

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Robert Miller

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Interviewer: Robert Grinslade

Mr. Grinslade: My name is Robert Grinslade, G-r-i-n-s-l-a-d-e. I'm here today with Mr. Robert Miller, World War II veteran. He's here to give us his interview. His last name is spelled M-i-l-l-e-r. Let's start out with having you give us your full name, date of birth, when and where you were born.

Mr. Miller: I'm Robert Miller, and the date, December 7, 1923, and what was the other one?

Mr. Grinslade: When and where you were born.

Mr. Miller: Oh. Woodside, Long Island, New York

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. All right. Tell us a little bit about your patents. What were their names?

Mr. Miller: Abraham Miller was my father, and Celia Miller was my mother.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. What did they do for a living?

Mr. Miller: My father was a carpenter, and he could build homes. My mother was a homemaker.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. So she stayed at home and took care of the kids?

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Have any brothers, sisters?

Mr. Miller: Yeah, I had four sisters. My parents wanted a boy, so when that boy came, they spoiled him rotten.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay (both laugh). Good for them. Any of them still alive?

Mr. Miller: Well, my oldest sister just passed away--

Unidentified male: A year ago, June.

Mr. Miller: What year?

Unidentified male: Last year.

Mr. Miller: Last year? I thought it was this year. She was 100.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow!

Mr. Miller: She was a WAC; she went in as a private, and they made her a lieutenant. She became an air controller at an Army airfield.

Mr. Grinslade: So she was in the Army.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Where did you go to school?

Mr. Miller: My first high school was Wellington C. Mettman in Belmar. Then I went to Delehanty Institute for Machinists in Manhattan.

Mr. Grinslade: When did you graduate, if you remember?

Mr. Miller: It had to be; I imagine '40.

Mr. Grinslade: '40? Okay.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: What did you do before you joined the military?

Mr. Miller: School. I went right from the machinists school--well, let's go back a step. I actually got involved with the Navy when I was 13. When most boys joined the Boy Scouts, I joined the Junior Naval Reserve, and I worked myself up to Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class.

Mr. Grinslade: So you did all this before you even thought--so you were going to be Navy no matter what.

Mr. Miller: Yeah,

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Do you remember where you were on December 7, 1941?

Mr. Miller: Yes. First of all, I went in a year before the war.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: We had been out dropping depth charges on German U-boats up and down the East Coast, and we weren't even at war with them. Then one day, we pull into Norfolk, Virginia, and they set off general quarters. I said, "Oh, God. Somebody's going to get in

big trouble doing that for my birthday.” I never heard of Pearl Harbor, because I was always in the Atlantic. That’s my birthday.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Well, congratulations, I guess.

Mr. Miller: And that’s where I was on December 7th.

Mr. Grinslade: So you said you were dropping depth charges on the German U-boats. What year was that?

Mr. Miller: Ah, ’41.

Mr. Grinslade: ’41, so right before World War II started with Japan.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. My first ship was the battleship Wyoming. Actually, I had gone to service school in Great Lakes for machinist. I got in a little trouble; I decked a chief because he said something I didn’t like. They put me in the brig on bread and water, and they fined me ten dollars and broke me down to apprentice seaman.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, gee. Ten dollars.

Mr. Miller: (Chuckles). Well, I was only making \$21.00 at the time.

Mr. Grinslade: Well, let’s go back to right when you joined up. Did you up in New York?

Mr. Miller: Yeah. When I joined up, they didn’t take me right away, because Newport wasn’t ready to receive recruits. Finally, on January 14th, they called me up and says, “Come on over to the recruiting office.” I got there, and they had a bus waiting, and several guys boarded the bus, and they handed me a big envelope and said, “You’re in charge.”

Mr. Grinslade: Congratulations.

Mr. Miller: (Chuckles). So, we made it up to Newport, Rhode Island, which was three months of intense training. You learned everything from drilling to shooting to KP, marching, everything about the Navy you learned, except you didn’t learn anything about aboard ship. So the last few weeks of the training was on board the USS

Unidentified male: Was it the Constitution or the Constellation?

Mr. Miller: The Constellation.

Mr. Grinslade: The Constellation.

Mr. Miller: Which is the sister ship to the Constitution, with the guns on the side, and the big square masts up there.

Mr. Grinslade: So you're talking about a sailing ship.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: We climbed all the riggings and unfurled these big sails and all that. We learned everything; and we slept in hammocks. Even at boot camp, we slept in hammocks. Every time you got up, you hit your head on the beam, because in between the beams, it was high enough, but each beam was there to support, to hold the whole ship together. So you were always hitting your head on the beam.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, Geez. That's a lot of headaches during those days.

Mr. Miller: (Chuckles). So from there, they sent me to Great Lakes for machinist school, and that's when I got in trouble.

Mr. Grinslade: That's out of Chicago.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, yeah. It was one hour north of Chicago, one hour south of Milwaukee, but I didn't go to either one. When I got liberty, I went to Waukegan, which is Jack Benny's home town.

Mr. Grinslade: What did you guys do on liberty, out of school?

Mr. Miller: We either went out to eat or we went to the USO, or we went to, you know, a place to sleep like the JCH--not JCH at that time. It was-the--oh, my mind.

Mr. Grinslade: Something like the YMCA? Something like that?

Mr. Miller: YMCA, that's where we went.

