

The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Boyd K. Miller
2nd Lieutenant
Army Air Corps

Interview with

Boyd K. Miller

Mr. Richard Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is January 21, 2003. I am interviewing Mr. Boyd K. Miller, known as B. K. Miller, at his home at 1035 Stadium St .in Alice, Texas 78332. Phone 361-664-7227. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Now I would like to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today.

Mr. Boyd K. Miller

I think it's nice of you to take the time to do all this.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, where were you born?

Mr. Miller

Houston, Texas

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Miller

9-1-23.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Miller

One brother and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Miller

Yes, he was a pilot instructor. I forget what years, but he taught primary flying to Army/Air Force aviation cadets

;in a civilian contract school, throughout the WWII war years. He and all other primary flight instructors were “frozen” in their jobs. They couldn’t join the Army, the Navy, the Air Force or any other service branch. They had to stay there and teach in a civilian capacity.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were civilians doing that?

Mr. Miller

Yes, Civilians. It was under a government contract. They were civilian companies that would do the primary flight training for the Army Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he older or younger than you?

Mr. Miller

He is three years older.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did he do this training ?

Mr. Miller

He taught flight in Cuero, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he stay there the whole war, then?

Mr. Miller

I don’t know, exactly, but he was there in Cuero during practically the whole war.

Mr. Misenhimer

He never actually got in the military, then?

Mr. Miller

No. The program was for the military, but he wasn’t actually in the military. That school was called Brayton Flight Service in Cuero..

Mr. Misenhimer

C. P. T. Civilian Pilot Training, this program?

Mr. Miller

That's where my brother got his training in Houston.. When he completed it, he went to work at this Brayton Flight Service School and taught the Army Air Corps cadets Primary Flying Training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your grammar school and high school? Where did you take that?

Mr. Miller

All of it was in Houston Montrose Elementry School, and Sidney Lanier Junior High, and Mirabeau B. Lamar High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Miller

1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Miller

January of '43.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do from 1940 until 1943?

Mr. Miller

I went to college.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go?

Mr. Miller

I went to the University of Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you studying?

Mr. Miller

I was an Art major. I had won some scholarships in art and it looked like it was a real logical field for me so that's what I started studying.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went into the service, were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Miller

I was drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer

In January of '43?

Mr. Miller

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember what day?

Mr. Miller

January the nineteenth, but the swearing in was some time earlier.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went into the army.

Mr. Miller

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your training?

Mr. Miller

Well, I went to Fort Sam Houston. It was an induction center. Then I was assigned to the Engineer in an Amphibian Command . It was in Massachusetts and I was in that quite a little while. First it was in Fort Devins, Massachusetts and later at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts..

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you take any basic training?

Mr. Miller

I took basic training at both, Fort Devins and Camp Edwards.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was infantry training or what?

Mr. Miller

Yes, Infantry basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long was that, do you recall?

Mr. Miller

No, I don't remember, pretty long.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Miller

Barracks; the large two-story type.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was in January when, you were up there, was it pretty cold up there?

Mr. Miller

It was very cold. We got out of a truck in the middle of the night with snow up to our hips. This old south Texas boy wasn't really used to that. But it was interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Miller

The food was fine. I don't remember anything specific, some place along the line we had pork chops to eat thirty-nine days in a row. I thought I liked pork chops but after that you get to wondering.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to Massachusetts?

Mr. Miller

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

By troop train, or was it a civilian train?

Mr. Miller

It was just a civilian train but maybe it had separate cars for the military. I don't know how many people were sent.

Not a whole lot; possibly nineteen or twenty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Approximately how long did it take to get there?

Mr. Miller

I would guess something like four or five days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a sleeper or a chair?

Mr. Miller

No, just a regular chair car.

Mr. Misenhimer

No stopping along the way, as far as getting off?

Mr. Miller

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You arrived there into all that snow.

Mr. Miller

Yes, lots of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So there you took infantry basic, is that correct?

Mr. Miller

Right and I also took training for the Engineer-Amphibian Command. They were activating what was called the Fourth Amphibious Brigade. I never did find out what happened to One, Two and Three, but this was the Fourth. I also worked in an office and I ran a transient barracks where every few days we would get recruits, just like I was, and fill those big barracks, the two-story kind, with double bunks. I don't recall how many it held, but somewhere around two hundred., I started out assisting a Sergeant in processing the other recruits, and issuing special equipment, like paratroop boots and different types of mackinaws , and maybe something else, which set the Amphibian out a little differently, than the typical outfits in the army.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was while you were taking your basic?

Mr. Miller

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to do quite a bit of marching?

