

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Ralph Lynn Allred

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Oral Interview conducted by Joseph Harmer

Transcript copied by Jessica Rhodes

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Joseph Harmer: First of all, thank you for this opportunity. It is a real blessing to be able to hear your story. Thank you. Well, let's start out with: Where were you born?

Lynn Allred: Born in town by the name of Bluffdale, south end of the Salt Lake Valley, Salt Lake, Utah.

JH: What year, like, what date?

LA: 1929, June the 3rd.

JH: How did you get involved in the military?

LA: I guess the basic involvement was when I came back from my mission I has the option of going in the army or else going to BYU as I has planned to do; and to be able to continue studies at BYU it was necessary to be involved in the ROTC program and I joined the ROTC program and that, as I completed that after my time my time at the university why, I had an obligation at the military for three years. Some where there's a trade off of the government letting me go to school and them me owing them some time for their compliment in letting me go to school.

JH: What kind of training did you get in the military?

LA: Well initially I started in Texas, in small airplanes reciprocating propeller-driven airplanes and there, after a six month stay up there why, I went to Mississippi and started working with fighter jet type aircraft and from there why I went into the newest of the fighter airplane and began flying supersonic fighters; and that was the beginning of the many different airplanes I flew.

JH: I've always wanted to fly a jet. I thought I would be fun. Did you enjoy it?

LA: You bet! You bet. In fact I had a friend who was in medical school and I was so enthused with what I was doing I told him that [he] ought to drop out of medical school and come join the Air Force and fly airplanes.

JH: When did you first have your first mission? I guess you were in the Air Force?

LA: Uh hmm.

JH: When was your first actual duty in the Air Force?

LA: Well, actually, the first time assigned to an active assigned unit was after I completed training in the Lion, the most recent supersonic fighter the F-100; and after I completed that training at Nellis in Texas... in Nevada, then I was stationed in France; and that was the first time that I really was on an active squadron with assigned targets and assigned responsibilities to participate if a war were to occur, and that was in 1958.

JH: Did you have family at all then?

LA: You know, initially I didn't. I was there three and a half months before I could... I was authorized to take my wife with me and so after the first three and a half months I thought that housing for them and so I had authorization to send for them. When they arrived the father was supposed to be having a house ready for us in M- G-. Didn't have the house ready and actually, I wasn't in France at the time. I was in Africa, in Libya and Janine flew in to, supposed to fly into Paris in early field and my squadron commander authorized me to take one of the squadron airplanes and fly from Africa and back up to France and then I was to meet her in Paris. However, that was delayed a little bit. Her arrival was on time, but I wasn't there. A girl, a friend that she had had years ago that she'd worked with, why, was on a mission in Switzerland and she had called and said she was going to come spend a few days with us. So I had to pick her up at the train depot and then go to meet Janine and so I was several hours late getting there. However, I had made a phone call from the little rural area where I was stationed to, I left a note in Paris that I'd be late and they correlated. Interesting though, would you do it now? [to Janine]

Janine Allred: Not at my age.

[laughter]

Robin Harmer: That's pretty scary.

LA: So that's where I flew my first combat missions or was assigned to a unit with assigned combat missions.

JH: What were you doing in Africa?

LA: We had a big area in the desert in Africa. It was in Libya and Libya is right on the edge of, well it's on the edge, the southern edge of the Mediterranean Sea; and uh, Libya only has a small area which is really agricultural or where you can grow much. You go twenty miles south of the Mediterranean Sea area and you get into desert, sheer desert. And we had some gunnery ranges down there, bombing ranges where we'd go down and practice the things that we were supposed to be talented in: guns, and bombs, and things like that. And so that's what I was doing down there, practicing my assigned responsibilities with the airplane.

JH: So how long had you been in the military when we started having conflicts in Berlin and the US's involvement there?

LA: Well, really there's a thing called the Cold War. There was not an active dropping of bombs during that time, but the Air Force and Russia also had alert situations both men and equipment, and, in 1958, why, I was involved at that time where I would sit in my airplane with a nuclear weapon under it and if the notice were to come over the Claxton or an alert system, why, I was obligated to be airborne within fifteen minutes on my way to my assigned target and so, I guess you could say as early as 1958 I was involved in

something that could have evolved into a war situation within a fifteen minute time frame.