Mr. Grinslade: What did they have for you to do at the USOs?

Mr. Miller: They had dancing; they had food. It was just a place where you could go and meet people and either dance or eat, you know, just have a good time and talk with people.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, just kind of a home away from home.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: You went to training for what type of MOS, or what type of job?

Mr. Miller: Machinist.

Mr. Grinslade: Machinist? Okay, what were you going to be working on?

Mr. Miller: All the different machines: lathes, drill presses, milling machines, shapers, planers, every kind of machine, metal working machinery.

Mr. Grinslade: So it was all metal working?

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Were you going to make parts for different things, or help repair the ship if it was damaged?

Mr. Miller: Right. Any part had to be made, I could make it.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, that's a neat job. You guys were important; you kept the ship in working order.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, except that since they kicked me out, and put me on the Wyoming, the battleship Wyoming, there, I don't know if you want to go into detail, but my job was second leader on the three-inch anti-aircraft gun.

Mr. Grinslade: Let's go back a little bit, try to keep it chronological here.

Mr. Miller: Okay.

Mr. Grinslade: So your first ship was the--

Mr. Miller: Wyoming.

Mr. Grinslade: What kind of a ship was that?

Mr. Miller: Battleship.

Mr. Grinslade: Battleship. How long did you serve on the Wyoming?

Mr. Miller: I don't remember the exact time, but it wasn't long, because they put me in as captain of the head. First of all, to take a shower on the Wyoming, they gave you a bucket of salt water and salt water soap, and after you got all finished--first of all, there was one big terracotta thing with a drain in the middle, and we slept in hammocks on there, and--I forgot where I was...

Mr. Grinslade: You were talking about getting ready to take a shower.

Mr. Miller: Oh. Since I was a wise guy, they says, “We got just the job for you.” That was captain of the latrine or head, whatever you want to call it. In the Navy it’s the head.

Mr. Grinslade: It’s basically the bathroom.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, right. I found out that was real water. I could take a shower and I felt human again.

Mr. Grinslade: So it wasn’t seawater.

Mr. Miller: Right. With the seawater, you always felt clammy, even after washing. And I wasn’t going to lose that job, so I kept it spotless, until one day they came to me and says, “Pack your gear; you’re getting transferred.” And I begged them, “Don’t transfer me!” I didn’t want to lose this!

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, no kidding!

Mr. Miller: So they transferred me to a minesweeper, which was also a sub chaser. It was a minesweep, a mine layer and a sub chaser.

Mr. Grinslade: What was the name of the ship?

Mr. Miller: The Raven.

Mr. Grinslade: The Raven? Okay.

Mr. Miller: AM-55. It had just been built a few months before, and they built two in the drydock, side-by-side, and what happened was, I got on there as a seaman, I got transferred there. Shall I continue?

Mr. Grinslade: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Miller: I loved it; it was really great, except when we went out to sea, I got very seasick. I was seasick; everybody says you’ve got to eat something, and I couldn’t. Finally, I tried to eat something, but then I got a bucket with my name on it. So, when I was helmsman, steering the ship, I had my bucket tied, secured to the mast. So every once in a while, I would tap the officer of the deck, and I’d point, and I’d run out and do my thing, come back and continue on.

Mr. Grinslade: And this worked whether you were sick or not?

Mr. Miller: Right, right.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, now your training was for machinist, and so during this time, you never got involved in any machine work?

Mr. Miller: Not up 'til--not 'til I finished the Raven..

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so your jobs on the Raven were just whatever you needed to do.

Mr. Miller: Well, my general quarters job was--it had two three-inch anti-aircraft guns, and three .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns They had one on each side of the bridge and one between the smokestacks. Mine was the right wing of the bridge; that was my gun. Tell you a story about what happened?

Mr. Grinslade: So, you were the gunner, or you were in charge of the gun?

Mr. Miller: The gunner.

Mr. Grinslade: You were the gunner, okay. How were you trained to be a gunner? Was that part of your basic training?

Mr. Miller: Well, yeah, basic training, but not on a machine gun. We had it on the rifle. But on the battleship, I was classified as a gunner, so now when I came to the Raven, that was my position. Every morning and every evening, at sunrise and sunset, we would have general quarters, and everybody would man their battle stations. I'd go out and take the cover off my gun, and I'd train at the bird going by, and then turn at the porpoise going by. One day, we're at general quarters, and it's very rough. It's off Cape Hatteras, and the waves are going like this. In the trough of the wave, I could see a torpedo coming, and the propellor's spinning in that trough. So I started shooting at it. They tapped me on the shoulder and said, "This is only a drill! This is only a drill!" I kept shooting, and that thing exploded.

Mr. Grinslade: So it was a real torpedo?

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah, because there were all those U-boats out there.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, so a U-boat was actually shooting at your ship?

Mr. Miller: Right, the German U-boats.

Mr. Grinslade: Well, good for you! Good eye!

Mr. Miller: Well, there were many times when they were shooting torpedoes at us, and we were lucky. One time it went past our stern; one time it went past our bow; one time it was under us. So there were many times where they shot torpedoes at us. We were escorting ships up and down the East coast. Now, at that time, we didn't have much in the way of destroyers, so they used us, and they used some four-stackers from World War I, destroyers. That's who was escorting these convoys, because we had sonar, you know, to check where the submarines were. Every time we would go out there on the ocean, you know, we'd know that they're standing right off the coast, ready to shoot torpedoes at us. People said they sat on the beach in Florida, and they watched the U-boats torpedo ships. They could see them.

