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Interview with

GENERAL ROBERT E. GALER

March 14, 1998

Place of Interview: Fredericksburg, Texas

Interviewer: Bill Alexander

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General Robert E. Galer

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Mr. Alexander: This is Bill Alexander. We're doing the oral history of General Robert E. Galer for the Admiral Nimitz Museum and the University of North Texas Oral History Program.

General Galer, please tell us what is your home address?

Gen. Galer: My original home was in Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Alexander: I'd like to know what your current mailing address is.

Gen. Galer: My mailing address now is 5588 Southern Hills Drive, Frisco, Texas 75034.

Mr. Alexander: Thank you. Now, this time let's go back and find out where you were born and when.

Gen. Galer: I was born in Seattle, Washington, on October 23, 1913. I was the youngest of three sons.

Mr. Alexander: Your father was...

Gen. Galer: My father was a captain in the [Seattle] Fire Department, and one of our fun deals was, when all

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Mr. Alexander: Your father was...

Gen. Galer: My father was a captain in the [Seattle] Fire Department, and one of our fun deals was, when all

three boys were in college, we were all captains of a team; and Dad was a captain in the Fire Department, so we were all captains.

Alexander: You were all captains (chuckle). What about your mother? What was her name?

Galer: Mother? Mary Larry. She was one of the youngest brides in Seattle, Washington, when the city of Seattle city just starting out. They were quite a visible family around Seattle. As I am told, my grandfather had one error...maybe it was my great-grandfather. I'm not sure. He had a choice of two pieces of property about ten acres in size, and one had a fence around it. So, he took the one with the fence around it. The one that didn't have a fence around it turned out to be the heart of downtown Seattle (chuckle).

Alexander: That sounds like my family's "good luck" (chuckle), I must admit. You obviously went to school in Seattle, did you?

Galer: Yes, I went to high school on Galer Street in Seattle, and all three of us went on to the University of Washington [Seattle, Washington].

Alexander: When did you graduate from the University of Washington?

Galer: I graduated from the University of Washington on June 1, 1935, and became an aviation cadet on June 1, 1935.

Alexander: Now, how did you happen to do that?

Galer: I think the way I happened to do that...I was in Naval ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] that they have at the University of Washington.

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: The major in charge [of the ROTC unit] was a basketball "nut" [fanatic], and I was captain of the University of Washington basketball team, and he wanted me to go to Quantico [Marine Corps Training Center, Virginia] .

Alexander: There you are (chuckle). So, that got you into the Navy, huh?

Galer: I had an opportunity of being either a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps or an aviation cadet. I wanted to fly. Strangely enough, an Army colonel had a son, who was a senior officer in the ROTC unit. We were in the same class. The Army colonel thought that he was going to get a Regular commission for his son. But then the quota was full, so "Daddy" went to Washington and worked on the right people; and the Marine Corps called and said, "I know that you want to fly. Do you want to cancel your request for second lieutenant, or do you want to go fly?" I said, "I want to go fly." As a result the colonel's son has been senior to me for the last sixty-seven years (chuckle). He knew more...I didn't know anything

about the military.

Alexander: So, there you are. It's another fence around your property. Where did you get your training?

Galer: I went to Pensacola [Naval Air Station, Florida].

Alexander: At Pensacola.

Galer: All the [Navy flight] training at that stage was at Pensacola.

Alexander: First of all, how long did it take you to get your commission and wings? Oh, you already had your commission.

Galer: Well, first, when you're an aviation cadet, you went to Sand Point Naval Air Station [Seattle, Washington], which is three miles past the University. We checked in and soloed there in the next forty-five days. Then you had to wait until the quota was down at Pensacola. So, I soloed in July--I think that it was in July or August--but the quota vacancy didn't show up until, I guess, January.

Alexander: Oh, that's quite awhile.

Galer: It was quite awhile.

Alexander: What did you fly in Pensacola? What kinds of planes were they?

Galer: In those days they had five squadrons that you worked up through. The first one was a primary trainer. Then there were seaplanes.

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Galer: Float planes and big [flying] boats. Then you went into...well, Squadron Five is where you went into fighters. I don't know. Squadron One may have been ground school; Squadron Two, primary flight training; Squadron Three, seaplanes; Squadron Four, bombers; Squadron Five, fighters.

Alexander: Fighters. When did you complete your training?

Galer: It was kind of interesting because about halfway through the course down there, that the colonel from Washington, who had worked with the Army colonel, who got the Army colonel's son fixed up...the Marine Corps announced a program that, I think, three out of the graduating class could get a Regular commission in the Marine Corps--those from Squadron Five. I was in Squadron Three. This colonel--"Fish" Salmon was his name--called me and said, "Now that you know a little bit about the military, do you want a Regular commission, or do you want to stay an aviation cadet?" I said, "I'll take a Regular commission. I understand that they make a little more money." (chuckle) So, the Navy at Pensacola was completely surprised when the list of names that they had submitted had one extra one added on. That was me.

Alexander: That was you.

Galer: Colonel Salmon did that. We got to be great friends. We later did a tour of duty together in the Virgin

Islands. We both laughed about that.

Alexander: I'll bet you have. What was your duty station at that time?

Galer: You went from Pensacola to Quantico, and about the first night at the bar, the word was, "If you want to be a fighter pilot, you better know how to play polo, because [Ford O.] 'Tex' Rogers has the polo team."

Alexander: You go from playing basketball to polo here.

Galer: He said, "They care for those guys." They asked whether I could play polo, and I'd been on a horse maybe a half dozen times in my life, so I said, "Sure, of course." (chuckle) It only took about the first day that we went out on a horse for them to realize that I'd got into the squadron, but I wasn't a polo player (chuckle).

Alexander: You had no idea what you were doing.