RH: How did you feel about that? How did you feel about having a nuclear bomb that obviously...you know...

JA: ...and sometimes it would be a one-way trip.

RH: Yeah, and you know that it's...

LA: Well, it's supposed to be a one-way trip

RH: ...it's not just, you know, attacking military. I mean other people are going to die. There's going to be heavy casualties.

LA: Uh.....It was an assigned responsibility. I had committed when I went into the Air Force that I would do my very best to protect the United States. We would only be launched if it were evident that there were something coming from an enemy territory or from what was supposed to be, concluded to be an enemy territory. We would be launched in such an occasion and I was committed and I would have done my responsibility if the occasion had arisen. I didn't have any qualms about it. You're asking about killing people? Uh, you can look at it several different ways. Yes, there would be a lot of people who would be involved in a very dire situation, both sides but rather than look at it from that standpoint I think you can also look at it from the standpoint of you're protecting a great number of people back across the ocean in America to stop things before it gets here, and so, you don't have to look at it as a situation of disturbing people's lives. And war is that, people lose lives to save lives. Eleanor Roosevelt said war was heck. She used a different word, and it is, but you look at as what you can do for the people that are of your interest.

JH: What did your wife think when that was going on?

LA: It was just a day-to-day operation. Wasn't it hun? Just a day-to-day operation, I went to work in the morning, came home at night, sometimes. Sometimes you spent not only days and nights there, but sometimes several days and nights at work and it was...I taught school before I went into the service and I got up in the morning to put my suit on and taught school and when we were in the service I got up in the morning put my flight suit on and went to work. A day-to-day operation, an operation that was a thrilling operation to fly some of the world's finest airplanes and to work with some of the newest and latest and best of equipment. So it was a thrill to work from that standpoint. It was a thrill to fly. It was a thrill to develop your expertise in gunnery and such things and so, it was a thrill to work with the finest equipment and such in the world.

JH: Were you ever called to action during that crisis? Did it ever get close or anything?

LA: Well, I think history shows that there were times of tension, but they would come and go. There's lots of times of real work short of a war situation. Every year we had to prove ourselves at least twice a year as to whether we were capable of flying the airplane and doing what we were told to do with it. And we were evaluated by a person who was an expert in that particular requirement and so, each year we were tested, evaluated, whatever you want to call it by the individual why, it was a time of concern cause you had to perform as well then as you would under an actual situation. An example of that is to be one of the top guns in the squadron or in the wing. You had to meet the criteria such as if you were running a practice low-level flight to really be one of the highly qualified and recognized you had to be able to get to your target plus or minus one minute. And one minute's not very long when you're flying very fast and so, you had to hit your target within a given timeframe, actually it was plus or minus thirty seconds, or one minute total, and you had to do it within a certain fuel reserve, and you had to fly at that time fifty feet above the ground; later they raised it to three hundred feet, but, so doing those things you had a lot of things to do and you had to be expert in the things that you did and you had to perform as well under those situations as you would under an actual war situation and so, not all of the tense moments were as if you went to war. The tense moments were when you were evaluated to see if you could perform and so, I don't know that there's a big difference between the day-to-day operation and what goes on during a war situation because you practice for that situation and when that situation come up you do that just like you did on your day-to-day operations, so there was always demands to meet, always criteria that you wanted to be able to meet and so, there were times when there was lots of anxiety, lots of concerns even in day-to-day operations. War situations, I've been in that to. I don't know that I ever felt different during a war situation than I did when I was running practices for the situation.

JH: What happens if you don't pass the examination?

LA: If you don't pass the examination then you go back into training. Some instructor pilot will work with you to develop your expertise. If it's an aircraft situation that you can't make the aircraft perform as it's supposed to why then, an instructor pilot will take you out and you'll practice some more. If it's a ground test that you couldn't pass well then, you'd be then schooled some more, and then some intense ground training, and then reevaluated on your testing on the ground. You worked from everything to normal procedures and a written test to emergency procedures and attitudes and things like that and so, it was important that you passed them all. So, if any of them you failed why then, you went back and you retrained for them.