Mr. Grinslade: Off the Florida coast. I know they actually attacked a few in the Gulf of Mexico--

Mr. Miller: Oh!

Mr. Grinslade: --and sunk a couple down there, so they were active all over the place.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah. But off of Cape Hatteras was their prime--in fact, you could see masts and sterns of ships sticking out all over, because it's shallow there, except for the new ones that are being sunk by the U-boats. They're not on the map, you know, on the charts. We went as far as Nova Scotia. We'd escort tankers up there, because they were getting these ships to go across to England and Russia, and they needed their fuel. And we went as far south as the Panama Canal. So we were patrolling the coast.

Mr. Grinslade: So you never escorted a convoy across the ocean; you stayed mainly shore duty. You were protecting the coast.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. About how far out did you go?

Mr. Miller: We weren't at war.

Mr. Grinslade: Not yet.

Mr. Miller: Yet. So then one day, they said to me, "Pack your gear; you're getting transferred for shore duty." So, they transferred me to a fighter squadron of F4F fighters. That's all we had at the time. Of course, we had dive bombers and torpedo bombers, but for fighters, that's all we had at that time, F4Fs.

Mr. Grinslade: That was the basic fighter force at that point.

Mr. Miller: Right. So they put me in VGF-28, and they trained us there, and then they tried to put us on a carrier for our planes, to see if they could land and take off from the carrier, see if they learned enough, but five of our planes cracked up, so they weren't ready. So what they did, is they took a field in Suffolk, called Drivers, Virginia, and they took--it was a cornfield--they flattened it out and they marked it out, and they took all our planes there and they would learn to land and take off on that marked out space. They had a landing signal officer there, who would tell them whether they were too high or too low, or when to cut. Little by little, they got better. Now, it comes along that they loaded us onto the--first it was the Ranger for training, then on the Charger for training. They were both--well, the Ranger was a full-sized carrier, the only one in the Atlantic. The Charger was what they used for practicing landing and taking off.

Mr. Grinslade: It was an actual aircraft carrier.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah. It was a CVE.

Mr. Grinslade: CVE? Okay.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, which is escort, but it was only used for that. We were short of carriers. I didn't know it at the beginning, but we were headed for the invasion of Africa, French West Africa. So the Charger, not being out in the ocean before, you know, took the waves very

badly. When they went to send off the first plane to go up to fly around or do reconnoiter, or whatever you want to call it--

Mr. Grinslade: Combat air patrol.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, like that. You know, the bow would be way down, or the bow would be way up, so they sent the plane down, the first one went straight into the water because the bow was down. So they learned--the pilot was picked up by a destroyer--the next one they took off, they waited to get the feeling that the bow would be coming up at the right time. He took off beautifully. So here, our planes took off.

Mr. Grinslade: You have a lot more air underneath you.

Mr. Miller: Yeah (chuckles). Now what happened, when the planes are coming back, they're coming back to land, and the signal officer gives them the cut when they're at the right height and perfect position, gives them the cut. But now what happens is, the flight deck drops down, because the bow is going up. When he gave them the cut, instead of going a few feet, now it's a long distance and they came down, and of course, the landing gear went out, and it crashed. So they sent all the rest of the planes on to Bermuda, because evidently that's where we were headed. We got to Bermuda, and there were--the Ranger was there and a couple of cruisers and four destroyers. The Ranger would first take some of the planes and pilots out to practice taking off and landing, and the destroyers were learning how to operate with the carrier. When they came back, we went out in the Charger, and we did the same thing, practicing take-offs and landing, and then we came back. Then a tugboat came alongside, and we were unloading all our stuff, because we were being transferred to Bermuda. We all got to Bermuda, and we got settled in. We heard that we were waiting for the aircraft carrier Suwanee. We found out that they took four tankers and converted them to aircraft carriers, and they were

great. They were called the big CVEs, those four. They wanted to do more, but they couldn't spare the tankers; they needed the tankers to supply, you know, fuel.

Mr. Grinslade: Do you remember the names of those four ships? The Suwanee was one.

Mr. Miller: The Sangamon, the Suwanee, the Chenango, and the Santee. That's the four of them.

Mr. Grinslade: What was your job on an aircraft carrier? When you were assigned to this air division, were you still a machinist?

Mr. Miller: No, I was an aircraft mechanic. I had made third class Aviation Machinist's Mate.

Mr. Grinslade: So, you had been trained for that work.

Mr. Miller: Right. I was working on the engines, and I was really good at it.

Mr. Grinslade: Good! Well, they needed good people to work on those aircraft.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. Remember, this is the beginning. Now, we ended up going for the invasion of Africa.

Mr. Grinslade: So, let me go back. How long were you in Bermuda, roughly?

Mr. Miller: Could be maybe a week.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, that's all.

Mr. Miller: Maybe more. In fact, I'm going to give you, oh I gave you one. I think it has it on there. Then, we heard that the Suwanee is in, because the Suwanee was just being converted like the other four, but the Chenango, they put on P-40s. The way they did it at the beginning of the war is, the number of the squadron is the same number as the ship. So, the Chenango was CVE-28. Our squadron was VGF-28, but we couldn't be on there because they were transporting all these P-40s for the Army, so when they take the field, these Army planes can fly over and land right on the field. So they put us on the Suwanee. When we got to--shall I continue?