Galer: There were two of us, an aviation cadet and myself, who both claimed to be...

Alexander: Polo players.

Galer: ...polo players. The other aviation cadet was also from the University of Washington, and he was "Pappy" Boyington. [Editor's note: Following a tour of duty with General Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Croup--the "Flying Tigers"--in China, Boyington later joined the United States Marine Corps and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for shooting down

many Japanese planes. Subsequently, Boyington was shot down himself and became a prisoner-of-war. He was the commander of the famous "Black Sheep Squadron" (VMF-214), and is credited with shooting down a total of twenty-eight Japanese planes.]

Alexander: Oh, really! So, you were classmates with him?

Galer: We were classmates and friends in college all the way through.

Alexander: Gee, that's interesting. He was quite a character.

Galer: You said that right.

Alexander: From what I've heard. Okay, now you've got a certain period of time. Well, at Quantico you were commissioned, so is that your actual duty station?

Galer: I'm a second lieutenant at that duty station.

Alexander: And you're flying?

Galer: We're flying fighters. "Tex" Rogers, the polo player, is the commanding officer.

Alexander: What kind of fighters are you flying?

Galer: Boeing F4B4s. [Referring to the United States Navy precision exhibition flying team pilots, the Blue Angels] We were the nearest thing to the Blue Angels for that day.

Alexander: Well, I guess that's right.

Galer: "Tex" Rogers was dating a gal that lived on a farm just south of Quantico, and it was very normal for us, when we would come back from a flight, that maybe nine

airplanes would "buzz" [show-off by flying dangerously low to the ground] down in between the barn and the house. She'd come out on the porch and wave at us as we went by. We performed at two or three air shows. "Tex" never learned how to navigate, but he knew every railroad track between Quantico and the Mississippi. The word was that if they'd left a switch open, we'd have gotten lost (chuckle).

Alexander: I can imagine. Especially on a good cloudy or foggy day, it'd be pretty tough.

Galer: He was so bad--really, he was a good guy--that we rigged up a couple of beer cans like goggles and painted railroad tracks on them. So, when we got to the West Coast to [train in order to] carrier-qualify, we said, "We don't want you to get lost, so just follow these tracks."

Alexander: (Chuckle) That's great. Let's see. Let's talk about carrier-qualifying. Was that something that you did pretty soon after you got there?

Galer: Oh, we were catapulted [reference to a technique of using a steam-powered slingshot-type device designed to assist an aircraft in taking off from a short aircraft carrier deck] at Pensacola.

Alexander: Oh, you were.

Galer: Then as soon as you got to a fighter squadron--that was in the first six months--you carrier-qualified.

The Marine Corps had to work it out with the Navy to get pilots and airplanes someplace where they had a carrier.

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: So, for example, if they said that there was a carrier up at Norfolk [Virginia], that was the closest to Quantico, and we'd go down and qualify there. As I say, one time we flew from Quantico to San Diego. They had a couple of other deals on the way, but we requalified when we were in San Diego.

Alexander: You requalified?

Galer: Yes. Theoretically, about every year or so, you'd have to requalify. You had to do several flights and practice responding to the signal of a LSO [landing signal officer]. Then you'd go aboard ship and make about six landings.

Alexander: What year was this, approximately?

Galer: This is in 1937, 1938.

Alexander: So, what was your duty pretty much between 1937 and 1938 to, say, the beginning of World War II?

Galer: Well, my next tour of duty after Quantico was Saint Thomas in the Virgin Islands. I flew amphibians down there. I was down there about two years.

Alexander: You were?

Galer: In fact, this is kind of interesting. This was, I guess, 1939 at Saint Thomas, which had just a small

squadron that was the only thing there. We got the first secret message that they'd ever gotten. It took them about two days to resolve it. Finally, my boss says, "Come on, Bob, we've got to go do [this]." The secret message was that the Marine Corps, the commanding officer, was to send somebody down to sign a treaty with the British about the various islands. [Editor's note: General Galer is referring to the controversial "destroyers for bases" diplomatic arrangement between the then neutral United States and Great Britain in 1940. Following much pressure from the British while the aerial Battle of Britain was raging during the summer of 1940, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued an executive order on September 3, 1940, announcing the exchange of aged American destroyers for British bases in the Western Hemisphere. Under the terms of the agreement the British would receive fifty World War I-vintage American destroyers in exchange for the outright gift British-manned bases in Newfoundland and Bermuda for ninety-nine years. In addition, the British granted rent-free leases to the United States for their facilities in the Bahamas (Great Exuma), Jamaica (Galleon Harbor), Antigua, Saint Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana (Georgetown). Moreover, the British government promised the United States that it would

never sink or surrender the British fleet to Germany.]

Alexander: Oh, to put in bases.

Galer: For bases and \_\_\_\_\_. That was when the Vichy thing was on. [Editor's note: The term "Vichy" refers to the unoccupied but pro-German portion of France which collaborated with Nazi Germany following the French surrender in July, 1940. World War I hero Marshal Henri Pétain served as the head of state of Vichy France. Under the terms of the ongoing, albeit somewhat revised, Stimson Doctrine that had been aimed at Japan's aggression in Manchuria in 1931, United State Secretary of State Cordell Hull refused to recognize the legitimacy of the fruits of German and Italian aggression in Europe, especially inasmuch as it pertained to control of the overseas colonies of countries such as France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and Finland.] We were supposed to fly down the islands, Barbados and stuff, and sign these documents. We were told not to land at Martinique [reference to an island in the Atlantic Ocean possessed by France before World War II] because we would be interned [by the Vichy officials there]. So, we took off the first day and ran into a hurricane, and we had to come back to Saint Thomas. You know, landing in the water at these various islands is awkward and time-consuming.

