

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR
(Nimitz Museum)**

**NIMITZ EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTER
Fredericksburg, TX 78624**

Interview with

**KEN MILLER
U. S. ARMY**

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

KEN MILLER

This is Ed Metzler and today is the 18th of February, 2005. I'm interviewing Col. Ken Miller. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, and it is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War. Let me start out Colonel by thanking you for coming and spending the time with us. I know you are really busy right now with all the things going on and we appreciate the time that you're allowing us to talk. Let me ask you to start by telling us when and where you were born, who your parents were, little bit about your family before we get into talking about the Pacific adventures.

COL. MILLER: Okay. My name is Ken Miller. I was born in Toronto, Canada, my father was an American citizen, my mother was Canadian. They moved when I was a child to...

MR. METZLER: When were you born?

COL. MILLER: I was born in 1920, on June 12th. When I was just a year or two old my father and mother took me to California where I grew up. I went to school in Sacramento and as I was going to school I became interested in radio communications, television, and learned the Morse Code. Upon completion of high school, I went to college for about one semester and then I was learning more back at the high school so I went back and continued with my communications courses. That provided me a background; I was one of the first members of the 102nd Radio Intelligence Company which is one of the first four radio intelligence companies in the army and the California National Guard. I then joined this organization and became very interested.

MR. METZLER: When did you first go into the military?

COL. MILLER: It was 1939.

MR. METZLER: So you were in the military when Pearl Harbor occurred.

COL. MILLER: When Pearl Harbor occurred I was on a boat going to Pearl Harbor. It was the final destination of the Philippines. The ship ahead of us was sunk by Japanese and we turned and went back on a zigzag course back to San Francisco and I ended up in the Presido, San Francisco, and was inter-ship chief of the station and Chrissy Field in Presido, San Francisco, where we intercepted Japanese communications.

MR. METZLER: I made you jump ahead because I didn't realize that you were in the military before the war actually started. Let's go back to when you first went in and you were talking to me about being in the guard and let's start the story there.

COL. MILLER: I was in the National Guard organization. We met weekly and continued my communications training in high school; it was a tech school and very advanced. They taught radio broadcasting, television and I also learned the Morse code. We were part of the group that was called to active duty one year before Pearl Harbor, and we trained up and down the Pacific coast and had some good experience. Then we went to San Francisco, started overseas and then came back. Did I make it clear?

MR. METZLER: Oh, yes, I understand how that goes together. Thanks. So tell me a little bit about how you trained for something like this. Are you working on techniques for breaking codes, tell me more about what that training is like.

COL. MILLER: That came later. At that time we would do field training. We'd set up in the field and we'd go out on maneuvers all up and down the coast, in fact went all the

way to Washington State. One of the maneuvers we were on, Col., at that time, Eisenhower was a party of the troop area people.

MR. METZLER: "The" Eisenhower?

COL. MILLER: Yes.

MR. METZLER: You were on a ship actually on your way to Pearl when she was attacked.

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: What kind of a ship was it?

COL. MILLER: It was a big troop transport.

MR. METZLER: Did you have an assignment headed there?

COL. MILLER: We were going to Clark Air Force base, which is strange. My last overseas tour, after I went back on active duty many years later and after I'd gone to officer school, my final overseas assignment was at Clark Air Force base, I was wing operations for a security wing.

MR. METZLER: So you kind of started there and kind of finished there.

COL. MILLER: Well, I never did get there the first time.

MR. METZLER: Well, that's right. You didn't quite make it the first time. Well, now here you are, a young man of twenty-one and you're headed west on a troop ship. All of a sudden they turn you around and you're going zigzag formation. Tell me what's going through the mind of a young twenty- one year old man when something like that happens.

COL. MILLER: Having had communications experience and some knowledge of navigation we found a benacle on the stern of the ship and we watched the courses

change and we couldn't figure out why and obviously they didn't tell you anything. The next thing we know we've back in San Francisco bay.

MR. METZLER: So they're keeping all of the guys pretty much in the dark about what's...

COL. MILLER: There was nothing indicated where we could wander. There was a war, anything, we knew nothing until we got back.

MR. METZLER: So when you got back to San Francisco, what happened then?

COL. MILLER: Well, when we got back to San Francisco we were bivouacked in one of the old buildings on the Presidio. There was a coast guard station there adjacent to Chrissy Field and we set up a radio intercept station there and put up antennas and we started copying. I'm jumping ahead a little bit, just prior to that I went through a navy course. The army had no Japanese code operators and I was selected as one of the first eight in the U. S. Army to attend this course. After that I became a radio intercept chief and I also was an instructor for Japanese code for quite some time.

MR. METZLER: So when you were headed out and when you came back to the Presidio, give me a description of the unit squad. Where were you organizationally in the military? Give me that little...

COL. MILLER: I think we were attached to the 4th Army at that time, headquarters in San Francisco and we were on the Presidio.

MR. METZLER: So this was a radio intercept unit of some sort.

COL. MILLER: Yes, it was.

MR. METZLER: What would they call you guys?