Mr. Grinslade: Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Miller: Okay. When we got off the coast of--first of all, they refueled us three times--but when we got off the coast of Africa, we split into three groups. . Each group had a carrier and, I don't remember, they each had a cruiser and they each had destroyers, and I think they each had minesweepers. Now, I know the Santee had a minesweeper, but I don't remember about the others. We were the center one, which was the Suwanee. So the Chenango was southern, and the northern one was the Santee. Anyhow, all four of these converted tankers were there; that's all we had. So now, we took Casablanca and the whole French West Africa, but who we took over there was Patton. Now I don't know if I should tell you this, because it's not nice.

Mr. Grinslade: Go ahead. Feel free to tell it.

Mr. Miller: Tell it?

Mr. Grinslade: Tell it; we want to get the history of what happened, and what you saw and what you did. We know it's not all going to be pretty, so just go ahead and let it go.

Mr. Miller: Before, when we were loading Patton's tanks and everything on board, he stopped it. So now, he's delaying the whole invasion. He says, "You're doing it wrong." And then he stopped, and they showed him what they were doing; he said, "Oh, okay. Go ahead, load it up." But then he went on to say, as Patton would, "Never has the Navy dropped us in the right place, at the right time. If you drop us within 50 miles of where you're supposed to drop us, and within a week of whenever you're supposed to drop us, I'll win the war."

Mr. Grinslade: Sounds just like Patton.

Mr. Miller: (Chuckles). Yeah. So here we didn't know whether they would fight us or not, because we had sent people over there to try and talk to the French people, but you know, we didn't know what to expect. We didn't know whether they would fight us, because we

trained their aircraft, all their pilots, the escadrille in World War I, and they had our planes. So we didn't know what would happen. So they said, here's what we're going to do. Normally, when they come in, they bombard the place like crazy, you know, with the battleships and the cruisers, before they go in.

Mr. Grinslade:

Sure. Before the landing takes place.

Mr. Miller:

Right. So what they said, "We're not going to fire on them, unless they fire on us." So the cruisers sent a few planes in, and I think it wasn't until four o'clock in the morning when we sent up our first flight. What happened was, the pilots were shooting at us, so the word was, "If they fire on us, the word is 'batter up'." Then you can fire back. But don't do it in excess. We don't want to do things to their country that we don't want to. So anyhow, so when they fired on us, we fired back, and that's what started the whole thing. So we would send up our planes, and they covered the invasion, the troops going in; they covered--oh, my mind--they covered--I know that they covered any ships that were trying to come out of the harbor, they would cover that. Of course, all of the cruisers and the battleships and the destroyers were also covering, because they were coming out of Casablanca. They had sent out five submarines. What happened was, we were in the Atlantic Ocean, so we had all of the German submarines there, but we were lucky that we had 102 ships that left from the United States, and went to this invasion. We were lucky that none of them attacked us. The only problem that we had going was, we saw a Spanish ship, Spanish--or it was another nation--and they spotted us. So we got a destroyer over there, and they boarded her and made sure that they didn't broadcast that we were there, because then all the U-boats would come in. We found out later that the reason there weren't too many U-boats around the area is because they were all watching this convoy coming across to England;

They evidently knew, somebody I guess was telling them, in the United States, when these convoys were leaving and where they were going.

Mr. Grinslade: Sure, they had their spies there.

Mr. Miller: So that's what happened. We did a lot of damage to their airfields. We bombed them so that they couldn't fly up, and then we found out later that they were thinking, "Why are they doing that to us? We were waiting; we waited two years for them to get here."

Mr. Grinslade: When you say "they"?

Mr. Miller: The French pilots.

Mr. Grinslade: The French pilots, okay. So, which country were you actually going into at that point? Do you remember?

Mr. Miller: French West Africa.

Mr. Grinslade: French West Africa.

Mr. Miller: Well, it was, I guess, Morocco, wherever--

Mr. Grinslade: But you said North Africa, so--

Mr. Miller: Yeah, but I think it was Morocco. But we went into three different, at the same time.

Mr. Grinslade: Were the Germans there, or were we trying to get our troops in to get up to where Germans were?

Mr. Miller: Well, the Germans were there, but what had happened is that when Germany invaded France, France had lost so many men during World War I, and they were overwhelmed. They did fight them for a little bit, but then they surrendered. They set France up with the Vichy government, which was French. They said, "You defend it, and we won't bother you." But now, we're attacking them, and one by one, these sections are giving up, because they don't want to fight us. But now the Germans are taking over, and they're shooting all the coastal guns at us, but there was one French battleship there, which was--I guess had been damaged when Germany took over. I forget the name of it, the big

battleship that the French had. It was ill in harbor, and it wasn't up, but one of their turrets was working. It started shooting at us, so we sent some dive bombers to knock it out. I'm not sure whether it was dive bombers or the guns from the battleships that knocked it out. In any case, it jammed the gears or something in the turret, so we didn't hear anything for a while from them. We figured, oh, it's knocked out, but it really wasn't. The men were there, repairing it real fast.

Mr. Grinslade: In other words, we're fighting a French ship that's under the auspices of a puppet French government that the Germans set up.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. A lot of people don't understand how that works, so I'm trying to get that on tape.