The next day we took off again and flew through

the tail-end of the hurricane. We were going to land at Barbados, and at about that time an airliner went by, a KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines] airplane, I believe, which was putting its wheels down for a landing. Captain Freeman said, "Hell, we'll follow them in!" [Editor's note: In so doing, the pilot of the secret mission didn't have to announce the presence of the aircraft by having to radio a request for permission to land.] It was a turf field. He landed and taxied away, and we landed almost in formation. When we rolled about to our stop, we were stuck because the hurricane had put all that water on the field. We were on a secret mission, and here was everybody out there taking pictures of the two airplanes. We signed them [the documents]. That [agreement] was to help [in Allied] anti-submarine operations later on in World War II.

Alexander: Yes. Were these bases primarily seaplane bases, or could they be used as any kind of base?

Galer: In those islands you could have authority to do anything you wanted, basically. You could build them, or you could use seaplanes on the existing fields. But they were for advanced planning, paving the way.

Alexander: Even that far off.

Galer: Then we came back. My next tour of duty after that was at San Diego, and that was with Fighter 2. I

think that that was what they called it. They changed the names of a couple of these fighter squadrons as they went along. This one was at North Island, Coronado [California], a beautiful place to be as a bachelor, and I had lots of fun. Coronado is next to San Diego.

Alexander: How long were you there?

Galer: I was there until February of 1941, when we went to Ewa, Hawaii.

Alexander: To Ewa?

Galer: We went to Ewa, Oahu. That was a 2,000-foot strip, and it had a mooring mast that they had built for the around-the-world flight of a dirigible.

Alexander: Oh, a mooring mast?

Galer: A mooring mast. There was nothing else there, and we were in the middle of a big plantation.

Alexander: Pineapple?

Galer: Yes, and we went out and set up camp.

Alexander: But you had this strip there. Was that...

Galer: We had a 2,000-foot strip.

Alexander: What airplane were you flying?

Galer: I guess at that time I was flying Brewster Buffaloes.

Alexander: My goodness! What was your duty?

Galer: Well, we were a fighter squadron. We were training and waiting to see what they [the Allied high command] were going to do next.

Alexander: What's going to happen.

Galer: There was a lot of talking about being on Christmas Island by Christmas. There was a Christmas Island, and they talked about Palmyra Island and all that.

The word was that the Group was going west, and that's when they said that we'd requalify for carriers. Heretofore the Navy had always sent the potential carrier's LSO over to conduct field [on dry land] carrier landing practice before the pilot's went aboard the carrier. The colonel had agreed on a date to start qualifying, but the Navy--CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet] had not provided an LSO for us. When we went to to a special meeting to request a carrier LSO to do the field carrier landings to requalify, the colonel went over to CINCPAC. CINCPAC said, "I didn't say that I was going to send you an LSO." He came back and saw me, and he said, "Did you know what the LSO was doing?" I was the officer-of-the-day on our trip to Hawaii. I said, "Yes, sir!" He said, "You're relieved as duty officer-of-the-day, and you'll start doing carrier landing practice!" Later that afternoon...

Alexander: You'd be LSO, then?

Galer: Yes. I phoned over to Pearl Harbor, and my friend...I think that he was on the Saratoga. I don't remember 100 percent for sure which ship he was on. I told him

what they had just done to me. He said, "Well, I can come over and help you for a couple of days." So, he brought a set of [aircraft carrier landing signal officer] paddles and showed up and helped me for about two or three days. Fundamentally, in the Navy's system there was a landing signal officer and an assistant [landing] signal officer who'd be in that position for a year before he got qualified.

Alexander: And you got qualified in...

Galer: In a weekend.

Alexander: Oh, gee (chuckle). Were you doing simulated carrier landings up there, or were you doing it on carriers?

Galer: Well, as soon as they had had maybe two weeks of field carrier landings practice, and a carrier was in--available--for the weekend, we'd go out and qualify everybody aboard ship.

Alexander: And you were the LSO?

Galer: I was the LSO.

Alexander: Where were you located physically from Pearl Harbor or Hickam Field?

Galer: I'd say that it was about four miles. Do you know where Barber's Point is?

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: We were halfway between Pearl Harbor and Barber's Point. That's where I did the Marine Corps a great favor.

Alexander: Well, I would think so.

Galer: I mean, what happened is later.

Alexander: Oh, I'm sorry.

Galer: I was planning officer for COMAIRPAC [Commander Air Operations, Pacific], and the Navy said, "What are we going to have to do to get Ewa? We want to build at Barber's Point." I said, "That's easy." No thought, no study. I said, "That's easy. Just swap us Kaneohe [Naval Air Station] for Ewa." I was talking to my boss, and I told him what I'd said, and damned if they didn't do it. Kaneohe is a beautiful base, and we still have it.

Alexander: Oh, it is. Well, now how far away is that?

Galer: Across the island.

Alexander: I thought so. It's still on Oahu.

Galer: Oahu.

Alexander: Oahu.

Galer: It had a beautiful runway, beautiful beaches, and beautiful quarters. We had been living in tents (chuckle).

Alexander: Gee! You went to first class.

Galer: Yes, but I didn't get to live there.

Alexander: So, you were there at Ewa [during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor] on December 7, 1941?

Galer: Right, I was there on December 7. We were with some friends of ours from the University of Washington, and

we were up at one of their houses. We spent Saturday night up there at their party.

Alexander: Was this on the island?

Galer: Yes, on the Pali. The house had a great view of Pearl Harbor.

Alexander: Where is this?

Galer: Really overlooking Pearl Harbor. My friend and I were both fighter pilots in the same squadron. We were going to play golf with our host. We had just come out with the first Bloody Mary of the day in our hands when we saw that the Japanese attack was underway: "God! We've got to go!" I still don't know whether we finished the drink, but we did get into the car and headed...