COL. MILLER: It was the 102nd Radio Intelligence Company, Signal Radio Intelligence Company.

MR. METZLER: So what was your rank then?

COL. MILLER: At that time I was a staff sergeant.

MR. METZLER: Alright, let's keep going with your story. We've got all the basics covered. Now what?

COL. MILLER: I was selected to go to signal corps officers training at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

MR. METZLER: That's all the way around on the other side. So off you went on some sort of training or something.

COL. MILLER: Officers training school at the signal corps headquarters at that time.

MR. METZLER: So how long were you there?

COL. MILLER: I was a ninety-day wonder and after ninety days I was assigned to an air force unit which was the 8th radio squadron mobile and was stationed at Drew Field, Florida.

MR. METZLER: Eighth radio station and what was...

COL. MILLER: Eighth radio squadron. After just a few months I was then transferred to Camp Pinedale and they were organizing and training the air force radio squadron's mobile. I soon became field training officer and established a radio intercept station and supervised field training of the units being formed to go overseas. When all the units had completed their field training, I was assigned to the last unit which was bound for the Far East and I was able to utilize my Japanese code.

MR. METZLER: So when did you depart for the Far East? What kind of time frame are we talking about?

COL. MILLER: Mostly about six months after Pearl Harbor, I'd say.

MR. METZLER: Okay, so we're in early '42 or first half of '42.

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: How successful were we in understanding and breaking the Japanese codes at that stage of the game?

COL. MILLER: We were responsible for collection and analysis and that forwarded to the next higher headquarters which would then do most of the cryptography work and forward the intelligence on up the line.

MR. METZLER: So when you say collection, I understand that part. Then you say analysis. What does that mean in this case?

COL. MILLER: Traffic analysis gives a lot of information in the presence of the messages and they were sent and repetitious messages you soon break down. You know everything that's in the message without being involved in cryptanalysis.

MR. METZLER: So it's more of a pattern, the frequency, the repetitiveness, this kind of thing.

COL. MILLER: The priority was very important.

MR. METZLER: Then that information you just passed on up.

COL. MILLER: To a processing center.

MR. METZLER: And you never knew what happened with the information after...

COL. MILLER: Not really.

MR. METZLER: You were doing your job and they were doing theirs. Okay, so here we are somewhere in the first half of '42 and you're headed west again, is that correct? Tell me where you're headed and how that went.

COL. MILLER: The first I mentioned, we didn't make it to Pearl and came back, so then years later we headed off again only this time out of the Seattle area. We went to Pearl and stayed, the ship had some problems, we stayed there for a few days.

MR. METZLER: What ship are we talking about this time?

COL. MILLER: A military transport. And then we went to Guam.

MR. METZLER: I'd like to ask you what your personal observations were of Pearl Harbor because we're talking about four to six months after she was hit. What was it like and how did you feel?

COL. MILLER: Everything had been settled down pretty well and there was a lot of results of the bombing and the attacks and the airfields that had been shot up. You could see the buildings where the bullet holes were, obvious damage. We were there two or three days and then we went on.

MR. METZLER: That was a real quick stop then?

COL. MILLER: Yes. We stalled, I think we had some engine problems with the boat.

MR. METZLER: So you headed west again out of Pearl and keep the story going here.

COL. MILLER: Went to Guam and we were assigned to a navy joint signal processing center. We spent a short time there and then prepared to go overseas and my unit was assigned to Iwo Jima.

MR. METZLER: Tell me what time frame we're talking about because we're somewhere, Iwo Jima was '45.

COL. MILLER: Probably just a few weeks before.

MR. METZLER: I'm thinking of a time frame here but I still don't know very much about what happened or maybe nothing happened, so there's nothing to talk about. So you went to Guam. What was Guam like?

COL. MILLER: Well, it was a lot of jungle and you could stand in mud up to your waist and have dust blow in your face. They have frequent heavy rains and it was muddy sometimes.

MR. METZLER: You don't want to buy any real estate and retire to Guam.

COL. MILLER: I thought about it but I established an officers club on a beach called Touman(?) Bay which is now a big resort area. We had a little tract there and we could swim and skin dive and collect sea shells. We'd always have somebody sitting on the beach with a rifle because there was still quite a few Japanese around.

MR. METZLER: So how long is this after Guam had been taken?

COL. MILLER: Quite some time.

MR. METZLER: Okay, there had been a fair amount of time to get everything settled down. How long were you on Guam?

COL. MILLER: I don't recall but it was maybe six months.

MR. METZLER: Were you practicing your trade then at that time?

COL. MILLER: We didn't do very much. I don't recall the length of time but it was not very long. At that time the war was going full tilt and I'll never forget I was getting ready to go on a landing craft infantry and LCI to go to Iwo. I heard somebody shout and I looked up and there was a navy fighter plane with engine on fire and the pilot was standing on the wing holding the stick up so he wouldn't crash into any people. He was

trying to get to open sea and he was only about a hundred and fifty yards above my head when I first saw him. He jumped pulled his parachute and the parachute didn't open until just as he hit the water. He flops around there a little bit and got loose from the chute, swam in and walked up, and he said, "This is a hell of a way to make a living." I was never so impressed by the bravery. He could have bailed out any time and he stayed with the plane and kept it up and I have great respect for the Navy.