Mr. Miller: Oh, good. Good.

Mr. Grinslade: So that's how that played; that's why we were shooting at the French.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, but we did a really good job over there, but what happened here, just what nobody knows about, is all the 70 some odd planes that were on the Chenango, they sent one plane over to see if the field was taken, so that they could send the rest of the planes. So when he came in, he found out that the field was taken, but he cracked up because all the holes from the bombs in the runway. So he couldn't get back to tell them, don't send the rest. He ran down to the ships in the harbor, which were ours already and said, "Don't send then; you've got to fix the runways." But he was too late. The colonel in charge says, "let's get these out of here." So they all flew in, and many of them were damaged. Their landing gear collapsed; their propellor got bent, you know, all that stuff. It was really a shame that we lost so many P-40s after taking the time to bring them over. Anyhow, we ended up doing a good job. Now before we left, since these were converted tankers to aircraft

carriers, they were really great because they could supply fuel for their destroyers.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so they could be oilers as well.

Mr. Miller: Right. That's what we did. But before we left there, when they had all given up, before we left we had to unload all our fuel to all the ships that were there. Then we headed back to the states. We pulled into Norfolk, Virginia.

Mr. Grinslade: Let me go back just one step. So you were on board the ship the whole time. You were always on board the ship, taking care of the planes.

Mr. Miller: Always, yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Once the planes got--did all the planes on your ship fly over to the field?

Mr. Miller: No, only the Army planes.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: Our planes returned to our ship.

Mr. Grinslade: So those were Navy planes?

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: How long do you think you were there during this battle that was going on?

Mr. Miller: I'm not sure, but I think it was only a couple of weeks, whatever it was, because it's in that material that I gave you.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, but it's less than a month.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so it didn't take that long.

Mr. Miller: Right. And we wanted to get out of there, because more U-boats were coming, because torpedoes, you know, were skimming by us, and we were evading them, and it was really something that we didn't get hit.

Mr. Grinslade: What was your emotional feeling about the fact that you were out there in the middle of the ocean, and you've got these U-boats

firing torpedoes at you? I mean, did that bother you to a big degree, or you just did your job anyway?

Mr. Miller: Well, first of all, coming across, all these people that are in this invasion, they've never been in a battle before, especially the pilots. They're very apprehensive, and really they don't know what to expect, until after that first mission's going out. They came back cocky, you know, because here they're shooting down all these planes, but we lost a lot of planes, and we lost a lot of pilots. We also learned from this that we sank a submarine, and it had never been done before by an airplane. This was the first. So they learned that, instead of using our torpedo bombers, just to either torpedo these ships or to drop bombs on the ships or land or these big concrete things that have these guns shooting at us.

Mr. Grinslade: Bunkers?

Mr. Miller: Yeah. They could also use them for depth charges, and it opened up a whole new window, because now up to that point, they only used destroyers. What next?

Mr. Grinslade: They would drop bombs on the submarines, or did they actually drop depth charges?

Mr. Miller: Depth charges.

Mr. Grinslade: They would drop depth charges from the planes?

Mr. Miller: Bombs wouldn't do anything; bombs are not for submarines. The depth charges--

Mr. Grinslade: So they would drop these depth charges from the airplanes?

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Interesting.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, from our torpedo bombers. Those were TBFs; those were great planes. They had a crew of three. There was the pilot, a turret gunner and then a gunner down below who was also the radioman.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Yeah, we have a TBM Avenger down in our, down here. So when you got on the way back, did you have any problems on the way back to the states?

Mr. Miller: No. There was one incident where a destroyer dropped some depth charges, but we don't know what happened with it. It didn't affect us in any way. By the way, going over there, they would take one destroyer, it was all around us.

Mr. Grinslade: They were the pickets.

Mr. Miller: Our ships were from horizon to, you know, as far as you could see, in every direction, 102 ships. They would take one destroyer, and send it back, to make sure no subs were on the surface that they could see were following us.

Mr. Grinslade: So, on the way back, you have no problems. Did the whole entire convoy then go back across the ocean? The 102 ships that went there; they also went back.

Mr. Miller: Right. Some of the ships stayed there; some of the destroyers or some of the minesweepers, but we hit a hurricane coming back, and that was really something. You know, there's a picture of one of the carriers, and it might have been ours, where it was like this, and you don't know how it stayed that way.

Mr. Grinslade: It was listing about 45 degrees.

Mr. Miller: Right. But all of our planes that were on the flight deck went off. Even though they were secured, they went off.

Mr. Grinslade: They just slid off into the ocean?

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah. Some of the ships lost all their lifeboats. A lot of damage to a lot of ships, but to the Chenango, which had taken all the planes off and didn't have that weight; not only that, but unloaded all its fuel, now it's riding high and next thing you know, well even on our ship, the waves were coming right over the flight deck. Can you imagine what it was to the Chenango? With no weight, it's coming right over the top, but what happened was--did

you ever open a can of sardines with the key? That's how their flight deck was.

Mr. Grinslade: So it just curled it right back.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow!

Mr. Miller: And the whole front end was flooded, so they had everybody aft. They could only go five knots, very slow. It's amazing that they kept control of the ship. They finally got out of it and made it back to Norfolk.

Mr. Grinslade: So those winds had to be terrifically powerful.