Alexander: What was your first reaction? Did you realize who they [the attackers] were?

Galer: Oh, yes. I mean, the first one that came by, you could see those insignia.

Alexander: It came right over you.

Galer: It was between us and the harbor. Physically, from the house we could see the harbor and the ships that were getting hit there. Then we got in our car and headed for Ewa. When we went through Pearl City--this was still the tail-end of the first wave [of attacking Japanese planes]--they were strafing incoming cars. We couldn't...it looked like we were going to have a

head-on [collision] unless we headed for the sugar cane field, and we ended out in the sugar cane field, stuck.

Alexander: Where were you headed?

Galer: Ewa. We commandeered a taxicab and got there in time for the second wave [of attacking Japanese planes].

Alexander: Oh, you did? Okay.

Galer: When we went on the base, they handed you a rifle, and we got in the swimming pool that was under construction, and we fired a few volleys at the next airplane that went by. None of our airplanes...they'd all been lined up, and they [the attacking Japanese planes] got them all. None of them were flyable.

Alexander: We did that very well [sarcastic comment].

Galer: Yes. Well, the Marine Corps can line things up straight (chuckle).

Alexander: Well, I think that was probably not only the Marine Corps, but the Navy and the Army, the Air Force, and everybody else did that. So, you were shooting at them with your Springfields [Model 1903 Springfield rifles]? Did you do much damage?

Galer: I don't claim one (chuckle)!

Alexander: Okay. That must have been pretty upsetting. You lost your airplanes.

Galer: We lost our airplanes.

Alexander: So, what did you do then?

Galer: Well, for the next couple of days we...incidentally, I mentioned when I spoke [at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] that when the first Navy carrier planes [from the Enterprise] were coming back to Ford Island, the Ford Island gunners were so trigger-happy there that they were shooting at them [the returning American carrier planes].

Alexander: They were shooting at everybody.

Galer: They [the remaining American carrier planes] came in and landed at Ewa, so we had a couple of Navy squadrons there for a couple of days.

Alexander: Where did they come from?

Galer: From the carrier [USS Enterprise] that was coming back into port.

Alexander: So, they offloaded their airplanes?

Galer: Yes, but before they ever get into port, they take off [from the aircraft carrier and land on the ground].

Alexander: Yes. So, that's what you're saying. We had a total of--what--two carriers out there?

Galer: Yes, I believe so.

Alexander: I know that there was a lot of confusion and everything going on at this point, but also at the same time there was an awful lot of work to be done. How was that worked out?

Galer: Without any airplanes, we set up a perimeter defense. We dug foxholes in case they made another a landing

and came at us. Then we started getting airplanes in, and they'd get them into flying shape. I ferried a couple of them out to Midway to get Midway set up.

Alexander: Did you do that? Did you ferry some?

Galer: I ferried two out.

Alexander: How did you get back?

Galer: Oh, there was a transport, I think. I don't know.

Alexander: I didn't know that they had any transportation or whatever. Prior to the Battle of Midway, there was considerable air traffic to Midway.

Galer: Yes. In fact, for the Battle of Midway, I took nine airplanes over to the island of Kauai. A B-17 or something would come back, and we wouldn't know if it was a Jap or not. They'd "scramble" us [get planes airborne], and we'd chase it to Pearl Harbor and never catch it. Pearl Harbor was blacked out if it was at night. But we operated over there for about ten days.

In the meantime, I had been declared as squadron commander. When they did that, I had my "exec" [executive officer], two enlisted men, and one airplane (chuckle). Everybody said, "Hurry up and get 'em ready!"

Alexander: You had a pretty hefty command there [facetious comment]: "Get 'em up and get 'em ready," huh?

Galer: See, this was in, say, March, and we had the Battle of Midway in June. We were carrier-qualifying people,

and we left on August 1 for Guadalcanal.

Alexander: Gosh, that's right.

Galer: The man that I picked as my wingman was a hell of a good guy. He had a total of forty-five hours of flight time in the F4F [Grumman Wildcat fighter aircraft] by the time that we left.

Alexander: Forty-five hours by the time that you were going to go into combat.

Galer: On our way to combat. In fact [Fighter] 223, 224, and two dive-bomber squadrons were in the group. [Major John L.] Smith's fighter Squadron [VMF-223] and [Lieutenant Colonel Richard C.] Dick Mangrum's dive-bomber squadron [VMSB-232] went in on a "Jeep" carrier Long Island, and the other dive-bomber squadron under [Major] Leo R. Smith [VMSB-231] and my fighter squadron went on in a ferryboat or train ferry that formerly had operated between Cuba and Key West [Florida]. The top speed was about eight knots.

Alexander: Where were your planes? Or you didn't have them?

Galer: You taxied them in just like a car. They were headed for Guadalcanal. We taxied them on this ferryboat, like, a railroad car carrier.

Alexander: Oh, okay.

Galer: When we got to Efate, that's where the little Long Island, a small aircraft carrier, had taken Smith's squadron. The carrier didn't get under way or

anything. They lifted us off and put us on the catapult and flew us off the other end. We lost one airplane and not a man, fortunately. The airplanes hadn't been warmed up or anything for a couple of weeks.

Alexander: Ooooo!

Galer: Yes. But we got to Efate, and then we first got warmed up, gassed up. The next day we flew on into Guadalcanal. We got in on Guadalcanal on August 29. We were about two weeks behind the other squadrons.

Alexander: What were you still wearing? Guadalcanal was a "hot box" [very hot and humid].

Galer: In fact, the other squadron, when they first got to Efate, they swapped several of these pilots with the Efate-based squadron. Their pilots were about as well trained as mine, and then....

Alexander: Forty-five hours.