MR. METZLER: Isn't that a story!

COL. MILLER: I think Naval aviators are about the top of the...

MR. METZLER: Top of the crop.

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: Now this is still on Guam, is that correct?

COL. MILLER: Still on Guam.

MR. METZLER: So then after Guam, tell me where you went.

COL. MILLER: Well, from Guam we went to Iwo and we lay offshore while the invasion was going on. Iwo was the most formidable destination for any military force ever. They bombed that island and the Japanese were entrenched in caves, some of them big enough just hugh, and everything was underground so the bombs did little damage whatsoever. They had heavy weapons rigged up to come out of the cave, fire on the shore and go back in, and it was really terrible. You could hardly walk on the sand there without stepping on ships' net shells.

MR. METZLER: When did you first know you were going to Iwo? Did they tell you that after you left?

COL. MILLER: I don't remember them telling me anything, get on the ship.

MR. METZLER: Report for duty and you did.

COL. MILLER: Yeh.

MR. METZLER: How long before the actual invasion on to Iwo? Were you there?

COL. MILLER: Just a few days offshore.

MR. METZLER: So you're sitting there offshore. What kind of a vessel are you in?

COL. MILLER: Landing craft infantry.

MR. METZLER: So you're in the LCI?

COL. MILLER: Yeh.

MR. METZLER: And you're just in a holding pattern.

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: Until what?

COL. MILLER: Until we landed.

MR. METZLER: Did you land with one of the first waves?

COL. MILLER: No, the island had been secured. Most of the marines were off the island when I went in.

MR. METZLER: Describe for me then the trip.

COL. MILLER: When we made the landing the LPIs had two anchors, one they dropped us to go ashore, 200 yards offshore to hold them off the beach, and then they go on in and put the ramp down and everybody gets out. I had several trucks; we had a mobile radio intercept facility and we brought the trucks ashore. We were assigned an area and then we set up camp. I had the first camp on Iwo Jima that was set up, not set up by the Marines. We have a picture here I could show you but it shows the camp and how it was set up and where the radio station was.

MR. METZLER: Tell me, you were getting ready to tell me, when you went ashore then about the beach the condition of things, what the surroundings were.

COL. MILLER: It was the most desolate place on earth. There was nothing green, there were no birds. It was just absolutely devastating. It was just a big sand pit if you can imagine.

MR. METZLER: With dark colored sand. How easy was it to get around there?

COL. MILLER: I had a jeep so it wasn't too difficult and they had started to build the airfield. There was a Japanese airfield there to begin with but Iwo Jima was probably the most essential target that the military ever had. The bombers were stationed in Saipan and Guam and they had...

MR. METZLER: Here's a map of Iwo in case you want to refer to it. Here's Suribachi.

COL. MILLER: Yeh, I'm right back here right near the airfield.

MR. METZLER: You're coming in from the northwest it looks like.

COL. MILLER: We landed right along here.

MR. METZLER: Right along the western shore near what they've got here is airfield number 1.

COL. MILLER: This is the Conkangoku rock and they had a Luanne station on it navigational assistance and I arranged for my people to go out there for a few days and they sent the people on the rock and I gave them the truck and they could go around the island.

MR. METZLER: Looks like the rock is maybe a half mile off shore or something like that.

COL. MILLER: Not very far.

MR. METZLER: What's the name of that rock again?

COL. MILLER: Conkangoku, and it was essential especially with all the aircraft that they would have on the way to bomb Japan.

MR. METZLER: You've got a station then now set up on the shore of Iwo Jima. Is that correct?

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: And you mentioned that there were vehicles that had a lot of radio intercept equipment. Tell me about that equipment.

COL. MILLER: It was the equipment on the trucks in a package called a TC8 and within it had typewriters, transmitters and receivers and operating positions, power supply and we could move. Because I was on Iwo, I had no place to go really so I didn't even need the trucks. I traded the trucks with the Seabees and they built me a wonderful camp.

MR. METZLER: They got their trucks and you got your camp.

COL. MILLER: I had traded for a marine surgical ward and I had a little house. I was the only officer in my outfit so I had a little house there and I took truck seats out and put them in front and had a little front porch.

MR. METZLER: At this time what was your rank?

COL. MILLER: I was a 1st Lt.

MR. METZLER: Ninety day wonder 1st Lt. right in the thick of it.

COL. MILLER: That's right.

MR. METZLER: So then what did you start doing?

COL. MILLER: I took everything out of the trucks and the Seabees built me a nice building and put mounds of dirt all around it and they put up an antennae. We were ??? in business.

MR. METZLER: So on a typical business day you and your mates are intercepting messages and recording this, transmitting. Tell me about it.

COL. MILLER: We were intercepting traffic from the Japanese air-ground communications system.

MR. METZLER: Now this is communication between the Japanese ground and aircraft?

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: I'm surprised they didn't do radio silence.

COL. MILLER: They needed it to control the kamikazes. I had eight Nisse Japanese, American Japanese, and they were very, very effective and...

