

EWING H. MILLER

Tape 3

April 13, 1981

At the Kenneth Hazledine residence--164 Allendale Place
Terre Haute, IN 47802

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For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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JH: This is Monday, April 13. I am Jane Hazledine. I'm speaking with Ewing Miller, who is an architect but whose interest at this point we seek concerning his having been a prisoner of war during World War II and some of his experiences during the war.

Ewing, how did you happen to go into the service in the first place?

MILLER: I was the right age and I had no other skills (laughs) to keep me out, which happens to all young people. I had just . . . when war was declared in Europe . . . I was a sophomore, I suppose, in high school when the Germans invaded Poland. I remember that summer because we were traveling -- my mother and my grandparents and myself, as I remember -- through New England. And my mother said, well, how fortunate it was that the war had started because I was far too young and would never be involved in it. Well, that shows the misjudgment of trying to predict the future.

By the time Pearl Harbor occurred, I was a freshman in college; and unlike our more recent wars, why college didn't really . . . being a university student didn't really set you aside. Everybody had to go.

Now, in trying to think over where I would end up, there was something about the sea that didn't really appeal to me, I suppose. And to allow yourself to be drafted meant that you were going (commences to laugh) into the infantry or worse. And being my size, particularly, and not being a person who felt hand-to-hand combat was the most delightful thing on earth, why I decided that the Air Force was not only glamorous but it gave you machinery to play with. And yet it was the edge that a small person gains where he's equal. You know, it's an equalizer in that sense.

JH: I think . . .

MILLER: And that proved very true. So, I enlisted.
(laughs)

JH: You enlisted. Well, I think I was going to ask because it's interesting to hear now in retrospect these many years later, what was the attitude of college students towards the war and the military at that time? This'd be 1942?

MILLER: Oh, there was a tremendous enthusiasm, you know, to get in. We had been attacked. Our nation had . . . we had lost our whole, entire Navy /Pacific fleet/ and we were in . . . thought to be in jeopardy, certainly not nearly as much as Europe. Everybody probably feared the Japanese, I suppose, more than they feared a German invasion at that point.

And there was tremendous sympathy with England. And I was thinking about that when I was on my way over to do this tape on this subject. There was also . . . because there was a naiveté about the war and its cost, there was the feeling among the students, I believe, almost to a person that . . . how do I want to put this? We just spent our whole life being involved in studies, and here was a chance to get out and do something. And here was a chance at a very early age to end up in very important positions.

JH: So, in a small way there was an ingredient of adventure . . .

MILLER: Oh, most certainly!

JH: . . . that mainly lured and attracted.

MILLER: Um hm. And for kids who came out of the Depression the thought of travel and the thought of having money paid to you to do this and the thought that you were going on a big camping spree (laughs) was just fine. And we didn't think about the fact that you got shot at (continuing to laugh) in the process!

JH: All right. Had you been a flyer before?

MILLER: No. No. No one could ever afford to get near an aircraft in those days, you know. That just didn't exist for anything but the super, super rich.

JH: Where did they send you?

MILLER: Well, they had to take so many of us in so quickly that we ended up in all the good hotels in Miami Beach.

JH: I see.

MILLER: (laughing) That's the only place they could quarter us. And that was really quite humorous, because they didn't . . . outside of drilling and just sort of getting you used to the fact that you were in the military and had to obey, why the greatest excitement that we had was being guard on the beaches. And, of course, everything in the moonlight with the waves coming in looked like a German submarine full of invasion spies. And I suppose we fired more rounds of ammunition at old logs (laughs) and scared the poor civilian population half to death.

JH: How long were you there?

MILLER: Oh, we were there probably three or four months until they could make arrangements. And then the next set of arrangements they made was really to keep the colleges open that they had just taken us out of. They put us back in the university for a period of about six months until they could get us into the flying program.

JH: Did you go back to the University of Pennsylvania?

MILLER: No, I went back to Cincinnati. (laughs)

JH: Oh!

MILLER: Which was sort of nice 'cause it was close to my home and I could see my mother and my grandparents with some frequency.