Galer: Well, they swapped about half a dozen people with the squadron that was in Efate. Actually, on Guadalcanal, I'd say, half our losses were operational, and the other half were combat losses.

Alexander: Okay, operational meaning just...

Galer: Pilot error or blunder. On the first day, I think two kids just didn't work their oxygen right. They had had very little oxygen training. We were about at 17,000 feet, and they...

Alexander: They just blacked out.

Galer: ...just blacked out or something.

Alexander: Were your planes at Henderson Field [Guadalcanal] during this time? [Editor's note: Henderson Field was on Guadalcanal. The codename for the airfield was "Cactus."]

Galer: Yes, we were at Henderson at this point.

Alexander: Yes, but when you got there, you landed at Henderson?

Galer: Yes.

Alexander: And you're still flying...was it still Brewster Buffalo?

Galer: No, we're in F4Fs .

Alexander: You have F4Fs, okay.

Galer: The Brewsters, they replaced those.

Alexander: That's fortunate, I believe (chuckle).

Galer: Well, see, we'd lost most of our Brewsters at Pearl Harbor.

Alexander: So, F4Fs is what they replaced them with. How did you like that airplane?

Galer: Fine. While we were at Ewa we used to dogfight with the Army Air Corps from Hickam Field when we had time. We'd run into them, and we'd have a little dogfight. But we couldn't get near the dive-bombing or do the firing actual gunnery training that we needed.

Alexander: Were you there just basically to scramble, to meet the Japanese planes as they were coming in?

Galer: Yes.

Alexander: Is that what your primary mission was?

Galer: That was the primary job, or if there were ships, we'd strafe them. We had Jap navy ships [approaching Guadalcanal] almost every night. It depended on how you worked it out. If you were loaded...see, we were very short of fuel and short of ammo [ammunition], too, so they could sort of pick...like, if they were trying to land troops, we definitely would go strafe them, but we strafed or dive-bombed them or both. We had a lot of problems--poor food, dysentery, malaria. We took anybody [into the air] who was healthy and wanted to go. If he could get in an airplane, he got to come.

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: And both John Smith--he had the other squadron--and I tried to go everyday. We couldn't take them all. I had an excellent "exec," John Dobbin. I'd bring them in the morning, and he might go in the afternoon. We might both go, depending on how many airplanes we had.

Alexander: Everything depended on that, didn't it?

Galer: As far as we were concerned, yes.

Alexander: What was your ranking now?

Galer: I made major while I was at Ewa.

Alexander: You've been out of school for a while. How long were you there?

Galer: I have to qualify this. My squadron was there from September or October and left about the first of November. Then I stayed for about two or three weeks more to lay out another airfield.

Alexander: Oh, you did?

Galer: I was a graduate engineer, and my boss said, "You're helping!"

Alexander: You were going to be an engineer for a while.

Galer: Be an engineer for a while. The squadron that relieved mine was [Major Leonard K.] "Duke" Davis's squadron [VMF-121], and [Major Joseph J.] Joe Foss was the "exec" in that. [Editor's note: Of the so-called "Cactus Marines," Foss was the leading "ace" in the skies over Guadalcanal scoring twenty-six Japanese planes shot down. Like General Galer, Foss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.] I flew one or two days with that squadron while I was laying out airfields.

Alexander: You still flew then?

Galer: Not much. But something would be said...somebody might say, "We've got an extra airplane! You've got to get it up there!"

Alexander: So, you did. All right. This is never a delicate subject, but I sometimes forget to ask the question. What about kills [number of Japanese planes shot down]?

Galer: Oh, I'll say that Washington is arguing over whether I have thirteen or fourteen (chuckle). My medal [reference to General Galer's Congressional Medal of Honor] says that I have eleven-and-a-half [kills] in twenty-nine days. Everybody says, "How in the hell did you shoot down half an airplane?" That [half an airplane score] really means that my wingman and I both shot at the same airplane [that went down]. So, who do you credit it to? For instance, in the Army Air Corps they resolved such disputes by flipping a coin. We just counted them as half kills for each one.

Alexander: That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it.

Galer: I don't know. I mean, you don't know who did it. I think that between all of us, where you shot at a couple of airplanes and thought that you'd hit them, but then somebody else shot at you, and you didn't watch them [the first airplane] anymore. The odds were that if you put holes in them at all, their making it back all the way to their base was very problematic.

Alexander: Were the Japanese planes pretty much flying in from Rabaul?

Galer: I believe so--250 miles north. That's a long way to go if you've got...

Alexander: If you've got holes in your plane.

Galer: You're hit, the engine is spitting, and you're losing gas (chuckle).

Alexander: That's right. So, did anybody ever shoot you down at all?

Galer: Yes, I've been shot down three times.

Alexander: That's more than once, isn't it?

Galer: Once I was flying over to Florida Island...the Australian coastwatchers...I mentioned [in my presentation to the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] them this morning, and I'm sure that you know who they are.

Alexander: I know who they are.

Galer: They were most valuable to us. We didn't take off and wait for the Japanese [a long time to get there], so we saved fuel. They [the coastwatchers] told us when the Japanese airplanes were coming. That gave us a little bit of warning, so we'd have enough time to take off and gain altitude. Then we were fighting basically right over Henderson Field. If you got hit or something...like, one day I don't know how many Japs were shot down, but three of us were shot down, and all three of us made a "dead" stick landing.

Alexander: Oh, did you?

Galer: Holes in the airplane. Another time I got shot down, and the Marines from the Raider Battalion came out and tried to drown me on the way in (chuckle).

Alexander: Something was going through my mind here. Were you there at the change of command? When [Admiral Willam F. ("Bull")] Halsey was put in charge?

Galer: Yes, but I was not very close to that. I mean, I'd heard about it.

Alexander: Yes, but it had no effect on what you were doing.