Mr. Miller

We did that. Some time when we did night marches, late. We had buddies and you were supposed to stick close to your buddy and the group was divided into two parts, A and B or Red and Blue or something. It was some kind of military tactical training where one group is supposed to outdo the other. I know I was walking with this buddy and we were whispering because of security. I whispered something and he didn't respond, and I turned around to look for him and he wasn't there. Sure enough, he had fallen into a snow-filled foxhole. Kind of amusing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen while you were there?

Mr. Miller

Well, yeah, something real amusing. We had some people from the Signal Corps who were fairly new in the service but they had gone to signal school. There were about five of them, and one was named named Jimmy La Curto. He was the actor who played the part of The Shadow on the radio. Being from Houston, I would hear it every now and then but not real regular. One time we had a barracks full of New York recruits, and that's the heart of The Shadow country, and it was a ghostly night. It was stormy and the power went out, snow and ice everywhere and a barracks full of New York kids that were frightened anyway. I guess the most famous thing about The Shadow was his laughter. It would start out high and go down low. I said, Jimmy just for entertainment, the lights are out, go out in the middle of the barracks and do The Shadow laugh. He said, aw I better not do that. So I finally talked into it. He did it. It was booming. I knew what was going on and it scared me, and those New York kids started running, and stumbling and falling over those iron bunks, and the next day at sick call, I had over half of my barracks report, I had a lot of explaining to do. "We were just playing games, Sir."

Mr. Misenhimer

And who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men, right?

Mr. Miller

Yes, The Shadow Knows. Oh-ho-ho. He told me how he developed that laugh. The director knew a certain sound that he wanted, so Jimmy said he laughed into different types of containers, boxes, and buckets, and barrels, then he got the sound to an echo-like effect from a particular container that the director liked so they taped it and he practiced it to where he could do it real well without the aid of the bucket. He did real well that night. (Chuckle)

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your amphibious training consist of there?

Mr. Miller

Well, I didn't actually train in amphibious equipment, I was a what do you call it? There's a number for your occupation.

Mr. Misenhimer

M. O. S.

Mr. Miller

Military Occupation Specialty. Mine was artist-draftsman. I had been studying art and I did drafting too, for our next door neighbor was an architect, but anyway I would do artwork and drafting for these training manuals that were created in the office I worked in and used for the amphibious program. Basically they involved how to establish beach-heads, I made diagrams showing where to put the gasoline, food, water, and ammunition. Various types of Marine crafts were used. The fronts would open up and either men or tanks or jeeps or something would run out. There were different kinds of what were called dumps, I would show the dumps for whatever kind of equipment was being processed..

Mr. Misenhimer

You drew the diagrams for that or whatever.

Mr. Miller

Yes, whatever artwork was needed. I think there were four of us in this office that did that job.. It was kind of unusual, one was a Captain, one was a First-Lieutenant, and either a corporal or a Sergeant, and I was just a Buck-Private We all did the same work. I don't think we got the same pay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of pay, do you recall what your pay was when you went in?

Mr. Miller

I sure don't. It seemed like twenty-eight dollars per month, does that ring a bell?

Mr. Misenhimer

Twenty-eight.

Mr. Miller

I think that was it. I'm not sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was at the same time you were taking your basic during this. Is that correct?

Mr. Miller

Right. Then I went to Camp Edwards with the Amphibian Command. Oh, Camp Edwards was where I was when I worked on the training guides, not at Fort Devins. At Fort Devins I worked as a Sergeant's assistant running the transient barracks, and later he went somewhere, he went into the hospital, really, so I just ran the barracks by myself. I did his work and mine too. In addition to your normal duties, you would do this that and another, isn't that what they say?

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Miller

Then I went to Camp Edwards where I did basic training again. It was a little more intense. I would be marching along carrying a pack and an M-1 rifle and there would planes taking off and landing close by at Otis Field. Those guys were pretty much like I was, but they're not walking, so I applied for a transfer to the Air Corps. My brother was a pilot and a lot of my buddies signed up for the Air Corps to be pilots. The reason I didn't go in earlier was I was trying to complete the second year of college before I went into the service. So I finally managed to get the okay to take the series of tests to see if I qualified to go into the Air Corps. Eventually I got in and, kind of unusual, there was a Adjutant General officer, that would come by and check the place where I was working, I don't remember the level of security restrictions, but it was pretty highly classified, and this guy would check every body out from time to time. Just look around, and he's the one that signed the application for me to apply for Air Corps training transfer. One day when he was down in our area, he said, "What in the world are you still doing here?" "It's where I work." Then he said, "What about your transfer?" Well nothing ever happened. "We'll find out" So we got into a vehicle and we went from station to station, it was a great big field. "We'll find out where it got pigeon-holed." And sure enough he found it. He was a Major and he let some Colonel have it for pigeon-holing that application. So, I did get the okay to take the tests which I passed and got into the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when was the date of that, do you recall? When you transferred to the Air Corps.

