



NCSU Libraries  
Special Collections & University Archives  
Oral History Interview  
**TAPE LOG**

*Please note that this is not a literal transcript. Many of the questions and answers are paraphrased and abridged.*

**Interviewee:** Ted J. Meyer  
**Interviewer:** Anna Dahlstein, NCSU Libraries Fellow, Special Collections  
**Date:** August 12, 2003  
**Location:** Meyer residence in Greenwood, South Carolina  
**Length:** 90 minutes.

- 000 Introductory information (same as above)
- 015 Date and place of birth?  
March 8, 1923. Charlotte, NC.
- 020 What about your parents?  
Both were from Charlotte, born and raised.
- 023 Parents' education and occupations?  
My father was a warehouse foreman for Biggers Brothers [a wholesale produce business], went to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Mother worked for J.B. Ivey department store and did finish High School and had some secretarial training. His name was Theodore J. Meyer. Her name was Pearl Jenkins Meyer. (No brothers or sisters.)
- 040 Why did you choose to attend college – were you the first member of your family to go to college? And why NC State?  
My father had a brother who was a lawyer. He graduated from Wake Forest. He was much younger. As to why I went to NC State – I had had no example, except for my uncle who went to Wake Forest. One of the subjects I always had trouble with was English / spelling, so I knew I couldn't follow him. But in High School I was on the college track. We had never discussed whether I was going to go to college. But in my Senior year, we had a father-and-son talk, and he said he and my mother were prepared to send me. As you may have guessed, they were not wealthy people, and I was very appreciative of this. I made up my mind that if I was going to do it, I was going to do a good job. [...] I had a good friend who was going to go to State. And Engineering seemed to be the thing. [*Several friends from grammar school went to State, including his first roommate, Fowler Woodside.*]

107 Did you have to declare your major already in your first year?

Yes you did.

112 Please relate how you found out that U.S. targets had been attacked by the Japanese. In other words, how did you find out about Pearl Harbor? Could you describe that day and the impact it had on your life and the lives of your friends?

Sure. I was where I should have been on that Sunday at about two o'clock. I was at North Carolina State, in the library, the old library. I did most of my studying there because I have a one-track mind and things have got to be quiet for me to learn anything. I was in the library and it started as a whisper around two o'clock that something was wrong. And then it got around that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Of course the whole library ended immediately and I went back to the dorm and talked to Fowler Woodside about it and he was quite upset because he had a brother who was a pilot and he was in the Philippines. To be real honest, our geography was sort of vague and we really couldn't place him. But he was worried about his brother, and rightly so. At that point, for three or four days, I'm not really sure if anyone attended classes or not. It just broke the whole thing up. Everybody knew, especially the freshmen, that this was pretty much over until this thing had been settled.

146 Did most students enlist right away or did you wait until you had completed your academic year?

It was so up in the air and these guys had a place and a job for the moment. The first time that it went through my mind was in the spring, when the Navy brought a group of aviators through. *[Tried to join, but had a bad eye and was turned down. Said they could make a sailor out of him but that was not what he wanted to do. Most friends worked through the summer of 1941. A good friend, Bill Starnes, and he decided to try the Army Air Corps. Could at least volunteer to be a navigator and use glasses. Tricked the eye examiners by memorizing the eye chart while reading with his good eye. Never posed a problem during the war.]*

205 Please describe your military service – where did you do your training and where were you sent?

*[Accepted as a navigator but then asked if he wanted to be a pilot. Did pre-flight training and testing in San Antonio, Texas. Then went to Chickasha, Oklahoma for primary training. Flew PT-19s, two-seater, low-wing.]* Learned to love it. It was amazing. I never got out of an airplane after I had finished flying and didn't feel like I had just done something great. And I kept that feeling for a long time. I had a very nice instructor and I was in his first class. His name was Calvin Bass. [...] *[Then basic training in Enid, Oklahoma in a bigger airplane, PT-13. Learned acrobatics, to fly in formation, night cross-country. ... In Victoria, Texas got last stage of training in PT-6s. High*

*altitude, night flying, cross-country. Gunnery school. Transitioned into PT-40 fighter planes... ]*