Mr. Miller: Oh, unbelievable. Now what happened was, the other carriers, like the Santee and the Sangamon--the Suwanee and the Sangamon--they just went back and had normal repairs and stuff done to their ship, and they got their squadrons and they headed for the Pacific. So now, it took a little longer for the Chenango. We finally got the word; we were at Navy base.

Mr. Grinslade: Which ship were you on at that point?

Mr. Miller: No ship; we were at Norfolk Naval Air Station.

Mr. Grinslade: So your tour on the Suwanee had been terminated.

Mr. Miller: Right. Now, the Chenango had got completely done over, good job, and amazingly, the time was--they were so surprised that they got done so fast. Now we're bringing our planes, taxiing them down to the dock and their being hoisted on board. This was in December. The date's in that literature I gave you. It started to snow and turned into a blizzard, but we finally left with our convoy and headed for the Panama Canal.

Mr. Grinslade: And you left from where, Norfolk again?

Mr. Miller: Mm-hmm, from Norfolk. I think we were 11 ships in our convoy, going to the Pacific. We were told on board, and I couldn't believe it, that they were going to put us off on an island. I kind of said, "These guys are nuts." But anyhow, we finally got to the island of

Efate, and they didn't put us ashore right away. They had us--let me go back a step. At that time, the Navy had seven big carriers in the Pacific, but only one was workable. They were either sunk, damaged or in for repair. So the only ship that was out there, the only carrier, big carrier, was the--

Unidentified male: Enterprise.

Mr. Miller: Enterprise, thank you (chuckles); he's a resource many times! Here they're fighting the whole Japanese Navy by themselves. What happened was, Nimitz heard what a fantastic job the four of us converted tankers did in France: he says, "I want them here." So that's where we ended up going. Now, what happened was, they had sent me ashore, and the Marines were moving up to Guadalcanal with their planes. They had B-25s, and they had several of them that they couldn't get going, so they needed a mechanic. So from our carrier, they sent me. I got them all flying except one. I scavenged whatever I needed from that one, and I got them off in the roll-off to Guadalcanal. Now, what's happening is, the whole Japanese Navy is coming, because they don't want the Americans on Guadalcanal. All of our ships that were out there, they had to back away, because there's no way they could fight them, because they were so strong in the beginning, and at that time, we didn't have that much. Here the Marines were stranded there. They needed supplies; they needed ammo; they needed replacements. They needed everything. But they held out! It's amazing what a beautiful job they did. So now, they've got us. We used to take convoys into Guadalcanal. So our planes would not only protect our ship, and their ships, but would be out looking for the enemy. When the enemy was sighted, they would either shoot them down or chase them away. Every convoy we made into Guadalcanal brought all that they needed for the Marines. That's what we did for six months, I believe, bringing in the

supplies. What they did, they used, I think there was only two of us carriers. I think the Suwanee was--anyhow, it was another one of us, of the four. So there's two of us, so that after we did one or two, we'd rest while the other one did one or two, bringing these convoys in. Now, in that five months, I think we brought in five convoys. The last one, they said was the biggest one ever that went in there. We were complimented on the fantastic job, that we didn't lose a single ship in the convoy, and every one of them got through, and no damage to them.

Mr. Grinslade: That's pretty amazing.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. Then what happened was, I guess we were out there for a year. Oh, I didn't tell you about, in March, or April, I think it was March. They put me ashore because they said they needed somebody there to, as these planes came in, somebody to repair them and get them going and working. I didn't know, until I sent away for my service record, that I was transferred to the Army.

Mr. Grinslade: (Chuckles). No one told you.

Mr. Miller: They don't tell you a lot of things. Like, when they tell you something, it might not be true. When they told me, oh, you made third class petty officer, I said, "Oh, that's great." So I put my stripes on. I found out that was not 'til several months later, in my record, I found out 40 years later, so many months later is when I actually got it. They told me twice, two months apart, several months before the end of the year, oh, you got it, you got it! So, you don't know what's true, and here I'm wearing stripes that don't even belong on me yet.

Mr. Grinslade: So you got it, but you didn't get it.

Mr. Miller: Right. (Chuckles). Exactly.

Mr. Grinslade: Let me go back a little bit. So you were assigned to the carrier, but they put you with the Army to repair planes.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. They not only put me with; they transferred--in that record that I got, it says I was transferred to the Army.

Mr. Grinslade: So, you became Army.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. And so, were you always on the land there, or did you go with these convoys back and forth?

Mr. Miller: I had to go on the convoys back and forth, as well.

Mr. Grinslade: So you'd repair the planes also on the ships as they came back.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: But you were still Army then, but you would be a Navy guy when you were on the ship?

Mr. Miller: They said, according to the record, I was in the Army until July or something, July of that year, 41? No, that would be '42 then, I think.

Mr. Grinslade: So you were temporarily assigned to the Army.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, alright. So after you got finished with the Guadalcanal invasion, and that was all taken care of, did you stay on the Suwanee?

Mr. Miller: No, on the Chenango.

Mr. Grinslade: Or, Chenango, okay.

Mr. Miller: Then the Chenango was told they had to back for repairs and replenishment and all that stuff. When they got back, they took the squadron and they transferred them off, because I was in the squadron. They put a new squadron on, for training, and they did that, and they said, "We're giving you 30 days leave, and you're being transferred to Seattle."