Mr. Miller

No sir, I don't know when I was transferred, that was about sixty years ago and I've found a few things aren't crystal clear anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, had you been in about a year or less or more?

Mr. Miller

Oh no, less.

Mr. Misenhimer

Less than a year. It would still be sometime in '43 then.

Mr. Miller

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's close enough then.

Mr. Miller

You see I got an emergency furlough for my mothers' illness and that was when I was already in the Army Air Corps. I wasn't doing anything but waiting for test results at Nashville. That's where you take your tests and then you just hang around and wait for the results. It was real cold there, in fact it snowed a great deal.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was Nashville, Tennessee. So you went from Camp Edwards down to Nashville, Tennessee.

Mr. Miller

Yes, I took these tests that were to decide on further training, I had applied to be in the flight program. You take these tests to determine if you are best suited to be a pilot, navigator, bombardier, or none of the above. I think, also in the pilot category, there were single-engine and multi-engine. Everybody I knew wanted to be a single-engine pilot, and that's what I was fortunate enough to become.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so you went into pilot training for single-engine then?

Mr. Miller

Yes, I signed up for it but there wasn't room in the schools at the time, and so I was assigned to another field. But I had received the okay to be in the cadet program pilot training. So I went to pre-flight at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ground school?

Mr. Miller

Yes. No flying involved at all while we were there. Somewhere along the way, we went into a program called C.T.D., which was College Training Detachment, and I was sent to Pennsylvania. It involved a series of college-level courses in history, speaking, and other subjects and also, ten hours of flying; riding in a Piper cub to see if you were or could be acclimated to flying. Some people were not suited for flight.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you transferred to the Air Corps did you get an increase in rank or anything?

Mr. Miller

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Still a private.

Mr. Miller

I was an Aviation Cadet, which was a change but it was essentially like enlisted personnel with a few perks. Somewhere I got to be a PFC. I took basic training again with the Air Corps .but they had a system of cadet officers, guys with previous experience, like I was after six months, eight months, whatever, it made me an old hand. So during the program I was always a cadet officer and this essentially meant you do the work of an Officer, but you are really just one of the cadets. You are in between because you had to help direct the cadet program, make sure everyone was where they were supposed to be and do what they were supposed to do, so it was kind of double-duty.

Mr. Misenhimer

So in Pennsylvania you took some college courses at a college?

Mr. Miller

Yes, it was Lafayette College at Easton, Pennsylvania. I don't know if it was considered an ivy-league school or not, but it had a lot of ivy on those old stone buildings. We lived in dormitories there and it was a real pleasant experience. There weren't any military bases around the area but there were a lot of girls in Easton . They would call the dorm a lot. There was a phone in the corridor outside of our room. There were three of us roommates, so one of us would answer the phone; one in particular most of the time, and he would talk to these girls. He would line up a date, which I'm sure is the reason the girls would call. He would line several of them up for Saturday at noon , or something like that, and said I'll meet you at the town square . So they would be on the square and he would be across the street. He would look them over and pick out the best looking one and he would go meet her and tell her who he was and leave the others for the rest of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were still college students going there also as well as you Air Corps people.

Mr. Miller

Yes, but there were also some Navy boys going there in some type of program. There were quite a few more of them than there were of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Miller

It was something like six months.

Mr. Misenhimer

You probably went there towards the end of '43 and the middle of '44 was when you finished there

Mr. Miller

I think so, then, like I mentioned earlier, they didn't have room for all the cadets in the training program, so they just found jobs for us. They were supposed to a form of training where you learn a little bit about the airplanes; mostly pulling chocks, and filling gas tanks on the planes, and assisting mechanics. The first actual flight that I went on, beside the cub, was with a W. A. S. P. There were several WASPS there doing engineering flights. They would test fly planes after a wing change or something of that nature. They would do these prescribed maneuvers and the crew chief or the mechanic for that particular plane would have the honor to join the test-pilot on the flight. I guess it was to prove he had confidence in his work. So the mechanic that I worked with let me go on one of the flights, and the WASP pilot was really winging the plane out, doing a lot of acrobatic maneuvers to see if she could get wing to come off. It didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that ? This was after you left Pennsylvania, is that correct?

Mr. Miller

Oh yes. It was somewhere in Alabama, as I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you left Pennsylvania you went to Alabama?

Mr. Miller

I went to Mississippi for primary flight training at Clarksville, Mississippi..

Mr. Misenhimer

The training at the primary level, what did that consist of?