Galer: No. I mean, we were happy to have him [in command].

Alexander: That's kind of what I was asking you.

Galer: He was better known to be aggressive...

Alexander: He sure was that.

Galer: ...moreso that his predecessor [reference to Vice-Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, whom Halsey replaced]. There was always different problems.

Alexander: Sure.

Galer: [Referring to and gesturing toward personal documents] Can use some of this information that I have here?

Alexander: I certainly can. The strip that you were building...

Galer: That was either Fighter 1 or Fighter 2, I think.

Alexander: That's what it was that you were working on. Obviously, you did a good job...

Galer: Well, I...

Alexander: ...in engineering.

Galer: Well, the SeaBees [Navy CBs or construction battalions] did the work. They just worked day and night on it. You know, the worst night, I think, was on November 13 or something like that. Theoretically, when the

Japanese battleships came down to shell us, they fired 972 big shells, 16-inch shells, that came in around Henderson Field. When they came in, I landed and taxied over, and thought that I had put my airplane where they couldn't see it. Well, then it rained like hell that night, and we were bombed that night.

The next day we got an alert, and I got into my airplane and went back exactly the same way that I came in, except that there was a hole this deep [gesture] full of water. I ended up like this [gesture indicating that the plane was standing on its front end with the propeller pointing toward the ground].

Alexander: You ended up on your nose (chuckle). Oh, geez!

Galer: We tried to avoid that, but there was that kind of deal.

Alexander: During that shelling--bombardment--what in the world did you do to get away from those things?

Galer: We got in a slit trench to get below the horizon. In fact, right next to each of our tents, we had slit trenches. I was next to mine one night, and they dropped a 500-pound bomb just the other side of it. It blew away the tent, but it didn't break the mosquito netting on my cot.

Alexander: Isn't that amazing?

Galer: Yes. There was no way you could have believed that,

but that's the way it was (chuckle).

Alexander: Now, you were there for how long? You were there in November?

Galer: I left about in the middle of November.

Alexander: What was your next assignment as a major?

Galer: I came back to El Toro [California], I think. I was there just a short time and then had leave and that kind of stuff and went on a couple of speaking tours, either from El Toro or San Diego. I don't know the exact status right at that time, but, you know, they were right there close together.

Alexander: Yes, sure.

Galer: Then I was sent to the Army Command and Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Alexander: Oh, you were?

Galer: That's where I was when I got the call saying, "Come to Washington to get your decoration."

Alexander: Okay. Tell us about that, please.

Galer: My mother had been a Democratic chairman, and the men in the family were all avid Republicans. She just thought that it was wonderful to come to Washington to meet the president [reference to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. We did that, and it made her day. When she went back to Seattle, she was a real celebrity for a couple of days.

Alexander: You know that she was.

Galer: Then I went back to the Army Command and Staff school. When I left, the B-17 would do everything. They thought that it didn't need fighter protection or anything. When I came back, if I said that they needed a fighter escort, why, they'd accept that just like it was the gospel (laughter).

Alexander: All right, for the purpose of the tape here, please tell us what medal you were awarded?

Galer: Well, I was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The citation says that I shot down eleven-and-a-half planes in twenty-nine days under difficult circumstances. The twenty-nine days were in the month of September.

Alexander: Well, congratulations. That's a wonderful, wonderful story. This is why they did ask you to go on the [War Bond selling] tour, because this was very important during that time for the war effort, because things were not going well at all. You also did a wonderful job doing something like that as well.

Galer: Just doing what I was told.

Alexander: I understand. Well, then following this assignment, did you stay in the States, or did you go back to the war zone? You didn't have to go back [to combat], I understand.

Galer: What I had tentatively lined up was to get a fighter group and finish the work on it. Somebody in

Washington said now that I had the Medal of Honor and I had been shot down three times, this pilot business was too dangerous. So, Colonel Kier and I...Colonel Kier was the boss. They had this radar that they wanted to use. They said, "See if you can figure out a way it'll help the Marine Corps--help airplanes get back to base and can help in providing close air support." We dreamt up the best way we thought that we could use it, and we trained three teams. The three teams were ordered to three different ships. The colonel and I were ordered to join Team One at Ulithi.

That got us to Iwo Jima on D-Day [February 19, 1945]. We went ashore on D-day at Iwo, and we were there about thirty-five days. We were there when they raised the flag [on Mount Suribachi]. He and I climbed up the mountain a couple of days later to take a look at it. We started to guide the airplanes back from missions such as those that were bombing Japan, particularly the damaged airplanes that had up been to Tokyo or something.

Alexander: That's why we got Iwo, of course.

Galer: That's what they say that we got it for.

Alexander: Having possession of Iwo Jima saved an estimated 1,300...or was it 13,000 airmen?

Galer: What?

Alexander: I can't remember the total lives that were saved. Was it more than 13,000?

Galer: I've read it, but I cannot remember. But we were there for thirty-some days.

Alexander: You were there on D-Day. You went ashore on D-Day.

Galer: Yes. We went ashore at 3:00 p.m. on D-Day. That's a loose use of the word ashore. We got to about high tide and dug a hole in the sand. That's as far as we got the first day.

Alexander: What happened to the Marine fighter pilot here (chuckle)?

Galer: Well, that was a safe job. I was on the ground, digging deeper.

Alexander: They took you out of harm's way, is that what it was? You're a major still, or do you have a different rank now? This is 1945.

Galer: I may have been a lieutenant Colonel by then, but I'm not sure.

Alexander: You had a command, did you?

Galer: Well, we were in charge of three teams that we had trained. Those are three teams of about twenty-five men per team, with a 584 Radar, a mechanic, and a couple of sub-machine guns, and that was it to go in. We'd figured out things, like, if you flew a plane over a tunnel or something like that during the day, and the radar knew where it was, then at night, if

necessary, if you heard that there was a lot of action there, you could guide that airplane back to that spot to try to bomb it. It was things like that that we did. We still don't know how effective it was.