Mr. Grinslade: That's not too bad.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, well, my 30 days leave; I lived in New York (laughs). But anyhow, I managed to get back to New York, but what bothers me the most, I was so early in the Navy that I had my own--they didn't

have tools on the carriers, so I brought my own tool boxes. I had two tool boxes there, and I forgot to take them when I got transferred (laughs).

Mr. Grinslade: So you lost all your tools?

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow!

Mr. Miller: Okay, now after my 30 days are up, or actually before, because I need time to get back to Seattle, my father took me to the train. I took the Pennsylvania Railroad back to Seattle.

Mr. Grinslade: So you got to go home to New York.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so you stayed there a little bit and then you had to go back.

Mr. Miller: Right, right.

Mr. Grinslade: Tell me this, before we get onto the next thing. How was your interpretation of what the country was like when you got back after you had been overseas? Did this country change at all, or was it because of the rationing and things that everything changed to that degree?

Mr. Miller: Rationing was a big thing. You know, they couldn't get gas; they couldn't get tires. There's a lot of things that they couldn't do, but they managed. They couldn't get sugar, but they managed. It was really surprising.

Mr. Grinslade: What was the general morale of the people that you hung around with? Was it--about the war, were they nervous?

Mr. Miller: It was mostly my family. They were so happy to see me, and of course, my mother cried. She didn't want me to go in at all. It was a good, it was a nice feeling to be home, and that's very relaxed. Everybody, whoever asked me about anything in the service, I couldn't talk to them.

Mr. Grinslade: Why was that?

Mr. Miller: I don't know. I couldn't explain; if they would say--I'd kind of look at them and say, "That's silly," you know? Because there was so much death that you had, even on board. They weren't even in the invasion, but so many people had died. They either died from plane crashes, or they died--when the plane came in and cut the cable and it whipped across the deck and these guys had their heads up. So many things happened, all these propellers turning on the flight deck of the planes, when they say start your engine, so many guys got hit with the propellers. It just goes on and on. One guy got hit with a block and tackle, and he died. It's things you don't want to remember.

Mr. Grinslade: Sure. You bet..

Mr. Miller: Yeah. I remember all the good things

Mr., Grinslade: Well, but, you know, the bad things are what make war what it is. It's just a bad situation anyway. So you just have to live through it. So you just continued to do your job, but these thoughts would invade you every once in a while?

Mr. Miller: When you got there, doing what you have to do, whatever is going on, it's out of your mind, because you know what you have to do, because I've got get these planes to get off the deck, and I've got to get them to come back on. I've got to clear the deck; I've got to move things forward to let them land. I've got to move them back for taking off, you know. And like I said, a plane's down, they'd have to be repaired. Actually, at that point, that wasn't my job. My job was just repairing the planes, except the last part of the Chenango, they made me a plane director on the flight deck.

Mr. Grinslade: So you were the guy with the paddles out there.

Mr. Miller: No. That's an officer.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: I was the one, had a yellow cap and I was the one that directs the plane to where they go, put the on the catapult, or send them to the

position they're going to be for take-off. Then of course, we had all the, I don't know what you call them, the crew. They had brown hats--that would put the chocks in for the planes when they stopped. That's what I did at that time. It was only near the end that they made me a plane director. I really never figured out why, until a few weeks ago. I said, why did they make me a plane director? And I figured it out. They must have gotten word that they have to transfer a plane director, and they didn't want to transfer theirs, so they made me a plane director. Why else would they do it?

Mr. Grinslade: So you just got cross trained all over the place.

Mr. Miller: Right,

Mr. Grinslade: So you must have been a big asset to that group.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: You could do a lot of things that a lot of people couldn't do.

Mr. Miller: That's true, that's true.

Mr. Grinslade: Fantastic.

Mr. Miller: So, now I get transferred to Seattle, and they had a group, I forget what they called it, they repaired planes, they fixed planes. It's in there; it's in that stuff. That's what they do, and that's what I was working on. I understand they transferred me there to go into the CVE pool, because Kaiser was building these carriers. I don't know if you know the story about Kaiser. He wanted to build carriers for the Navy, and he went to the Navy, and they said, "Oh, no. You're not going to do it." He didn't like that answer. He went to the President, and the President told the Navy, "You're going to do it." He was such an asset. He turned out more carriers than anybody else, than all of the others did. He turned out 50 carriers in 51--he turned out one carrier a month, something like that.

Mr. Grinslade: That's pretty good.

Mr. Miller: I imagine that the first several months, to put everything together and plan it all out and get all the prints made out and how they're going to do it, but once he started, I think it was one every month. Now I might have the wrong information, but he turned out 50, and that was really a job.

Mr. Grinslade: Are you talking about Kaiser Aluminum?

Mr. Miller: Yeah

Mr. Grinslade: Yeah. That was the company that started all the--so they were being built on the West Coast then?

Mr. Miller: Right. In Oregon.

Mr. Grinslade: You said you had been transferred to Seattle, so that after you had finished your tour in Guadalcanal area, you went home, went back to Seattle. That's where you stayed for a while?