Mr. Miller

Well, that was the first actual flight training . Normally the overall cadet training was three levels. There was Primary, Basic and Advanced. Yyou would go half the day to ground school and the other half flying. Of course you didn't fly the whole half day, the whole squadron flew a half day at a time. They would divide up use of the airplanes. Then there would be some time for the instructors to explain things to you. This school was at Clarksdale, I can't think of the name of that school. It was a civilian school like where my brother taught in Cuero. The instructors were civilians. We flew P.T.-19's. The operation was an upper class- lower class arrangement, and the upper class, when we were there, were flying P.T.-17's, that's a Steerman, which we thought we were going to fly. It's a radial engine bi-wing plane and very maneuverable, but they changed aircraft when we got there to the

P. T.-19, which is a single-wing with an in-line engine. Very nice aircraft, it's a Fairchild. After the Primary Training I took Basic Training. I mentioned earlier about the cadet-officer system, I was the cadet commander there. After Primary Training the Director of Flying Commandant of Cadets and all, decided to select some of us they thought should have the opportunity to go to Basic Training at Stewart Field, New York, and that's where the West Point cadets flew. They had the very latest equipment and the nicest conditions. They had steam-heated barracks and hardwood floors, and somebody else did the polishing. Which wasn't really the case in the normal program. We were really fortunate to get to go there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to your Primary Training, this is where you took your first instruction flight.

Mr. Miller

Right, along with ground school.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you solo when you were there?

Mr. Miller

Yes. Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many hours did you have in soloing, do you recall?

Mr. Miller

Well, I think it was about eight hours of flight instruction time before you soloed. After that, I'm not sure how many solo hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall how it felt to solo the first time?

Mr. Miller

I soloed when my instructor decided I was ready, It was like a surprise!. You are the only one in the plane. You gotta make it happen right. It was a real thrill. We would go through the prescribed maneuvers and come in and land; flights were usually an hour long. I guess the landing was the trickiest part.

Mr. Misenhimer

So basically what you did when you were there in Clarksdale was Primary Training then, you transferred.

Mr. Miller

Upon Completion of Primary we went to Basic Flight Training at Stewart Field, New York on the Hudson River.

The nearby town was Newburg, NY. I was the one who took the paperwork for the group of about ten who went there from Clarkdale. I reported in to the Commandant-of-Cadets, and I was ready to get put into a brace and all the yes sir, no sir, and whatever to chill us out for no special reason; the typical treatment for Cadets, but he said, "Have a seat. You are here a little before the rest of the group is due, so we have the rest of the weekend, if you'd like, the Tak Officer here will be glad to take you out to the skeet-range." "I thought, when is the second shoe going to fall?" It never did. They were always real nice. That skeet-range was a part of the training, too. We would shoot skeet, I suppose to get to understand shooting. I really liked it. Each of us had a card with about thirty numbers around it. They would punch one every time we went to the range. A lot of the Cadets didn't particularly like to go, and I would often get their cards punched for them. I liked it. We were the first class of cadets to skip the basic-trainer, the BT-13. We went directly into the AT-6. It was an experimental program, to see if Cadets that had completed Basic Flight Training could go into the advanced trainer. It worked out real well.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had only finished Primary. What kind of planes did you fly in Basic?

Mr. Miller

That was the AT-6. We went from Primary to the advanced trainer but it was Basic Flight Training. In Basic Training it was just more of the same type of training as Primary only more advanced and included navigation, beginning radio work and instrument flying.

Mr. Misenhimer How big a jump was it from the PT to the AT-6 ?

Mr. Miller

I really didn't have anything to compare it to but it worked out just fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

It wasn't a big problem.

Mr. Miller

Apparently not, because the Air Corps utilized the advanced aircraft in the Basic Training program after that, as far as I know.

Mr. Misenhimer

The AT-6 was retractable gear where the other was not.

Mr. Miller

Yes, that's one thing. The AT-6 was just more powerful. It was a bigger plane. It was a Radial engine single wing plane. They used it a lot in war movies because it resembled the Japanese Zero.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Miller

I think it lasted four months, maybe. Something in that neighborhood.

Mr. Misenhimer

You did cross-countries, I'm assuming.

Mr. Miller

Yes, we did a few. We did the navigation calculation, then fly them as part of our training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any thing humorous happen along here as well?

Mr. Miller

Well yes, I don't know how long your tape is, this is a fairly lengthy story, but when I was in Primary, I got pleurisy, an irritation in the lining between the lung wall and the pleural cavity, the skin tries to grow together and when you move, it pulls it. I'll tell you it is painful. That caused me to be in this medical facility, and they said if I did anything that was strenuous or tiring, until I got completely well, that pain would occur more. When I was in basic training, I had night flying, as well as the navigation and all the rest. We were flying at night, but that didn't change the day schedule. We had ground school and flying during the day time as usual. As a result of the added hours, it made that pleurisy kick in.