We studied mathematics and English and much of the same things that we had (laughing) been doing

MILLER: before, except now we were in uniform and we had quite a Oh, there was an extensive athletic program to sort of condition us. And we did get a little flying in little Piper kind of Cubs that But those things, they were just not . . . they were nothing more than kites with a motor on them. (laughs) But we did get a little flying time that made us think we were cadets anyway.

Then we went to Texas into the cadet program from there. And to the big field of San Antonio where we took all of this battery of tests. And an interesting thing of this stuff is that I have been followed for most of my life by follow-up surveys.

JH: Oh, you have?

MILLER: Oh, yes.

JH: They keep in touch?

MILLER: They keep in . . . not the Army! Not the Air Force! But other groups that use the same data, that wonder what's happened to us -- how successful we've been, what's been our income, do we consider ourselves to have led a good life, what would we rather have been. And there have been some interesting results out of it really.

JH: Well, now are these available?

MILLER: I think there were Well, they're undoubtedly available to various research groups that pick up the data and then ask new questions about things. Now, I think that there were . . . I was told at one time there were 20,000 cadets that they singled out and I happened to be one of these.

JH: Oh, so it was sort of a random . . .

MILLER: Oh, it was a random . . .

JH: . . . selection?

MILLER: Yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. You couldn't afford to do the whole . . .

JH: To be followed.

MILLER: . . . three million or five million . . .

JH: I understand.

MILLER: . . . people that were in cadets. But . . .
so of the 20,000 of us, 5,000 -- these figures
are rather staggering -- 5,000 were lost in
training.

JH: Oh, really?

MILLER: I'm sorry. That's not true. Five thousand
were lost in training and combat -- of the 20,000.
And then another 5,000 had been lost over the period
of time, either by moving or by dying of other
diseases and things of that nature.

JH: Well, what happened to you?

MILLER: So there are only 10,000 of us left. Now I
don't know how many there are because I haven't
been contacted in the last five years.

JH: In other words, when you received these ques-
tionnaires, you were supplied with statistics
concerning this group.

MILLER: Yes, they'd always answer you. Yeah. Yeah,
they . . . one was a thing in which they were
wondering . . . oh, they spent a great deal of
time wondering whether we had chosen the right vo-
cation after we got out of school. And so they gave
us a very complicated test. And fortunately, I
suppose, I came out ranking fairly high as an archi-
tect. But I would also have made . . . and then
they listed six other things, you know, that I would
have been successful in they would have thought.
And surprisingly, a lot of it was in the field of
psychology.

JH: Which you're interested in.

MILLER: Which I was interested in and they had no way
of knowing this at all.

JH: That's interesting.

MILLER: Yeah. But that's a little far from the war.

- JH: Yes, indeed. And . . . well, just to continue this though before we leave it, you did go on and continue your original education which was architecture.
- MILLER: That's right. Yeah. I went back after service.
- JH: And I would presume that many of them did not.
- MILLER: I suppose that's true, too. I suppose that's true.
- JH: Was this whole group college-educated or starting college?
- MILLER: You know, I really don't know but it just seemed to me that the Air Force was a very homogenous group of people, unlike the Marines or the infantry that was really the bag ends of everyone who came along.
- The Air Force was . . . I suppose today would be thought to be the upper middle-class, white WASP /White Anglo-Saxon Protestants/ (breaks into a laugh) in many ways. We were all fairly much the same breed.
- JH: All right.
- What happened to you then after San Antonio?
- MILLER: Well . . .
- JH: How long were you there?
- MILLER: Oh, probably only two or three months while we were doing all of this training. It was really quite a bore, as I remember. And you tried to find yourself a job, as I did. I became head of salads in the officers' mess. And you did this because this got you a pass. You were one day on and you were two days off, or something like that. And the pass got you into town. San Antonio was really sort of a pleasant town even at that time, with its . . .
- JH: Now, to establish your status here, you were unmarried . . .