- 320 When did you get called out for duty?  
*[After graduating from flight school, he got sent back to basic to instruct, which he disliked. Signed up for combat. Sent to Richmond, Virginia for training in P-47s. Also got some training in Washington, where he met his wife. ... Gunnery school in New Jersey.]*
- 377 How many months did you spend in training, in total?  
*[About a year. Then wasted two months in training command, went to Richmond in the spring.] If you really want to know, I could look it up. It was October 1944 before we shipped out.*
- 391 Where did you go, at that point?  
*I went to Karachi. [By train to Miami, then on C-54s across the Atlantic; switched to smaller plane and hopped down the African coast. Went to Buzurdi, which was fought over bitterly by the Germans and the English. There was a hangar there that looked like a sieve – full of bullet holes. Rested in Cairo. ... Wound up in Karachi. ...]*
- 430 Did you know what they had in mind for you, or was that confidential?  
We didn't know who we were going to join. Flew six or seven missions in India, then transferred to the eightieth fighter group, ninetieth fighter squadron, in Burma, right in the middle of the teakwood forest. Got there around the first of December, 1944. I flew a mission on Christmas Day – couldn't believe it.
- 445 *All in all, flew 75 missions around Burma -- in support of the British and flying high cover for planes dropping supplies.*
- 464 You mentioned in our conversation yesterday that you get upset when people talk about the Bomb and that it shouldn't have been dropped. Could you explain why you feel that the Bomb actually saved many lives?  
By the spring, the 90<sup>th</sup> fighter group had been pulled back out of Burma and we were resting in India. A half dozen of us were sent back to Karachi...with the idea that we were going to train new pilots. And we all knew what that was for. The British had pretty well cleared the way to the coast of China and it was pretty evident by what was happening in the Pacific that you would wind up with an attack on Japan, which was going to be a bloody thing. ... I wrote my children... if you don't mind my reading it to you. *[Reads aloud comments on atomic bomb from the letter to his sons.]*
- 496 So when you heard the news of Hiroshima...?  
Guess where I was, when I heard the news? Come on, make a guess!

In a library?

I was in the library in Karachi, at the airfield. And they said, “Gee, they’ve dropped the atomic bomb.” It was a huge thing. Of course, I had no more idea what it was than the man in the moon. “Atomic bomb” didn’t mean a thing to me. None of us had any idea of the significance of it. But the rumor began to spread that the war was going to end. And then they dropped the second bomb. Word got out again that the war was going to end. We celebrated every time. [...] It finally did. [*When it did, he was reading the newspaper – saw baseball players throw bats and gloves in air.*] One of my first thoughts was “Gee whiz, I’m out of a job – what am I going to do now?”

520 When did you come back to the United States?

That was early August. ... *Came back by boat to New York; it took thirty days.*

554 Was [your fiancée] Jean in New York waiting for you?

No. We had to be discharged. I went to Fort Bragg to be discharged.

559 What were your thoughts then? Was your goal to go right back to school?

Well, Jean and I had talked about this... We had gotten engaged when I was stationed in Richmond. We had talked about what we were going to do; whether we were going to stay in the Army or go to school or what-not. It would have been an immediate advantage to have stayed in the Army. And I had some reasons to stay. I had a Colonel, a West Point Colonel, who was very kind to me and was urging me to stay. And that was one of the things – you need a mentor in the Army, I guess just like anywhere else. But Jean and I had talked about it and we found out about the GI Bill in the middle of the summer of 1944. *I would have been uneasy staying in the Army forever without a college degree. Everybody assumed the Army would be reduced in size again.* We had decided that we would get married and I would go back to school. I got back around the middle of November and we got married on the first of December, so we were moving pretty fast. *Went to New York on our honeymoon, came back to her folks’ place in Washington, then went to Raleigh and talked to a counselor at NC State.* Talked to him about a place to live and what the procedure was and he said his friend, a former teacher, was going into business himself and he and his wife would like to rent a room. Checked with a friend named Charlie McCann if he should take the room and Charlie said, “Heavens, yes – don’t let that guy out of your sight.” Moved in the day after Christmas and started school just immediately.

600 And so you decided to continue the Engineering track that you had started before the war?

Yes, I had enjoyed it and done pretty well. I still can’t help but give part of that [credit] to those teachers, except the English Department, who took delight in failing all freshman engineers – at least I thought they did! My first semester I wound up with two A’s, three B’s and one F...

## Side B

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One of the things that bothered me and I think bothered everybody was that we felt we were behind. I thought often at State... "Gee, if this were different, I'd take more time and I'd learn more about this than what's required." But I didn't have time.

020 In your case, it sounds as though you would have gone to college with or without the GI Bill. How did the GI Bill influence your education? Did it allow you to finish faster?

When Jean and I were in Richmond before I went overseas, we had become engaged and we were talking about what we were going to do and how we were going to live. About that time the publicity came out about the GI Bill. We looked at that and thought that we could do that if Jean worked and I worked a little bit and particularly if we didn't have children, it would give us the opportunity to go back and get the degree. We talked to her father about that and told him we would get 75 dollars a month. He had a big laugh about it, thinking that we thought that we could live on 75 dollars a month, which we knew we couldn't, as a matter of fact. I think the decision was pretty well made then that we wanted to face up to the future with a degree. And in fact it got me a job, it kept me a job... It certainly made our getting married more practical. Where I had been during the war, you couldn't spend money unless you liked to gamble, and I'm not a gambler, so I had accumulated what I thought was a fortune at the time. So we had that as emergency money, and that and the GI Bill certainly made life a lot easier. We did have an apartment on campus and we were the proud possessors of a telephone – a lot of our friends came over to use the phone.