One Saturday I was on one of the navigation flights, it was a triangle-shaped plan in which you navigate the first two legs and then you are pretty close to out of gas so you land and gas up. Then you fly that last leg to the home field. In that particular country, the geography was such that it was very simple on that last leg. It was in a valley, the mountains were parallel to the Hudson River, and should have been easy to fly back home. But after I gassed up after those first two legs, I took off and my pleurisy began hurting, so I started squirming around trying to get into a comfortable position, and I started to listen to commercial radio, and which we really weren't supposed to do. I didn't do it very often. I finally found out that I didn't know where I was, and I started looking on the chart to try to match what it showed to something on the ground. I'd see these different things like a football field, or some type of race track or something that was notable for a reference, but I couldn't seem to match anything. So I thought, well I'll just fly straight east until I hit the Hudson River. It might be a long way, but it is surer, then I can just fly north up the Hudson to the home Base. So I kept flying, doing ninety degrees, and I finally saw that water. Gee Whiz, that river is wide this far down South. I never did see the other side of the river, and as it turned out I was too far south and the Hudson had already emptied into the Atlantic and I was just seeing the Atlantic Ocean. I flew up the coast and found out where I was. I saw Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and recognized a lot of things but mostly it was just a lot of buildings. About then my gas gauge was low and the engine started coughing or whatever, signals you're out of gas again boy or you are close. They had told us we had a certain amount of gas left once the signal came on and I couldn't remember just how much time I had left. So I decided that I would just jump out. So I headed the plane out to the ocean and climbed to an altitude that I thought to be about right, over the water and estimated the wind so I'd fall fairly close to shore so I could swim in. I was really ready to go, I wasn't scared to

jump. I had the canopy back and then I got to thinking, it's going to be real embarrassing getting back home without that AT-6 I had strapped on me when I took off. So I decided that there's bound to be some air-fields around here so I decided I would land at the first field I saw, no matter what kind of field. It turned out to be a Navy field, where they manufactured Hellcats across the highway and would bring them over to this field to test fly them. This was a Saturday afternoon so there wasn't a lot traffic, so I landed there and some Navy boys said "What's going on?" "Well, I got lost so I decided to pay you a visit. Oh, and also I'm out of gas." He said, "We'll gas you up. You know where you are now, right?" "You bet!" I said, "But who is going to sign the ticket?" He said, "You are." "No, I can't do that, that's a big no-no." So I had to call in to home base, and I could hear my guys calling in for landing instructions before I landed. They couldn't hear me though when I would transmit, I was pretty desperately calling in for some kind of instructions. The C.O. said, when I phoned my home base and told them what had happened, "You just stay there until somebody comes after you." I said, I know where I am, it's just a matter of this gas. "You just stay there!" So I waited. There were two instructors left at our squadron ready room. They were planning a squirrel hunting trip for that afternoon, instead of cadet hunting, but they had to come get me. They didn't even chew me out. They said, "Are you Miller?" Yes, sir. "Get in the back seat." They wouldn't even let me fly my own plane back home.

A couple of weeks after that we were called out for formation in front of the flight shack instead of in the back as normal. The real Brass was out there; the Director-of-Flying, Commandant of Cadets, etc.; a real formal occasion. After I landed from the last flight of the morning, I was told, "You'd better hurry up and get into formation. Something big is happening out there." I ran and got into formation just as they called me front and center. Wow, what's this? A Major pulled out a scroll, like they do in formal military fashion and he read a citation which said I had shown extraordinary heroism in landing at an enemy field, you know, the Navy Field, and I was awarded a fur-lined plastic pot. A little pot like kids use. There was a group of us that had goofed up some way and we were all awarded these pots. We had to wear them on a string around our necks to everything except PE, flying, and sleeping; but every place else, so we were on public display. The other guys would ride us pretty heavy. Most of us who were wearing the pots would take offense at that. They are the ones that really got it. I kinda got a kick out of it and laughed it off, so I guess they didn't pressure me too much. It was kinda funny having to wear that pot. After a while, there was another group that fouled up, so they were awarded our pots. The one that got my pot was flying someplace and got lost. He saw another one of our planes flying the same heading so he decided that he must be okay, but it turned out that the guy whose heading he was paralleling, was lost also. So they landed, and one did worse than I did. He pulled up his wheels instead of his flaps and sheared his prop off, so he was in a little more trouble. He was wearing his pot on the flight line one day when the Base-Commander, a West Point Colonel visited. When the Colonel saw the pot, he asked the Director of Flying, "What's going on with that man?" So the Director of Flying, whose idea the pots was called him over there and told him "Son, tell the Colonel why you are wearing that." "Well, I got lost and then emergency landed and pulled up my wheels instead of my flaps." The Colonel said, "That's pretty bad. Ask the Major if he's ever landed wheels up." That Major popped to attention and answered sharply, "Yes, Sir." To which the Colonel said, "Son do you think that I've ever done that?" "I have no idea, have you, Sir?" "Yeah, but these chickens up here helped me out." That was an amusing incident. It wasn't amusing at the time tho.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got back, did they chew you out then?