MR. METZLER: Were they from California?

COL. MILLER: They were from an outfit in California.

MR. METZLER: They were drafted in there and were serving side by side with you.

COL. MILLER: We had to be very careful. When we were on Guam we had one of our men, Anglo, alongside on each one of them. They would be shot because the Japanese were still a lot of them on Guam and also on Iwo when we first arrived.

MR. METZLER: Still Japanese on Guam?

COL. MILLER: They were there for ten years after...

MR. METZLER: I've heard stories about the ones who never heard the war was over.

How did these guys feel about, I guess they had relatives that had been sent to the relocation...

COL. MILLER: They did. They'd lost their farms.

MR. METZLER: Did that subject ever come up? Did they ever discuss that with them?

COL. MILLER: No, didn't talk about it. I knew a lot of Japanese Nissi. I grew up in Sacramento, California, and I had friends that were Nissis some of them that had farms and business people. They lost everything and went to these camps.

MR. METZLER: But these guys were doing their duty.

COL. MILLER: They were. Several, I think about four or five of them, were Nissis from Hawaii and I enjoyed them very much. They were very talented. One of them had been a cartoonist with Mickey Mouse with Walt Disney on the staff. Another one was a highly skilled carpenter which we used him and got a lot of nice things uncorked. We had the best setup of anybody on the island.

MR. METZLER: So you're busy working with these Japanese Americans and you're intercepting radio messages and watching the patterns of the signals and this kind of thing. Tell me...

COL. MILLER: We had DC610 transmitter that we would transfer in code. We'd transfer our reports to the joint signal offices on Guam. They would advise the navy and it saved a lot of peoples lives because prior to getting notice of when they were gonna attack, they were able to give them forty-five minutes notice. They were able to be at full battle stations when the kamikazes approached and began shooting them down very effectively. Instead of losing a lot of ships and people we got through the deal until the war ended.

MR. METZLER: So how long were you in that location and playing that role?

COL. MILLER: I was there until the war ended and it seems to me it was about eight or nine months.

MR. METZLER: Yes, 'cause Iwo is in February and, of course, we know the war was over by the end of August first of September, so you're right on there. How did you find out what the results of your gathering of these signals, did you learn that after the war?

COL. MILLER: Not anything, they never ever give you any information but at the end of the war I have this book that we prepared. It's been through some floods but I can still see it. We received a number of commendations from Admiral Nimitz and from the Joint Signal Processing Center. Nimitz made one comment to his people in a letter and told them that the 8th Air Force, the army in the form of the 8th Radio Squadron Mobile are carrying the ball, which I thought was very commendatory.

MR. METZLER: Now that is. That's coming from the head man.

COL. MILLER: Yep, he was very knowledgeable and expert in communications. It did a lot of wonderful things for all time.

MR. METZLER: Here's this group of guys, are they under your command now?

COL. MILLER: The detachment was under my command. We reported to nobody on the island.

MR. METZLER: You guy were working your tails off and doing this and then you get a commendation from the main man, how did that make you guys feel?

COL. MILLER: Well, we didn't know about it until afterwards

MR. METZLER: So you were just kind of working in the dark then really, just doing your job.

COL. MILLER: Intelligence is like that. You never know exactly what you're doing.

MR. METZLER: Were you the only group that was on Iwo doing this?

COL. MILLER: We were the only ones.

MR. METZLER: So how many of you were there?

COL. MILLER: It seems to me we had about thirty, about eight Nissei. Later on as the bombers became more and more effective, but you have to think about if they went into combat in Japan if they had any damage to the aircraft, any mechanical problems they would not be able to make it back to Saipan or Guam and they could recover at Iwo Jima.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, Iwo's a great spot, stopping off stop.

COL. MILLER: It was controversial, everyday you'd see planes come. Sometimes they'd injured personnel aboard and aircraft too damaged to ditch. They would see the parachutes and you'd count them as they came out. Once in awhile a pilot with more courage than anybody that ever lived would do a ditch in the water. I only saw that a few times. I saw this one ship come in and would lift one wing over ship and then the other wing and drop down to about three hundred yards from the shore and pancake into the water, skid up almost to the beach, that way they could take the people off of the airplane.

MR. METZLER: So how many of those situations did you observe?

COL. MILLER: I don't recall now but the fighter unit the only way we could give protection to the bombers would be to have a fighter escort and they started off with B-51s. They'd go out on a mission. It would be eight hours in the air holding a plane up, they had no automatic pilot. When they came back you could see them make a sloppy landing and go on and turn the engine off and they'd slump forward in the plane just be totally exhausted. Their flight surgeon got some billy tanks and cut them off and put water, we had hot water from the sulfur springs, fill with hot water put the pot in there,

give them about four ounces of liquor, and they were ready to go the next day. The courage was unimaginable.

MR. METZLER: Those bottles were sulfur.

COL. MILLER. Oh, they were incredible. Later on they brought in a fighter plane that, don't recall the name of it right now, but they had an automatic pilot. When they came in they were showing off and one of them got a little too close and flew the aircraft right into a cave, the wings came off and went into a cave. They were a much heavier aircraft and it was a lot easier for the pilots.