079 How did you supplement your income, the stipend of \$75 a month?

Jean worked for a department store for a while, and then worked for the state, and then worked for the College, at the Bureau of Statistics. I worked part-time for Maxwell [who rented them the first room on Dixie Trail]. He had started an insecticide business and I drove a truck for him and mixed insecticide. ... [*Relates anecdote about running into taxi cab on the way to a student dance.*] I also worked in the Chemical Engineering lab, moving equipment and breaking concrete foundations... And we lived as well as anybody.

143 Were most of your friends also married?

We had two groups of friends: the PiKas (members of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity), most of them had come from Charlotte, were single and the group they ran around with were single. And then we had our married friends. Most of the married people who had children went to Vetville.

- 160 Could you please describe the general housing situation on campus, with all the returning vets?  
I think the big surprise was the number of people who came back. I just don't think that anybody had any idea that that many of us would come back or that they would come back married. We were three and a half years older than when we left and had found people we wanted to spend the rest of our lives with, so we came back married. It was certainly a shock to me – they had full classes, and classes at odd hours... But I was really pleased with the quality of the instructors. I ran into some of the better instructors in my last year in Thermodynamics. I had two instructors who... if you were a post and could stand still, they could teach you...
- 193 Do you recall their names?  
A math professor named R.C. Bullock. [*Associate Professor Roberts Cozart Bullock.*] This was a change from the schoolteachers in High School. These guys were pros. They knew their subject inside out. Another one, who was a Chemistry professor my freshman year, was R.C. White. [*Raymond C. White, Instructor in Chemistry.*] He counseled with me one time and wanted me to switch to Chemistry, which was flattering. Those are two of the great teachers. Another was the [Mechanical Engineering] department head, who had come out of industry, and another was a turbine designer who had come from Westinghouse.
- 234 Did you spend a lot of time studying in the library, as in your freshman year?  
No, Jean was not rowdy and she was not apt to [play pranks on me like in the freshman dorms]; she didn't yell, holler and fight. We bought a desk, an awful-looking wicker desk painted pink. I used that so I just went to the library when I needed the library [resources].
- 250 How much did the GI Bill represent relative to your tuition? Did it cover it?  
It covered the tuition and supplies, including drafting tools, a second slide rule... The school expenses were just flat covered.
- 260 It was your living stipend that you needed to supplement, not the tuition?  
Right. We could eat for \$10 a week. And rent always cost you \$35 a month – that seemed to be the standard.
- 269 So originally you rented a room at this former Entomology professor's house, Dr. Maxwell, but you wanted to have your own kitchen so you moved to...?  
We didn't want to go out for breakfast. There was a lady who worked with Jean at the department store who took boarders and served breakfast and dinner. But again, it was just one room and we wanted more room, and wanted our own company. We found an apartment on Maiden Lane, upstairs in one of the old houses that is still there. That's the dead-end street right by the Belltower.

- 294 What was it like living near the Belltower?  
Well, when they played that Belltower, particularly in the summer when the windows were open, why, it was just like you were sitting inside the Belltower. We laughed; it was nothing that really bothered us back then – we were pleased enough with the facilities we had.
- 301 Did you ever visit Vetville or Trailwood?  
Yes, we had friends who lived there. One was again Charlie McCann and his wife Beverly. And another was Nesbet Rodgers and [Mary] Catherine Rodgers. Both had children. Friends from Charlotte.
- 312 Could you please describe Vetville?  
They were converted army barracks. They seemed to be very congenial. Physically I have a hard time telling you much about them.
- 320 Could you tell us a little more about life on campus in the late 1940s – other than extremely crowded, how would you describe it? Were the veterans very different from the younger students? Did you mix?  
We didn't mix a lot. The friends that I spoke about at PiKa house, they were all my age. The McCanns and the Rodgers were all my age, and all had been in the service. The new guys who were coming in, the sophomores who had not been in the Army, were really children, at least in our eyes. They had a different outlook on life. I remember we ate out in the boarding house with some of them and they were absolutely silly...
- 340 What month and year did you finally receive your degree?  
In June of 1948.
- 342 Did you have your first child by then?  
No, we were five months along the way. I thought we timed that pretty well.
- 345 Please describe your first job out of college.  
I went to work for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio. Their pay was the best offer I had. ... I had three offers: one with IBM, one with TVA, and one with Goodyear. We had never lived in an industrial community and thought we would try. ... *Had a terrible time again, finding a place to live. Shared duplex with another couple who became very good friends. They moved in again after first son was born. Were there for about a year. Did not want to be a supervisor; wanted to practice engineering. Wrote to State and got three or four names of employers who were looking for people. Wound up at Dayton Rubber Co. in Waynesville, NC, working as a draftsman... and then as a plant engineer there. After five years, could take professional exam and get license in South Carolina. Left Dayton Rubber Co. briefly and went to Dupont in Virginia. Dayton invited him back to a job he had wanted before, for around two years. Then Riegel Textile as a staff*