Mr. Miller

No, I guess there were rules that the Commandant of Cadets couldn't leave until all of the cadets were in. He and his wife had some social event planned and she was there with him, both were all dressed up. She was pacing up and down more than he was. He told me "I can't just let you get away with this, so over the remainder of the weekend you write a two-thousand word theme on basic navigation." So, you know what I did for several hours. There were no follow-ups. I look at it as just a part of the game.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just one of those things that happen.

Mr. Miller

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Miller

No, this was in Newburg, New York. That was during Basic Flight Training at Stewart Field. The West Point Cadets fly there during the good time of the year and we were there in the wintertime. We were regular cadets and were apparently expendable. The next phase of training was at Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia. That's where I took Advanced Pilot Training. I reported to the C.O. and turned in papers on our group. He saw that we were from Stewart Field, and he kinda blinked. "Are we to treat you as regular cadets?" He knew that was a West Point School. I said, "I'm sure that'll be all right." So they did. Back to a normal Cadet treatment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, so far have there been any crashes, people been killed, or anything?

Mr. Miller

Well yes, not too many, but there were some. There was a non-death case at Stewart Field. It was when we started night flying. This Cadet had done real great until then. But at night he couldn't seem to understand how far down the ground was. There were bright lights shining down on the runway, and there was dust particles in the air, and this fellow would land on the dust, which was ten or twelve feet in the air. He would stall out his plane and it would drop. In order to land, you are supposed to stall, but pretty close to the ground. He tore up some planes doing that. I don't think he was allowed to complete the program.

When we first arrived at Stewart Field when they took us a round to show us the whole base. We went through this one hanger and there was an AT-6 wing that was about a foot and a half or two feet wide at the root where it joins the fuselage. They are normally six feet or eight feet wide. It seems two West Point Cadets were flying in what they call a buddy ride which was a flight with two Cadets and no instructor. The Cadets put the plane into a dive

and they were playing “ chicken”. The one to pull out was chicken. Neither one of them was chicken. They crashed into the ground and they crunched that wing. I think this was shown to us that to let us know that flying was pretty serious stuff as they both died..

Mr. Misenhimer

So it killed the men?

Mr. Miller

Yes, both.. We didn't see it happen. We just saw the wing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then after you left New York, you went to where?

Mr. Miller

I went to Georgia. It was Spence Field which was for Advanced Pilot Training. We flew the AT-6 in Advanced. We were already familiar with it, so it was just more intense training, more navigation and all the other details. That's where I graduated from the Cadet program. Following that is the Transition Phase of flying. It is where you fly actual tactical aircraft, the aircraft used in combat. At that time they used P-40's for this phase;there, so I took my transition in P-40s.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to your graduation where you get your wings, tell me about that.

Mr. Miller

There was quite a bit of ceremony, parades, and pageantry involved in graduation and being commissioned.. Your family is included.My mother,an aunt, and girlfriend from Houston came, as did those of all the other Cadets. They witnessed this meaningful event for two days or so.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were commissioned Second-Lieutenant.

Mr. Miller

Yes. I was Commissioned Second-Lieutenant. The presentation of the Commission and wings all part of the ceremony..

Mr. Misenhimer

I see over here you have your wings on this plaque.

Mr. Miller

Those are the actual wings. Upon graduation you start wearing an officers' uniforms. Each graduate must buy

his own uniforms

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your pay check as a Second-Lieutenant?

Mr. Miller

I don't remember .I sure don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they give you a clothing allowance?