JH: Did you make a lot of friends in the military, in the service?

LA: You bet! You bet. Lasting friends.

JH: Was everyone pretty anxious when they had exams to pass? Was that amongst everyone?

LA: I think it's like an intense college examination. Not when you're [an] undergraduate, but I think when you get to the intensity of graduate school. That's the intensity I think that they experience in being prepared.

JH: What other missions were you involved in besides the crisis we had with the Cold War?

LA: Well, during the early sixties Russia again tried to block the access to Berlin. That had been done earlier and then a great program was run to be able to give Berlin the capability to survive and after that was settled why, then there were certain corridors in the air, highways in the air that America was authorized to use to get in and out of Berlin. Russia decided in the early sixties they were going to close those corridors down. And as early as that particular time why, I was one of the individuals that were identified to go and assist during that time. I did not end up going, but I was one of the ones that was identified and prepared... I had to prepare myself to go over there and to make sure that we had the freedoms to come and go into Berlin and so, that was the first active situation. Nothing ever developed of it as we put planes into position and men in position why then, Russia decided that it was not worth the price they were going to have to pay to block that corridor and so, nothing in the way of a real skirmish evolved, but the situation was there and people were identified as to who.. some of them would go to that particular area and would assist in maintaining those corridors in an open situation.

JH: What were your feelings about Russia during that time?

LA: I think I identified with some of the media of the day. I knew of Russia's capabilities. I knew Russia's aircraft, their capabilities. I knew of their weaponry. I knew them by name. I could identify them and such and so, I knew of Russia. I knew of their capabilities and I knew of their intentions, at least the leaders of the nation and so, I identified them as most people would, as an aggressor against our philosophy and against our commitments and so, I was happy to identify them as an enemy. Now that's not true of later on in life when I had an opportunity to go there, to Russia, or when I go to work with Russian people because I found out that Russian people are like American people, they're like the Canadians, they're like the people south of the border. They're like the people in France and Germany and elsewhere that the men and lady in the street are pretty nice people, pretty nice people, but governmental issues and such were the things that I'm sure that was the focus of the enemy situation and the thing which we were not happy with. Their variation that they should rule the world and that they would do it at any price they had to pay if they didn't have to answer to someone who would challenge them.

JH: That was a really threatening time period.

LA: Pardon?

JH: It was a really threatening time period...scary.

LA: It was. You betcha. You bet.

JH: Do you remember it when you were a kid? (to Robin)

RH: Yeah, the Cold War was very real. They really posed a threat, the fad of the bomb shelters.

LA: I got one in the backyard.

RH: Still have it huh.

JH: The Vietnam War was really close to this same time period wasn't it?

LA: Well, yeah, it ran there for a long period of time. I was not involved in that until later in the program. After I spent time in Germany and rotated back to the States I worked with other fighter aircraft at that time. I flew with an organization in Victorville, California and flew the F-104, which was an aircraft that could go better than twice the speed of sound and in excess of one hundred thousand feet, and so I flew that for a period of time and that was still in the combat role. I was still in the war preparation time, That particular aircraft was used for several functions. It was used for intercepting inbound enemy aircraft or vessels or whatever and it was also then developed where it could handle and carry nuclear weapons and so, I still had the nuclear weapons atmosphere even with that. However, I only spent a short time with that aircraft and then I was put in charge of a nuclear weapons and convention weapons training center for two wing base, air division in California and I spent a good deal of time in California actually running that school because the F-104 at that time was being phased out then I flew different aircraft. I went back to flying some of the aircraft that I had flown earlier. In fact, I developed capabilities in the T-33, which I had had previously and the U-3 aircraft, which was an aircraft, designed for high-level officers generals and such and also, a cargo airplane called a C-123. So I ended up flying at one time current in four different airplanes while at Georgia Air Force Base, California.

JH: Did you test planes and things like that too?

LA: My only experience in test was based after an aircraft was taken in for an overhaul, maintenance and such. It was evaluated before the average pilot was allowed to fly it and so they had pilots whom they identified, who had some time in the aircraft as test pilots for that particular thing, and so yes I spent time as a test pilot there. I did not work as a test pilot for new and experimental aircraft. I worked as a test pilot only for those airplanes that were, that had gone through an overhaul inspection and modification.