MR. METZLER: I know the Corsair came in late.

COL. MILLER: No, this was ??? They had been in Europe.

MR. METZLER: So when the European theatre was over they came over to help in the Pacific.

COL. MILLER: Right.

MR. METZLER: You mentioned sulfur springs. Tell me about that.

COL. MILLER: I spent a lot of time in the water and I had a surf board. There was one area where the sulfur springs you could swim out to them and just sit in the sulfur springs.

MR. METZLER: Off shore?

COL. MILLER: Right on the shore but on the edge of the beach.

MR. METZLER: So these weren't onshore these were offshore, these sulfur springs.

COL. MILLER: There were some onshore and some offshore. It was a sulfuric place there, a lot of sulfur.

MR. METZLER: Very volcanic.

COL. MILLER: Yes, it was.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about that surf board.

COL. MILLER: An officer friend of mine was returning to the states and gave me a surfboard. It was just two pieces of four by eight plywood cut in half and nailed together. It worked pretty good.

MR. METZLER: I didn't know surfboards went all the way back to World War II. I always thought that was Beachboys.

COL. MILLER: No, they did it in Hawaii. It wasn't the type of surfboard you could surf on but it was just mostly paddling. I'd actually paddle out go aboard ships that would come in the harbor. In fact, one time I lost a board. There was a storm offshore and it was a pretty good surf and I lost a board. I had to swim and immediately got into undertow so I had to swim parallel to the beach for a long ways. I finally got out exhausted much later and slept for awhile.

MR. METZLER: You must have been a strong swimmer.

COL. MILLER: I was a good swimmer.

MR. METZLER: You had to be to survive that. So you're a commanding officer. Who did you report to?

COL. MILLER: I was with a squadron attachment 83 Squadron Mobile. They were on Guam.

MR. METZLER: Okay, so home base was back in Guam and you were a forward position.

COL. MILLER: The other three DF teams were places like Pelalu...

MR. METZLER: How many DF teams were there?

COL. MILLER: There were four.

MR. METZLER: Okay, but you were right there in the thick of things.

COL. MILLER: I was, or we were.

MR. METZLER: Did you see any Japanese aircraft or any combat Japanese?

COL. MILLER: I did. We were bombed by two Japanese Betty bombers. One of them dropped bombs from high altitude and none of them hit the island. The other one came and their mission was to strafe the airfield and shoot up as many of our planes as they could. He made his final approach on his way right into the airport and there was a bluff on both sides. He hit a bulldozer that was standing up there and it was a strange thing in that the plane skidded all the way across to the bluff on the other side of the airfield and crashed into the bluff and did not burn. The Provost Marshall was a good friend of mine and he got me over to look at the aircraft and see if there was anything that I wanted out of it. As soon as I got into the plane I could see that the pilot was in the cockpit. He had a flight suit on and had a candy bar in his pocket and was obviously deceased.

MR. METZLER: He was killed by the crash?

COL. MILLER: Yes, everybody in the crew was killed.

MR. METZLER: But the plane was intact?

COL. MILLER: It was all smashed up but it didn't burn so you could get to it. I recovered the Japanese air ground operations codebook. It was on the plane, and I sent that back to my headquarters. When I got back to Washington they had done the same thing. They had the same kind of a book and they had completely aware of the code.

MR. METZLER: That much have been strange being right there in an enemy plane or in essence the wreckage of an enemy plane.

COL. MILLER: It was quite interesting. There were a lot of crashes. One time we had, late in the war, a group come out of Guam or Saipan in a B-29 that came to the airfield and they came in a little short and I was standing right at the edge of the airfield. They knocked the wheels off and the plane skidded down the runway with people leaping out and rolling and tumbling. One time I came up a B-29 had crashed and there was head of it four or five ????. I drove over there and just as I got in front of the plane it caught on fire. One of the shells that were in the chambers went off so I was lucky I didn't get hit.

MR. METZLER: This time you were on Iwo and even on Guam, were you able to stay in contact with family back home?

COL. MILLER: We had mail.

MR. METZLER: Were you a regular letter writer and receiver or an occasional?

COL. MILLER: A better receiver than a writer.

MR. METZLER: Is this true confessions or...

COL. MILLER: I'll never forget when the commander gave me a most difficult task on one of my sergeants that kept the mail. He had no idea how difficult it is to come off a small boat and climb up on one of those rope nets that they hung over the side. It was pretty hard to do and they when you get the mail it is even harder to get back down.

Anyway we brought the first load of mail back to the base.

MR. METZLER: I gather that there was a lot of sniffing and clipping and blacking out of the letters.

COL. MILLER: Yes, there was some degree of that.

MR. METZLER: I guess that was necessary. What were the living conditions like for you and your boys?

COL. MILLER: I was fortunate in that I had the Seabees that built the camp and we had wooden floors. There was so much sand and built up sides and they were actually nice and comfortable to live in. We got for a long time just one gallon of water per day per man and I'll say that's for washing and food and drinking.