Mr. Miller

I don't think so. They might have allowed some amount but it didn't cover it all, I'm sure of that. I buddied around with some fellas. One's brother was a pilot, and one of the things that is not required is a sun-tan dress uniform. This guys' brother gave him a Hickey-Freeman sun-tan uniform as a graduation present. In the meantime, these pals went to town to a tailors shop and got measured for these sun-tan uniforms. I was flying when they went to town. When I found out what they had done, I said that's great of you guys to do that while I was working. So I went to that tailors' shop and the tailor said, "I'm sorry, I don't have enough material to make another uniform." When Harrison's brother gave him that Hickey-Freeman uniform, we started measuring each other. Oh boy, we came pretty darn close, so when it was time for the fitting, I went to the tailor shop as John Harrison. The tailored uniforms for the other three fit quite well, "mine" didn't fit very well. John and I were the same dimensions but I guess different proportions. So the fat was in the fire, and I had to say, hey I just don't understand . So the tailor scrambled, cut and pinched until he finally made it work. That was a dirty trick for me to pull on that guy. If I'd known how it was going to turn out, I wouldn't have done it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you got your sun-tans.

Mr. Miller

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Otherwise you wore the greens and the pinks?

Mr. Miller

Yes, I guess the basic dress uniform was green with a green jacket. Green pants, but you could also wear the pink pants, you had no pink blouse, I don't know why they were called blouses instead of coats. But anyway that was the dress uniform, the green. And then there's that hat. The reason the pilots those billed hats that are kinda crushed looking around the edges is we wore them with radio headsets. The hats wouldn't work with a grommet in them. Everybody thought it looked real hot. So we had permission to do that but I don't think any of

the other branches did. Theirs had a metal hoop , or a grommet to hold the hat somewhat stiff and circular.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was called the 50-mission crush I heard.

Mr. Miller

Was that it? I'm not familiar with that term.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard it called that. So in your transition you were in P-40's?

Mr. Miller

Right. After transition we went to gunnery school and it was at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. There was no town nearby; there was just an Air Force Base. It was in the western pan-handle, real remote country. We flew AT-6's there and we did aerial gunnery, which is shooting at a moving sleeve, and ground gunnery where shoot at a statuibery target on the ground. In ground gunnery we would fly a pattern just like a normal traffic pattern, during the approach, we'd dive and shoot at the target. When the instructors took us around at first, they'd say, "Do you see that target down there?" Target, that speck? I had a real sharp instructor. There were chalk lines on the field where the targets were, and you're supposed to start your descent at one end. You'd go straight and level to the first chalk stripe going across the field, and then you would dive and do your shooting and at the second stripe you would pull up. When you are pulling out you chandele up before going down too far. He taught me that the thing that made the airplane bounce around is what makes you miss the target a lot .So if you are going faster, the plane is more stable, then you have a better chance of hitting the target. Also, in going faster you are diving steeper and therefore there are less ground currents that contact the surface of the wings, so it's a more vertical dive and for a shorter distance. You weren't limited to how many rounds you could fly and shoot at the target, so we shot in short bursts, and we'd go in further and dive steeper before the pull out. As a result of that instructor telling me that meathod, I think I got the highest, or second highest score that had ever been made at that field. It wasn't my doing, it was his doing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he a combat veteran?

Mr. Miller

I don't really know ,but I was fortunate to be one of his students.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you are back into a AT-6 now?

Mr. Miller

Yes AT-6's were flown at the gunnery school. And then after that, as mentioned earlier, most new graduates got

to go home and show off their wings and bars. But in this case they held some of us back. We were sent to transition and gunnery because we were designated to go over-seas very soon. So following the transition, when we got back from gunnery they said something has happened so you are not going overseas .right away. You can go home ,but you leave a phone number for immediate contact if you go to a movie or anything. When that leave was over, we reported back and still were not scheduled to go overseas. There were various assignments available, You can select some place you would like to go from among a selected list. I hadn't been stationed in Texas because I transferred to the Air Corps when I was in the East, it was called the Eastern Training Command.

One of these options for temporary duty was to go to Flight Instructors' school in Waco, and I went there. In the process of learning to be an instructor, the war ended. Boy, you could see guys flying big loops and all kind of shenanigans. So they gave us the opportunity to go back to our home field for processing to get out of the service or to complete the Instructor course. I didn't complete the instructors' course but it was very interesting. Then I went back to my home field, Napier Air field , where I had done the P-40 transition. I had become buddies there with a pilot that was in a Lend-Lease program for pilots from Mexico They were being taught to fly the way our Air Corps teaches flying. When the opportunity to get out of the service came up, I was talking to Juan about it. In shock he said, you mean you are an officer and you have a choice of staying in or getting out, and you are going to get out? In the Mexican military, to be an officer was a pretty big honor. It was in ours, too, of course, he said once he became an officer, he would definitely stick with it. That's a great career. And he might've been right, I don't know. He's probably a retired General by now. But I got out went back to college. I went to architecture school at the University of Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see you have got Captains' bars over here.

Mr. Miller

No, that's just two lieutenants' bars.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your highest rank?