JH: What was your favorite aircraft to fly?

LA: I don't know that I had a favorite. I don't know if I had a favorite. If I recollect correctly I flew sixteen different aircraft makes and models. I think that each one of them had its uniqueness its pleas... a bit of pleasure. I flew the executive aircraft, the T-39. I

was in a 105 wing in the warplanes department. I flew T-38s, which was a supersonic trainer. I flew three different kinds of helicopters, the Huey, the H-3, and the H-53 and so my, the breadth of experience in very different makes and models of aircraft...For a normal pilot in a twenty year career they would probably fly six or seven airplanes and I had the opportunity to fly some sixteen different ones so my opportunities were unique in [that] I got to fly so many different ones. I enjoyed each one of them, I even flew the old C-47, the DC-3, called the Gooney Bird built in 1945 and so, mine was from airplanes that were old, old things and to things that were the latest off the drawing board. I enjoyed them all.

JH: Is there any specific reason why you had the opportunity to fly so many different kinds of aircraft?

LA: I think that some of it was the opportunities at George where they were decommissioning the 104 and they had more pilots then they had airplanes and so, whenever they could move a pilot from that 104 into a different airplane that made it so the lined pilot could have enough hours to remain current and proficient in the airplane and so I got to fly four different airplanes there. And then I think the Vietnam situation extended my opportunities to fly different types of airplanes. During that particular situation I was put into rescue and trained in helicopters and I worked in helicopters during that particular time.

RH: So did you ever rescue anybody?

LA: Yes, yeah.

JA: Said he never had an unhappy passenger.

RH: I'll bet. What an amazing experience. Can you share one?

LA: Uh, they're kind of personal, they're kind of personal because you're working with people that are in trouble, they're down, or they've been shot down, they've been hurt; some of them have lost their lives and so it's kind of a personal thing. But yes, I had the opportunity to work with living and dead people who were to be picked up. I was actually in charge of flight operations while I was in Vietnam and I had people hurt. I had airplanes damaged and so...but it was a pleasure to find somebody that was down and pick them up and get them out.

RH: A miracle man, an answer to someone's prayers.

LA: I had a few of my men who got hurt and during the situation, but that's part of war. [pause] One particular situation, you asked if there were any particular situation, I think one of our most gratifying rescue situations was a pilot had been shot down in north Vietnam are up near Hanoi, and actually ejected northwest of Hanoi and we went in to rescue that man. I was the second helicopter. I was not the primary one. We always flew in flights of two in case one got shot down. Then we'd rescue the others. I was the

number-two aircraft and we were getting close to Hanoi and were intercepted by the migs and were not able to make the pickup that day. We were lucky to get back out. In fact, the refueling airplane had to come way north to get us. We were about out of fuel before we got back. The next day we were going back again and the helicopter I had why, had failed to perform properly as we did the preflight and so we ran to another aircraft. By the time we got it inspected and ready to fly, why, they had substituted my position with another pilot, copilot and crew and so I didn't fly that one, but they rescued him. He had been down thirty days and he was just about done. He couldn't get down to the crick for water anymore. He was in pretty bad shape, but they got him out.

RH: Oh, that's great!

[long pause]

JH: How were you able to keep high moral during that time? What helped you the most?

LA: I don't think we had any moral problems from the general pilot that were involved in all this. Our missions were missions of great exposure to enemy fire. Whenever we went in to pick somebody up the people who'd shot him down weren't anymore happy with us than they had been with the people who were flying the airplanes they shot down, but we were always thrilled when we could find one of them that were down and rescue them and bring them in. It was a thrill to save a life. It was a thrill to recover an individual. It was a thrill to bring them back even if they were hurt and get them back so that their lives could be spared. Moral was not a problem. The general populace of the pilots in this particular assignment they were all anxious and happy to do their job. It was always a thrill to have them come back with the folks on board that they went after. So moral was not a problem.

JH: I can't imagine a more gratifying responsibility during a war that to save peoples' lives.

