it looks really nice and it's something you can display.

Bill Meier: Well thank you.

Again, thank you, sir, for your service to our nation and thank you for letting me interview you.

Bill Meier: All right, thank you.

Thank you very much.

[End of recording]