Mr. Miller

Second lieutenant. That's it..

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get out?

Mr. Miller

In November of '45, at the end of November. I was in almost three years. Just a few weeks short of three years

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that P-40 to fly?

Mr. Miller

Well, it was really something. It had an in-line engine with a long snout-like look. The cockpit seemed very far back where you can't really see in front of the plane when on the ground, only to the sides. It had large air scoops below the engine, The Flying Tigers painted them like sharks mouths with fierce looking teeth. It had a lot of power compared to what I was accustomed to. I had hoped, one day, to get to fly P-51s, but I never did. The P-40 was the forerunner of that category of P-38s and P-51s, and it was sort of like a Model T or a Model A Ford in comparison. It had a lot of things you control manually such as adjusting cowl flaps. Where in the later aircraft they were all done, automatically. So you learned a lot. It really was fun to get into something that powerful and maneuverable.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was water-cooled or fluid-cooled as compared to air-cooled in the others.

Mr. Miller

No, it was air-cooled. You had to open cowl flaps to get the air in to cool the engine..

Mr. Misenhimer

I know the P-51 had that coolant.

Mr. Miller

Yes. They were different.

Mr. Misenhimer

The P-40 was not that way.

Mr. Miller

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any experience with the U.S.O.? Did you go to any of the U.S.O. shows anywhere?

Mr. Miller

Yes, I had several nice experiences at USO Canteens and also at some of their shows.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, when you were discharged, were you still in the Reserves, at that point, or did you get completely out?

Mr. Miller

I tried to get into the Reserves and continue flying, because I really enjoyed it, but I was going to the University of Texas in Austin, and was told that I had to go to San Antonio to fly in the Reserves , and I didn't really have any way to get there conveniently. They were going to start a wing at Bergstrom Field in Austin, so I heard, but I don't and I don't recall the details, but I didn't get in on that either. So I was separated from the service.

Mr. Misenhimer

What about the Red Cross? Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Miller

In what way?

Mr. Misenhimer

In any way. Did they give you any donuts or help you get your leave?

Mr. Miller

Oh well, they helped me get that leave that I was talking about, going to see my mother. My dad was a big Red Cross worker in Houston, and he was able to get that arranged.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get your commission?

Mr. Miller

March 11, '45.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you ever had any kinds of reunions or anything?

Mr. Miller

No, I sure haven't. There were a few of us that buddied around together while still in the Service. One was from Grosse Point, Michigan He had a LaSalle. That was a big car back then. Gasoline was rationed at that time and gas stamps were used to allocate gasoline. Our little group would I save up gas stamp. There were five of us. When we got enough stamps we would go on a trip some place. It was a lot of fun.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you mentioned a big celebration when you were taking instructors' training, was this when Japan surrendered?

Mr. Miller

No, Germany. I Recall I was prepared to go to Europe. That's where they thought we were going and it never really got to that point. So, at the end of the war with Germany we had the opportunity to terminate being in the

Service..

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in the cadets, what kind of uniform did you wear then?

Mr. Miller

It was a standard Aviation Cadet uniform. It was, basically like enlisted mens' uniform. I remember, but it had some Cadet Insignia that would be pinned to the lapels and collars. They were little wings underneath a propeller as well as the U.S. Brass ...

Mr. Misenhimer

And what is this with the wings and propeller in stead of whatever?

Mr. Miller

It is just what Air Corps' or Air Force flight personnel Cadets all wore on their uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer

You wore that on your pocket or where?

Mr. Miller

On the blouse lapel, shirt collar and cap..

Mr. Misenhimer

The U. S. On one side and the wings and prop on the other?

Mr. Miller

Yes. See in that picture, do they show?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. Let me ask you, Was there anytime you felt really frightened?

Mr. Miller

Well. You always had these feelings of uncertainty because you didn't know what was going to happen, and I think that I consider, looking back on it, the whole experience was outstanding. Learning how to fly and flying what I wanted, in the single engine, and that sort of thing. But I guess, the uncertainty, like everybody, you didn't know how long you were going to be in the situation: one more week or ten more years, or what.

Though not actually frightening, there was one time a hurricane that threatened to come in, before landfall, and they had us ferry the planes further away from the coast. You know those rascals made us drill, and said you are not coming up here on a picnic. I don't know where we were, but we flew the planes pretty far away from the storms' path. They said okay, everybody get into formation, we're going to do close-order drill.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got back into civilian life did you fly any more ?

Mr. Miller

No. I couldn't afford to fly according to the standard I was accustomed to. One could rent a Cub or something, but that wouldn't do it. I would like to do it now if an AT-6 or Suell was available to me. I really enjoyed flying.

Tape transcribed by
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