RH: The worth of that one soul

LA: Well, even if we came back with a body, why, we were happy to do that because that relieved the folks that wondered how they were doing and where they were. So even if we came back with a body why, it was a successful mission.

RH: Sure.

LA: We always felt more successful if we came back with life. Even though folks were hurt why, we were happy to get them back. It was a rewarding mission, ya. I remember one of our airplanes going down with two of our instructor pilots and one engineer on it. And, uh, somebody went in to see if anybody was alive on it. We were ferrying the airplane from Thailand to Vietnam and it went down. And I remember one aircraft that went in to see if they could find anybody there why, was shot at and they had to leave the

area low on fuel, they had to leave the area and go back home. At that particular area why, I recall that I asked for volunteers.

RH: Did you ever use your priesthood to administer to someone who was hurt in those circumstances?

LA: No, no I never did. I had some church responsibilities over there, I was in the direct presidency and in the servicemen's group in Thailand, but as far as administrations no.

JH: How did your faith bless your life and the lives of other people?

LA: I think that our opportunity to be participants in the church to which we belong is a great asset to us and wherever went whether it was Africa or France or Germany or Thailand wherever we went, even in the different places in the United States we established friendships with people in the church we were active in all the areas that we went to. I think that probably one out our greatest opportunities that we have come to mind is the blessing that I received from Harold B. Lee. Janine may want to tell that one.

JH: When you were ordained as a high priest? Was it then?

JA/LA (together): When (I/you) were set apart in the Stake Presidency. He told him that through his faithfulness he would be forewarned of dangers and we would have many people that we had met years ago that would come to see us and I had to go by that; That if he didn't come home he wasn't faithful.

LA: He'd said that if I lived the gospel principals there why, that I would return, but wherever we went [we] were active in the church and held often responsibilities, Janine in women's organizations, young women, and primary.

RH: Was there ever a time in combat when you truly felt prompted to do something, or take a different direction?

LA: Not in combat.

RH: You had your mission and you just fulfilled your mission.

LA: There were other times that uh. One time the fuel control system failed on an airplane and didn't have sufficient fuel to get back to the base that I was assigned to take the airplane to so I ran out of gas, I ran out of fuel. I was airborne. Felt a certain amount of apprehension doing that.

RH: I bet.

LA: That's a little bit more exciting than running out of gas on the freeway. And, uh, I was still in some training exercise during that time and I needed some help and I knew it, asked for it, and interesting things transpired the like of what one wouldn't expect. The

instructor pilot was flying in another airplane, flying along side and as we worked our way to a neighboring base to see if we could fly the airplane and get it to the landing and save the airplane. And as we did why, he asked very suggest... no, he directed that I change the radio from one frequency to another and so that we'd have more help. As we did why, the radio failed. So I no longer had any help from the instructor pilot and everything then was quiet. And so most everything I did except a few and signals and visual signals from the instructor pilot why, I had the responsibility of the airplane. And I think that that happened for a particular reason. A friend of mine talked to me after we got back to the home base and said, "Did you turn the radio off?" and I said, "No, I didn't turn the radio off." And he said, "You mean it really failed?" and I said, "Yeah, it really failed. I didn't turn it off." The radio was supposed to work for quite an extended period of time. There was supposed to be enough electricity from the battery to run it for a long time and it failed within just minutes of the emergency situation. When I got back a friend of mine said, "It's a good thing your radio failed." He said, "You had so many people giving you advice. You had such contradictory advice. Oh," he said, "you would have gone crazy if you would've had a radio to listen to all that." So I figured it was an answer to prayer. So, the answer came a different way.

RH: Yeah

JH: I'm just kind of in awe. These things are hard for me to imagine.

LA: Well, we enjoyed our time in the Air Force didn't we honey? We enjoyed it. We met a lot of wonderful people both in the military and in the different countries and states we went to. We gained a great appreciation for the southern part of America down in the area where the black people had suffered so.