Alexander: It'd be hard to find out.

Galer: Well, that's what we were trying to do with the radar. We figured that any way we could use it, we would.

Alexander: Yes. The radar installation would have been...was that a permanent, fixed-type station?

Galer: That was very simple. You could set that radar station up in about twenty-four hours.

Alexander: I see.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Galer: We were there for about thirty-five days, I think it was, or thirty-six days. Then we got orders to join Team Two.

Alexander: Where in the world were they?

Galer: In the Philippines. We were flown down and landed behind the lines and then met Team Two coming ashore at Lingayen Gulf. Then we went on into Manila.

Alexander: Safety all the way [facetious comment].

Galer: Safety all the way. [The Japanese command at] Manila surrendered, so they figured that we were available to join Team Three.

Alexander: I'm not going to ask where that was (chuckle). Where was that?

Galer: Okinawa. We went in there and landed there on D-Day [April 1, 1945]. So, the two of us hit three D-Days...

Alexander: Three D-Days.

Galer: ...in about three months.

Alexander: They didn't let any Marines do that except you two.

Galer: Except these two.

Alexander: Boy, it's lucky you didn't get another medal.

Galer: That's what I say. The "man upstairs" [God] was with us].

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: The funniest part of a lot of this is that I've got a couple of Purple Hearts.

Alexander: Yes, sir.

Galer: The biggest injury that I've ever had, I got playing baseball in high school (chuckle).

Alexander: Well, that speaks well for your good luck in the war.

Galer: Well, the "man upstairs" was taking care of me. I claim to be the luckiest Marine around.

Alexander: I can see why, sir. You were doing the radar bit on each one of these landings then?

Galer: We had the radar team, and we'd take it in and set it up. Then we used it for forward air control in front of the Marine ground advance force to guide in dive-bombers [who were providing them with close air support]. It helped us pin down...you've heard

stories where our own troops were shelled or strafed or something.

Alexander: Sure.

Galer: But with the radar we could locate it in daylight and know what we were talking about, and then we could take planes back into that area at night or in bad weather; or we'd pick up a ship off the island and send some of the squadron. We could direct Army Air Corps squadrons as well as the Navy and Marines, if we could help them.

Alexander: You know, because actually they activated in an Air Corps base on Okinawa before the island was secured.

Galer: Oh, yes.

Alexander: I hadn't realized that.

Galer: Oh, I mean, there was also one on Iwo before the island was secured.

Alexander: Active?

Galer: Yes. In fact--I used to say that [that Okinawa was secured] advisedly--a squadron came in, and they got to their tents and stuff, but they didn't put security guards around at night. They thought that they were, you know...

Alexander: Secured.

Galer: ...safe. The Japs were coming out of these tunnels, and they ran through the camp throwing hand grenades into the tents that night. They then passed the word

to the new Army Air Corps personnel coming in: "When you go to one of these fields, make sure that you understand the need for security." After we secured Okinawa, we went looking for the best site to get the best range and stuff out of the radar. We picked a place where we could look down at the field and also look in the way that we were going, which was north. As I say, we had maybe twenty people. We had just gotten there and dug in, when all of a sudden, we had at least 10,000 Okinawans go by--just down below us--and you don't have any idea if they were friendly or not.

Alexander: You just keep your head down.

Galer: We also had one of the first VHF radios. That was new in those days.

Alexander: Well, that would have been new. That's right.

Galer: About the second day we were set up...and theoretically our landing program called for us to get there on D+10, but on the ship that we were aboard, the skipper got so excited that he wanted us ashore. He called up some small boats, and what happened...we were having dinner with him on the way over. He said that he'd been in on two landings and never knew what the hell went on.

Alexander: Which skipper was this?

Galer: The skipper of the ship. Colonel Kier said, "Well,

the stuff we have got down below, if we bring it up here on your bridge, we'll give you a play-by-play account." He said, "Well, bring it up." We gave him a play-by-play account, and by noon he was beside himself. He had some small boats, and he commandeered some more, and he loaded us on. We had to be there to "help the boys," he thought. So, we got up there, and the beach at Okinawa was not too tough compared to [the Japanese resistance that was encountered at] Iwo. It got tougher later. When they [American troops] tried to move up [inland], that's where we had the biggest losses of the war, but we had set up. About the first day we were up and operating, well, the Japs came in with a couple of "Betty" bombers and landed on our airfield and came out shooting and stuff.

Alexander: They came out shooting?

Galer: Yes, and we could see it. The fleet wanted to know what the hell was going on. We came up on the air [transmitting], but the ships' captains had never heard of us. But from then on we were the play-by-play guys, only harder. So, those are the kinds of things that you get into.

Alexander: This was all over the radio?

Galer: VHF.

Alexander: But you were watching this visually. Was your radar a factor there or not?

Galer: No factor at all. We were sitting up on a hill looking at it. The general, who was my boss down in the Virgin Islands, was the air boss for the Marines on Okinawa. He was General Francis Patrick Mulcahy.

Alexander: Oh, boy!

Galer: Two people on Okinawa got the mumps. One was a little Okinawan boy, and the general was the other one. Apparently, it went to the groin [testicles] and all that kind of stuff. He called me up and said, "Galer, get your ass over here and tell me what's going on!" I was not connected with him at all. But he was in bed (chuckle).

Alexander: He didn't know what was going on. That's terrible. Well, how long did you stay on Okinawa?

Galer: Until about June.

Alexander: You stayed April, May, June?

Galer: Yes, two or three months. Then I was just relieved and went back to the States.

Alexander: Oh, you did?