- MILLER: I was unmarried. I was known as a cadet.
- JH: . . . and you came from Toledo, Ohio, at this point.
- MILLER: Yeah. Aviation cadets, I think, ranked about the same as privates as far as pay were concerned. (laughs) You had a few more privileges.
- JH: But at least you were relatively footloose then, so far as your individual . . .
- MILLER: Yeah.
- JH: . . . life was concerned?
- MILLER: Oh, yes. Yeah. I was . . . I enlisted at 17 so I was just barely 18 when I went into this.
- JH: Where from there?
- MILLER: Where from there? Then we went up and we took primary training in what were known as PT-13s. These were open cockpit two-seaters that were marvelous aerobatic ships. We really learned to fly beautifully in these aircraft. And it was quite romantic, because we wore the leather suits and the leather helmets and the white scarves (commences to laugh) and the . . .
- JH: Just like the pictures.
- MILLER: . . . (continues to laugh) and the goggles and the white scarves trailed out behind, you know. But they were . . . and there's nothing like flying an open cockpit plane to do these kinds of aerial maneuvers because when you first . . . that first time that you roll over and the seat belt lets loose a little bit (laughs) because you haven't tightened it up quite enough, you know, why you really know that you're . . . that that belt's all /that is/ between you and the ground down (laughs) below.
- JH: That must be pretty scary, really.
- MILLER: No, it really wasn't. It was really a thrill. They were so . . . they were marvelous aircraft to

MILLER: fly. They really were. And we had quite a good time in them. And it was . . . that was near Sweetwater and Abilene and, oh, it was cold. It was so cold in the winter up there, and that's when we were there most of the time.

Then you had to make an elective choice when you . . . well, no, that's not quite true. We went there for basic training, which were more complex aircraft. These were aircraft where the landing gear retracted and they had extensive flat area on them. These were called BT-13s. Now, these were very difficult aircraft to fly. And they were sort of a transition -- basic trainer number 13. And we lost quite a few young men in those.

JH: How were they lost? Was it inept . . .

MILLER: Oh, they'd start in . . . it was lack of experience, and they were just aircraft that you had to be on top of all the time. They had very peculiar characteristics. They would start to spin and they couldn't get them out of the spins, you know. If the . . . particularly if they . . . if the power was on full. Or they'd panic.

And then we lost a number to just nothing more than what is the bravado of the times. Somebody trying to loop an aircraft and roll his wheels along the ground, you know, and he misjudges and hits. There was the normal kinds of things because we first started night flying here and it's just the misjudgment or getting lost or these kinds of things that happened.

JH: What kind of guides did you have for night flying at that time?

MILLER: Well, we had nothing like what we have now. You know there've been so many advances. We had a radio compass. We had . . . we had air communication with the tower. The trouble is that if you were out there, we didn't have any distance measuring equipment like they have now -- the DME, the radar. We had no radar that was used for this purpose; and if you got caught in a storm, why you had to . . . you really had to work yourself over what was a

MILLER: very inept way of finding the runway. It was a radio signal and you had four quadrants to the signal. And you had to find out which quadrant you were in and then try to get on the beam. And you remember that old term of being "on the beam"? Well, you tried to get your aircraft on the beam between two quadrants and that lined you up with the runway. And there was nothing to tell you whether you were too high or too low. You had to fly to what was known as an outer marker beacon; and then you set a rate of descent or a letdown, and then you tried to fly this radio beam. Well, if there was a heavy wind, you kept getting blown off the beam and you'd have to crank your aircraft around in almost like a sailing ship. And you'd have to put it on sort of a tack, you know, to get it back in and hold it on that. Well, needless to say, why it was a hard thing to learn and when you're brand new at it, why many didn't master it in time.

And we tried not . . . they tried to keep us out of the weather at that point because we weren't experienced enough, but it wasn't always possible.

Then we finished there and that was . . . at that point then, you had to make a choice as to whether you wanted to go multiple engine or single engine. And I don't know why, I chose to go multiple engine, I guess. So, I went to Houston to Ellington Field, and we trained in advanced trainers that were twins. And we got quite a bit in the way of instrument work at this time, how to fly instruments through bad weather. And when we graduated from there, why this is when you became an officer and you were ready to go into the transition training on combat aircraft.

JH: All right. Now, what date would that be? How long did it take you to go through this process?

MILLER: Well, let's see. I enlisted in 1942. I was taken at the beginning of '43 and we graduated in '44, the class of E . . . which would be "A" January, "B" February, March, April, May of '44. And then I think we had two weeks that we came home to visit -- sort of a rest period.