MR. METZLER: There was no fresh water on the island, is that correct?

COL. MILLER: No, there wasn't fresh anything but sand.

MR. METZLER: So they brought the water in then or maybe they had a little distilling station there or something.

COL. MILLER: The navy had capability of making water, fresh water out of sea water.

MR. METZLER: What about food?

COL. MILLER: We had food, we had C rations and K rations and powdered eggs and powdered milk which wasn't very palatable. I'll never forget that Spam was the primary meat that you got. When we got into Guam we used the navy mess and we went in. We had tablecloths and they had people waiting tables, china and silver, and we thought this was wonderful, you know, we sat down and looked at the plate, Spam.

MR. METZLER: Every thing was good until you saw the menu.

COL. MILLER: Sometimes I could trade the navy people for some fresh beef, not beef but lamb. We got some lamb.

MR. METZLER: Coming up from New Zealand or Australia or something like that. So you were there until the war was over and how did you feel about your command? That is, to say the people who were your leaders, your commanders. Did you have much interaction with them, how did you feel about them?

COL. MILLER: I didn't like my commander. When I was in charge of field training he was the sorriest one that I ever had come through and I wrote him up pretty bad and he never did get over it.

MR. METZLER: So you write up your commanders?

COL. MILLER: He wasn't the commander at that time he was one of my units in training. When I had this field training mission we had units up and down the coasts of California, Sequoia Mountains, and Pot Camp Pinedile, and Desert Training Center and a little place near Merced and near Frisno. I'd make a circuit around and inspect. He was the sorriest one.

MR. METZLER: So when you think back about your experiences there in the Pacific and doing the things you were doing, what was the low point for you in that whole period of time when you were the most discouraged or the most saddened by what you saw?

COL. MILLER: I did not have any down time for feeling bad or sorry for myself. I always found something to do and kept busy. Sometimes when they would open up the new cave I'd go over and go in. When they took the island they used bulldozers and they had a flame-thrower crew and they'd shoot some flame in the cave. Then they'd close it up and when they opened it up building a new road or something I'd go in and see bodies all over the places, skeletons and these walls and ceilings just covered with cockroaches. It was just a nightmare when you'd walk in and step on rib cages. It was quite an experience.

MR. METZLER: That must have been an eye opener, that experience.

COL. MILLER: One experience that I remember very well, I had a driver in my jeep and we were driving around the island and we came across two soldiers that were there. This

was real early on just after we arrived and they were throwing a white object back and forth. This marine sergeant jumped out and said you know you're throwing a live hand grenade back and forth there. I thought that was quite amazing.

MR. METZLER: It was a white object?

COL. MILLER: Yeh, it was a ceramic grenade, white ceramic. One of the things that I wanted to mention, just a week or two after we got on the island a representative from every position met at the base of Suribachi. Within a few hundred yards was a bomb dump and there was a abgas portable tank. They had cots for us, we spent the night in a cot, middle of the night the bomb dump blew up. The Japanese blew it up and there was five-hundred pound bombs that went off simultaneously. Big shock! Shrapnel was flying around, it was red you could see it going by. Somebody opened up the tank and let that abgas fuel run into the sand and I thought one of those articles hit that and ignited it, we'd all been dead. It would have murdered the whole base at Suribachi.

MR. METZLER: I take it, it never went off.

COL. MILLER: It never did, the gas didn't layer. That was quite an experience. Then later on I heard that there was another bomb dump that blew up about the same time.

MR. METZLER: The Japanese were doing this with night squads that go down.

COL. MILLER: They'd come out of the caves, they could go all over. There was a lot of them still. One time early on, across the road from my unit, all the fighter people were bivouacked. One night a group company strength in uniform with flags came out in the middle of night and marched up a road and went into the bivouac area of the pilots and started killing pilots. It was just terrible.

MR. METZLER: How did they not be noticed or be intercepted?

COL. MILLER: They were just getting set up.

MR. METZLER: It was still early.

COL. MILLER: Real early on.

MR. METZLER: So they did it complete with a parade-type thing?

COL. MILLER: Yeh. I was on the other side of the road. We were lucky we weren't involved. They said it was a mess sergeant that stood at the entrance to his dining hall and had a meat cleaver and he whacked off quite a few Japanese as they walked in.

MR. METZLER: So there was a heck of a lot of stories here even after supposedly being secured and you guys were operating. There's still a lot going on. What about the famous taking of Mt. Suribachi? Had that occurred before you were there?

COL. MILLER: It occurred while I was still in the boat offshore.

MR. METZLER: Where were you, I assume you heard the war was over, VJ-Day was upon us, how did you hear about that and tell us how you felt?

COL. MILLER: I had a naval captain of one of the ships spend the day and night with me, and in the middle of the night we heard that the war was over and then we thought we'll go down and get on a plane and go with them. We overslept and we didn't get on the trip which was probably fortunate.

MR. METZLER: This is the trip to?

COL. MILLER: When they took Japan over.

MR. METZLER: You were there then beyond the end of the war on Iwo.

COL. MILLER: Just a few weeks.