Galer: Yes.

Alexander: So, that was your last one?

Galer: Overseas with that.

Alexander: Did they assign you to...

Galer: Oh, yes. As I say, my memory isn't as clear, but I think my next tour of duty, when I got back, was to Corpus Christi [Naval Air Station, Texas], where I was

Commandant of Cadets for a couple of years.

Alexander: What were you then? By this time you're a colonel?

Galer: Someplace around there. The next tour of duty after that was the Air Force Command and Staff School at Montgomery, Alabama. Then I spent quite a bit of time with the Navy. I was director of guided missiles in BuAer [Bureau of Aeronautics], Washington, D.C.

Alexander: Guided missiles? Where?

Galer: Guided missiles in Washington. At the Air War College, I wrote my paper on triphibious assault.

Alexander: Triphibious?

Galer: Air, ground, and sea assault. There were only three Marines there, I think. Another one was on guided missiles, and the third was on some other subject; but when we got our orders, my orders were to guided missiles. I'd never seen one (chuckle).

Alexander: They must have thought that you knew something about them, anyway.

Galer: I got educated about them, and I stayed in that job for a couple of years.

Alexander: Where were you then?

Galer: Washington, D.C.

Alexander: That's right. So, you were the guided missile expert in Washington?

Galer: I wouldn't say that I was "the" expert. I was the Director of Guided Missiles for the Bureau of

Aeronautics.

Alexander: That's pretty impressive, isn't it?

Galer: That included things like...well, that made me the manager of the guided missile range out at Point Mugu [Naval Air Station], California, and things like that. I'd go back and forth.

Alexander: Sure. Where was your family living? Were they in Washington?

Galer: They were in Alexandria, Virginia.

Alexander: Didn't you tell me that you had a son?

Galer: I had a son in 1944 and another one later, about four years later, at Cherry Point [North Carolina].

Alexander: You were with your wife when you got home, your family, so that was apparently a good thing. Well, let's go further. We haven't got you out of the service yet.

Galer: Well, I got out of the service when I finished the guided missile tour in Washington.

Alexander: You did?

Galer: We'd been to Cherry Point once, and my wife didn't like the schooling there at all. That was my first wife. She didn't like the schooling at all. I had worked real hard...they had a program, while I was the Director of Guided Missiles, but in the Marine Corps, if you have a master's degree, they would send you to a special school--two Marines a year--and you'd end up

with a Ph.D. So, I took courses at night and traveled and got a master's degree at George Washington University [Washington, D.C.] while I was Director, Guided Missiles.

I had my orders to go to this special school and then they cut the budget. They canceled it, and my wife had already arranged for all of this. When they said, "Go back to Cherry Point," she said, "No!" She didn't want to go, so I got out [of the Marine Corps].

The next thing is, what do you do? The aircraft industry knew that I was knowledgeable about where the industry was going to head. I had a couple of offers for jobs. I wanted to get with Boeing, and they couldn't make up their mind. Then Temco in Dallas--Bob McCullough--came in.

Alexander: I knew him.

Galer: A great guy.

Alexander: I didn't know him well.

Galer: He says, "What's the story?" I told him, and he said, "I'll tell you what. I'll meet your salary, and you're a V. P. [vice-president], if you want to come." I said, "I'll take it!" So, I went with Temco and moved to Dallas. Then about a year later, we became Ling-Temco, and then we became Ling-Temco-Vought.

Alexander: Yes.

Galer: I was vice-president, engineering for Vought. I'd

been there in that job a couple of years, when we had been developing at Temco a missile that we took over to LTV [Ling-Temco-Vought]. We also were designing a vehicle for amphibious work. The "purple" [secret] word was we were winning both of those [contracts]. We'd been testing and demonstrating it and stuff. Jim Ling had joined us, and he didn't know anything about Washington, so we went up to Washington...

Alexander: You knew a lot about [dealings in] Washington [facetious comment] (chuckle).

Galer: There we were--two and two are five [facetious comment]. That's the way Ling thought.

Alexander: That's the way he thought.

Galer: The way he thought. We went to Washington, and we were in a meeting...as I say, I was introducing Jim Ling to Washington and what went on up there. A guy came over from the White House. It turned out that Mr. [United States Senator and 1960 presidential candidate John Fitzgerald] Kennedy, a couple of days earlier, had stood on the steps of the Warren, Michigan, plant and said, "If I'm elected president, we'll keep your plant open." This guy comes over and says that if we would build both of these vehicles in Warren, Michigan, we would win that [contract]. The chairman of the board, Bob McCullough, said, "What do you think of this, Galer?" I said, "Are you going to

throw the son-of-a-bitch out or not?" He said, "Why do you say that?" I said, "We have bid it, and we bid it based on building them in Texas. All of our engineers are in Texas. They won't all want to go to Warren, Michigan, and there is no way that the price we bid is any good in Warren, Michigan. If we got to Warren, Michigan, the United Auto Workers are going to take over your bid. I think it stinks." "Oh, okay."

On the way back--we had a company airplane--they asked me again whether...I said, "I explained it before. We just can't afford to do that. It will ruin our reputation. We can't meet our schedule." We were back for about a month, and I went skiing, and I picked up the paper in Aspen [Colorado] one morning, and it said that LTV was going to move to Warren, Michigan (chuckle).

Alexander: Yes, but Mr. Ling knew where the money was, and that's all he cared about, so I understand that.

Galer: He's in the oil business now.

Alexander: Is he? I've lost track of him.

Galer: I had cocktails with him last Saturday night.

Alexander: Oh, you did.

Galer: Yes.

Alexander: Are we through here?

Galer: Fine with me.

Alexander: Well, I want to thank you very much on behalf of the

Nimitz Museum and also for the University of North Texas, because they also share our work here. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you so very much.