*engineer. Then became chief engineer of the company, 1956-1960. As plant manager, made more money than as engineer. Eventually served as president of the Apparel Fabrics division, a \$50 million part of their business. In about 1985, Riegel Textile was sold, took early retirement and formed Greenwood Engineering, a consulting firm. Also served as president of Stevco Knit [a division of Delta Woodside Corp.]*

470 Your wife mentioned that you retired at least three times...

Well, I retired from Riegel first. Then I started teaching at the local industrial college, taught drafting, and then quit that. After that, I went to Stevco Knit. The last thing I did was to supervise the building of a jail in Abbeyville, part-time, for about a year. And I did do another thing that I wasn't paid for – went to Macedonia with Executive Services and spent nearly a month there with several other people, looking at their textile business. Macedonia had broken away from Yugoslavia. ... Their textile industry was a complete wreck; they needed customers badly. We were working for a Swiss consulting firm. ... I think it was 1995, if I'm not mistaken. ...

530 How did you get the idea to volunteer for Executive Services?

I had an acquaintance – who had lived on Maiden Lane, as a matter of fact – who worked for IBM. Jean and I went to visit him and he had been to Peru on this Executive thing and I sent them a resume and told them I was available.

536 It sounds like you had a very successful career. How useful was the training you got under the GI Bill to your career?

The Engineering degree brought the opportunity. Engineering was a very satisfactory area to work in, but higher management was more satisfactory because you didn't have to ask so many people if you could do things... Being the boss is fun, as you may know. And that all came from the engineering background, which was paid for by the GI Bill.

545 Do you have any thoughts on how useful a policy it could be in the years ahead?

If it's applied right, I think it could still be useful, to people who have no other way, to talented people who have no other way... And whether you call it the GI Bill or what you call it...[is irrelevant] The way this is going, we're going to price ourselves out of the education business...

555 Are you referring to the rising cost of tuition?

Yes, absolutely.

556 What are you handing me here – Is it a copy of the act [to pass the GI Bill, i.e. the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944]?

Yes, the first page of it. Something went wrong with the computer and I only got the first page.

- 564 You mentioned you had a friend, Charlie McCann, whom we might be able to interview as well. Could you suggest any other people we should talk to?  
I've got a friend in town who went to State on the GI Bill – he went to get his Master's in Business. John Sherrill. He's here, if you'd like to talk to him.
- 571 Have you stayed in touch with your friends from college and the service?  
Yes. *Group from grammar school and high school in Charlotte gets together every year and goes to the beach. [gives names]* We have the old 80<sup>th</sup> fighter group, 90<sup>th</sup> fighter squadron. The 80<sup>th</sup> group has a reunion every 18 months... It's getting to where it's not so many any more, but I keep track of a lot of them there. ... The next one will be in Indianapolis next spring. It's the 90<sup>th</sup> fighter squadron year to put it on, so one of my cohorts is in charge of it.
- 600 When you get together, do you mostly talk about your families or do you reminisce about the war? Do some people find it difficult to talk about those years?  
I don't think so. I've never talked about it much with my children or anybody else. We exchange funny stories, not "where did I shoot this guy and where did I get shot." I think if you read [the letter to my sons], that's a pretty good description of what happened [on a typical mission].

**Final statement, recorded on second tape:**

Right after the war was over, Jean and I were married, and I was going to school. I had been in it long enough to know that I could pick it up where I had left off. It was kind of hard because I came back to Calculus after three years of nothing. But I had a confidence that I had never had before. I felt that I could do anything. There was no fear in me, OK? I felt like I had what it took to make my way through... And that was a confidence that came from the war and from knowing that I was going to make a success out of this school thing, that the path we had chosen was going to be successful.

A strong sense of determination?

Determination, but also confidence.

I guess flying upside-down at high altitudes will do that for you.

Whatever it is, walking away from that airplane... This great feeling that "I just did something wonderful" stayed for a long time. It's part of being young, having energy...

Thank you very much for your time. END