MR. METZLER: What did you do at that point, pack up all your stuff and just go home or what happened?

COL. MILLER: They relieved me with another officer and sent me back as I had been a long time out there, so I just turned it over to him and I left. I remember just before I left one of the night fighters was coming in for a landing. I looked up and the bomb bay door was open and two Americans fell out of the plane and just hit the ground. They put a timber across the bomb bay and they were sitting in the bomb bench and somehow one of them fell off and then the bomb bay doors opened when that happened and they both tumbled out.

MR. METZLER: Well, that was just an accident.

COL. MILLER: Yes, it was an accident just after the war ended.

MR. METZLER: And the fighting was over and then to get killed in an accident right after. What a terrible thing. You were relieved and then what?

COL. MILLER: I was glad to get back home and I settled down and became an automobile dealer and then I went to work for a new car agency, I had a used car lot to begin with, and I went out to visit McMillan Field and I couldn't get in, they wouldn't let me in, and I felt bad about that. Shortly after that I got a notice that they were organizing a communications radar company National Guard and so I joined it. I stayed in and shortly after I was assigned to an air defense command in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My organization was sent to an air base in the state of Washington and they never did go anywhere, they just sat there and took people out of the unit. There was a lot of good people that had been with the signal corps as civilians and communications. I was very, having been relieved didn't make me feel very good. I had gone to an air war collection and was taking a course there. In one of the classes a friend of mine that I knew World War II said, "You know they're organizing a air force security service that has the highest

priority of personnel in the air force. If you want to go back in the same business all you've got to do is put an application in." So I did and went back and I was one of the first people in the security service the Air Force Security Service stationed at Kelly Field. I had a lot of good assignments, went overseas several times and I was stationed in Crete, Deputy Commander of the base. I was with the SHAPE command with General Norstadt and I was on his staff. Then I became the senior special security officer for Europe and then I kept going back to the States and going back overseas again. I was in plans and command programs and was involvement design of the station at Clark Air Force Base and helped design the building from the operations standpoint. After two overseas tours in Europe in a row and then I went back. I was back nine months and they said you can go overseas again. They convinced me I had to go so I did. I was wings operations officer at Clark and we had units all over the Pacific. We had them in Viet Nam and Thailand and Japan.

MR. METZLER: How many years were you in the military?

COL. MILLER: I stayed in and had twenty-eight years when I retired.

MR. METZLER: Looking back on your time when you were on Iwo and you were in the Pacific during World War II, how do you feel that experience changed you as a person? Here you were a twenty-one year old young man, I don't know if you were single or married at the time, but you went over there, how did that experience change you?

COL. MILLER: I don't know. I think I'm just about the same as I was then. I've been an antique dealer for twenty years now and for four years I was a used car manager of a Cadillac store in San Antonio. I've had a lot of fun in life and learned a lot and still learning.

MR. METZLER: Do you look back on that period in the Pacific with fondness or with...

COL. MILLER: I kind of enjoyed it, I really did. I feel like I accomplished something and I had good people with me and it set me up for my career in active duty again.

MR. METZLER: Who were you the closest to when you were over in Iwo? Were you guys a band of brothers or...

COL. MILLER: Being the only officer in the unit my companions were usually ship captains that were stationed there, LCIs and LCMs. I had a good friend that ran that ??? on Conga Ko Rock. In fact, I was with him one night when he got a message and he read the message and turned white. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "We've got a typh coming." He got a book out and he thumbed through the book. He said it's course is eight and that's as high as it goes. So we'd better get you ashore. He had a duck to go back and forth to the island so we got in the duck and by that time the waves were coming up pretty high upon so we almost broached on the beach. I was on the front of the craft so when I got close enough to jump I left and hit the beach. He had to back off and go because if he goes side ways with that much surf it would roll us over. My friend stayed with the ship and sat there and back out again and came back in.

MR. METZLER: Did he go back out to the rock?

COL. MILLER: Yeh, they went back out to the rock.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about that typhoon. What was that...

COL. MILLER: Congo Ko Rock had high water marks all over the highland. It had been inundated I guess many times over the years but fortunately it wasn't bad but when it hit. I was in my camp and I got in the jeep and went out and the force of wind was so high that you could see plywood from the supply dump just going off like decks of cards.

There was this tent and I drove by and they were sitting there a lot of men were sitting out in the bunks and the tent just went and there they are. I got to the radio station and just as I stopped the jeep and got out I heard the terrible like an explosion and the antennae lead in had whipped off and then snapped. It was like when you slap a whip, we survived okay. I've been in typhoons on Guam also.

MR. METZLER: That was an eye opener I bet. Living in California and being originally from Toronto, in Canada, you're not too experienced with those tropical storms, I wouldn't think.

COL. MILLER: You learn quick.

MR. METZLER: I'll bet you do.

COL. MILLER: They'd have movies in Guam and you'd sit outside. You'd hear the rain coming across and you'd just keep sitting there and the rain comes and you get all wet and go on.

MR. METZLER: But the climate wasn't like that in Iwo, was it?

COL. MILLER: Not really. It was pretty pleasant, I thought.