[Tape turned off for a while]

LA: In my later years in the military why then of course you advance from being a line pilot to where your one of the directed or one of those who have leadership responsibilities and [such] over things. And so, the last years that I spent in the military I spent as an instructor pilot in the world's largest free-world helicopter, but I also was in charge of the development of training. And I ran the audio-visual a bit producing the then slide tapes and TV things that were before the days of computers. I had that department that I was in charge of. I had a big graphics group of people who could draw things out for us because we didn't have a computer to do it, but we did it with people who where graphic capable. So we developed learning centers and media to go in the learning centers and we developed types of equipment that they could use outside to develop capabilities short of going up in the air to save the cost of running planes. Some of my last things why, we developed equipment where we could perform light things in the... I forget what I called them now. Anyway they were hydraulic units developed and put into buildings where you could simulate... simulators!...Where you could simulate flight and train people. And so I had the responsibility for setting...developing and setting up and putting together presentations that they put in one center in Norton Air Force Base in California and all of them but a hundred or so had some from my particular group. And

so I had a great influence in training, develop the training programs, media, learning centers. That was a good experience. My basic training at BYU, at the university was an education and so it was a great opportunity to work early in weapons training center and be in charge of it and the latter part of the curriculum and other things. And so, even though I was associated with helicopters all the time, I mean, I'm sorry. I mean airplanes of one kind or another why, I had the great opportunity to work in the field of education.

JH: I do have one question. What was your experience after going through all this and going through Vietnam and seeing all that and coming home? What was the reactions of the public to Vietnam veterans?

LA: Oh I think as a general rule most of the people were glad the situation was coming to an end or had ended. You know the great conflict between people as to whether we should have been there, shouldn't have been there. What I remember one individual calling me a baby killer because I had been over there. And I took it with a grain of salt and I said you know I had a job to do. I swore to the government when I was commissioned a pilot that I would do as the President asked me to and that was my responsibility and I always felt I would unless it was really against my principles then I would resign from the military. But it was not hard for me to go over there and to do my job, but the individual who called me a baby killer I was... I gave a little piece of my own mind at the time. I indicated that if they had elected individuals who could determine what we ought to be doing in unison I wouldn't [have] had to be in that particular situation. And because that individual did not unite our politicians and our government people they were part of the thing that was supposed to unite those people. They were the voters. They're the ones that had to opportunity to vote. I felt no responsibility. I thought that they ought to feel the responsibility. And though I said I won't call you a baby killer I think that if I were to want to say something in return why, I think that might [be] a good phrase in reverse to you because I did what I was directed to do. You guys couldn't get the people that were supposed to direct me what to do to make up their mind what really was the situation. It was because the difficulty among you people. It was not my problem. My problem was to be obedient. Your problem was to make the people who held the office then smart enough and wise enough to work together and make some decision. So I said I feel no remorse. I feel no challenge. I have no problem with it.

RH: Is there an emotional revamp though when you come home after seeing so much destruction that you have to kind of regroup?

LA: I think that everyone that is in a war situation is a changed situation, is a changed person. I think everyone who goes to college is a changed person. Everyone who marries is a changed person. And so, I don't think that anyone can go to an area or an opportunity that's unique without having some changes in their personality, some changes in their life. My situation was not such that... I don't think my family noticed any change. Did ya? I tried to hold in reserve those things that ought not to be discussed, or those things that I held in reservation. Yes, I came back a changed individual, but it didn't affect my well being or my social capability.

RH: [to Joseph] Your grandma said that your grandpa just got a little quieter.

LA: Well, yeah. Because you pick up where you come back and you leave that particular block of time where you...it needn't be rehearsed. It needn't be rehearsed. There's not a thing you can do about it. I didn't feel that it needed to be rehearsed a whole lot and so, it's just a period of time. It was a period of time during your life. I've not written anything about it in my personal history yet. I've not gotten that far. I do have quite a bit written, but I don't have anything written about the war situation.

R: Well, coming from my perspective please do because we want to be able to know all of Dad Harmer. You know we want to know all of him the whole man and there's that chuck...

LA: Oh I've written some of my personal history. And in fact, one particular area is the area I told you about for qualification for, to be a select crew, one of the top guns and I was one of them in the squadron and there was seven of us and I was one of the top guns. I've rehearsed the flight in a section in my personal history. Janine says if you want to read my personal history why you go for a flight lesson.

JA: Yeah, you go for a flight lesson.