MR. METZLER: Did it rain a lot?

COL. MILLER: Not a great deal.

MR. METZLER: Why don't we just flip through the book that you've got here and just see if there are any points that might trigger a thought that you'd like to leave with us. You've had this book since, let me just read the title, Behind the Flying Eight Ball, the story of behind the flying eight ball. What is this all about?

COL. MILLER: This is a commander. The first part is in training and then I was in D stage which was the field training and this is a map of where we had units detached.

MR. METZLER: This is all back to your training?

COL. MILLER: Yeh, still training at Camp Finedale, Fresno. Transformation on Hawaii and here Guam D Day plus 113.

MR. METZLER: Okay. Is that when you guys were in Guam?

COL. MILLER: Yeh, when we got to Guam. One interesting thing here we had one of the air men in the squadron had gone off by himself and was in the jungle and got shot and killed. My commander said we'd better avenge his death. So I want you and another officer to go out there and you should kill one of those Japanese. So we went out there and it was real hard ground and we decided we'd dig a foxhole. It was pretty difficult so I didn't dig it very deep. All of a sudden all hell broke loose, started shooting back and forth. I don't know who was shooting who or what but I wished my foxhole had been a lot deeper.

MR. METZLER: How deep was your foxhole?

COL. MILLER: About eight inches. This is operations. You asked about the equipment.

MR. METZLER: Oh, yeh, so this is what an operations layout looked like. That is really a pretty big layout.

COL. MILLER: One of the units that had gone to Palau, one to Saipan.

MR. METZLER: You said it was four units, right?

COL. MILLER: Yeh. This is my unit. It shows a picture of raising the flag and standing by some equipment here. This was the camp that we built.

MR. METZLER: Okay, that is a good looking camp.

COL. MILLER: This is my sergeant and my cook and this is another visiting officer up pretty high on Iwo. These are the Nissis that were flying there with them. They put them on a bomber and gave them equipment and they were intercepting ultra high frequency transmissions.

MR. METZLER: So they were aloft?

COL. MILLER: They were aloft on a mission. They went on many missions, did a great job.

MR. METZLER: Back in that era, how did you record signals for future use? You didn't have the traditional tape recorders.

COL. MILLER: We had tape recorders.

MR. METZLER: Okay.

COL. MILLER: This is that message from Nimitz.

MR. METZLER: Well, this is the one you were referring to earlier.

COL. MILLER: Oh, yeh.

MR. METZLER: So that's really something.

COL. MILLER: This reminds me of we had a lot of live ammunition right in our camp so whenever they'd dig them up we'd put them in a pile and get the munitions people to come out and look at them. They said this is okay and they'd take one or two and so I had to dispose of the rest of them. So I'd put them in my jeep and go around back of Suribachi and throw them in the water. One day when I was doing this there was a guy hitch hiking. I stopped and said, "Would you like a ride?" He said, "I sure would. I want to get as far away as I can get from the airfield." I said, "Well, in the first place, there's a runner back to Suribachi." He said, "That will be great." I said, "What's your

problem?" He said, "They've got a bomb up there and an airplane that would blow this island off the water." I didn't think much about him so I left him there. Years later I put together one of the bombs that bombed either the first one or the second one...

MR. METZLER: Either the Hiroshima or the Nagasaki bomb and he wanted out.

The bombers that took both of those atomic bombs they were based off of Iwo Jima?

COL. MILLER: No, they weren't based off of Iwo. I've never seen it said that. The only thing I know about was what that fellow told me and then later on I assumed that it was one of the two planes, the Enola Gay or the other one.

MR. METZLER: Okay. Boxcar was the name of the other one. So what else have we got in here? All work and no play, this looks like...

COL. MILLER: This is one of the squadrons like mine was that was in that was at ???

MR. METZLER: Okay, so these are the other ones. What else can we talk about while we've got this opportunity?

COL. MILLER: I don't know. I've about talked out.

MR. METZLER: You've had about enough of this time, huh?

COL. MILLER: Yep, I've enjoyed conversing with you. My daughter-in-law has had twelve years with the Parks and Wildlife and I'm just impressed by the things that she has done. She is in charge of the fishing area.

MR. METZLER: Yeh, it's a job that most people don't even know goes on.

COL. MILLER: She is gone all the time. She's on one trip after another. She puts on demonstrations and training.

MR. METZLER: Are there any other messages that you would like to leave with us that we can put into our archives?

COL. MILLER: I would like to mention that I've only been here a short time today but everybody has been just so gracious and so appreciative of whatever we accomplished on Iwo.

MR. METZLER: And we haven't even done the parade yet. Wait until you see the parade.

COL. MILLER: I'm sweating it out, it might rain.

MR. METZLER: I'm hoping it won't rain. I guess it's useful for me to take the opportunity to thank you personally again for not only spending your time with us but for doing what you did sixty years ago to keep us where we are today. We appreciate that.

COL. MILLER: You're very kind and everybody has been just gracious, delightful people here.

MR. METZLER: Thank you for spending your time with us.

COL. MILLER: You're very welcome.

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