Mr. Miller: Right, because that's where all the big shots had their offices, distributor for the whole West Coast. So they first put me into this repairing planes or going out into the graveyards to take parts off of planes that they needed and bring them in. Then I got transferred to the blueprint department, which being a machinist, I knew blueprints. Anyhow, finally they put us on a carrier. In fact, it was called the Casablanca. And here I'd been in the invasion in Casablanca. Our whole squadron--no, it wasn't a squadron at that time, because the squadron disbanded when it got off the Chenango. But there were a lot of men from the Chenango that were there, and so we knew each other.

Mr. Grinslade: So they got transferred to the Casablanca?

Mr. Miller: No, to Seattle. So the first ship they wanted to train us on, because now this is a completely different carrier than the ones we'd been on. You know, we'd been on the four big ones, Now, these are smaller, and they were higher. There were different ways to get to the decks and all that stuff. So finally, they put us on the Casablanca for training. So we'd go out into the bay and train, and

then they'd come back. We learned about the ship and about what our jobs were, and that was good. Next, they transferred us to another, Cassin Bay, I think; I don't remember the name of the other carrier. We were transferred to that for training. Then they'd bring us down to the dock, and show us these films on machine shop stuff, which I knew very well, but nobody else did.

Mr. Grinslade: So it was more training?

Mr. Miller: Yeah. And, next thing you know, we get the word that we're now being transferred to Oregon, Astoria, Oregon, for the commissioning of the Tulagi. Now the Tulagi is one of Kaiser's ships; it was number 72.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. CVE-72.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, CVE-72.

Mr. Grinslade: Just to get this straight for people who might be hearing this for the first time, the 72 meant what?

Mr. Miller: It was the 72nd carrier built.

Mr. Grinslade: It was a CVE.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, but the first ones were like, number one was the Long Island. I forget the number of the Charger--unless they just gave them that block of numbers.

Mr. Grinslade: So that number indicated how many ships had been built up to that point?

Mr. Miller: It might have been, or they might have just said, okay, you're going to build 50 ships; you're going to have from this number to this number.

Mr. Grinslade: And they just assigned the number to the ships.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, could be. I'm not sure.

Mr. Grinslade: What did you do from that point on? You were transferred to this--you had two ships for training, the Casablanca and the other one. How long were you on each one of those for training?

Mr. Miller: I think it was only about a week.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so short time.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, but you learned, you know, everything that goes on on the carrier, and where everything is, because it's the same carrier.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, same class of carrier. Okay, so these were training for you guys as well as the new people aboard that ship.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: So this was kind of their shakedown cruise?

Mr. Miller: Well, once we got on board and went through loading up all the supplies and everything you needed, then we'd go on the shakedown cruise.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. So, the ship that you went on after those two, what was your next ship?

Mr. Miller: The Tulagi. That's the one that would be my ship for the next year or so.

Mr. Grinslade: Where did that go?

Mr. Miller: Now, it seems like they take these, when they first go out for their shakedown, besides going out, just outside in the ocean and coming back, I think what they did to us, and I see they did it to most every carrier, they would take planes and personnel to Hawaii, drop them off, and then you'd bring wrecks and engines, used engines, and personnel back to the West coast. Then after doing that, then the next thing you knew, the second trip to Hawaii, they were loading up a bunch of planes on the deck to take back to the states, and all of a sudden, they were all called off the ship. We had to complete tying it down, but I don't know what the reason was why. Well, I probably do, but so they all got off the ship and we got underway and headed for the states. We continued to finish up the job that they were working on. Now, we go back to the states, and we unloaded all that stuff, and next thing you know, we're going through the Panama Canal to Norfolk. I'm trying to think of what happened at Norfolk. Oh, I know what happened.

From Norfolk, they said we're going to Rhode Island, Quonset Point, Rhode Island. There we went, and we picked up a squadron, and an admiral, Admiral Durgin. Now, Admiral Durgin was the captain of the Ranger during the invasion of French West Africa. Now he's an admiral. We pick up this, and then actually, there was a few more trips we made, carrying stuff to and from, from Africa. On one of those trips, we brought back 35 German prisoners, and they put them in the locker. I guess they put bunks in that chain locker room. They would feed them there; they were locked in that room. Thirty-five prisoners we brought back to Norfolk. That's when we now go; we picked up the admiral and the squadron. Now that squadron, it was a unique squadron. We never had one like it before. It was named VOF-1. Now, the "F" is for fighter, and we had the new fighters, the F-6Fs. Oh, they were beauties! But they also, after their training as a fighter, they had to go out to the Midwest to be trained by the Army as spotters, to spot for the big guns of the battleships and the cruisers. See, up to that point, they used the seaplanes, the SOCs, the S-O-Cs. Each battleship and cruiser had planes on it, that they would catapult off. They used those planes to get up over, and when they would shoot, they would tell them, next shot should be this far left or this far right, or up or down.

Mr. Grinslade:

So they were fire direction control.

Mr. Miller:

But they would get shot down, most of them, because they weren't fighters. So now, they've got the fighters.

Mr. Grinslade:

Well, and they were probably flying pretty slow, trying to figure out what all these things were doing. They're sitting ducks.

Mr. Miller:

Oh, yeah. So now we've got this squadron that learned, not only to fight, but to spot for the big guns. Now I didn't know, it but there was two of our carriers, the Tulagi and, I don't know, it's in that paperwork. There was only two. The other carrier not only had

the same fighter on there, but they had some night fighters. Now this is the beginning of night fighters, because, especially in the Pacific, these kamikazes would come at night, or these torpedo bombers would come at night, and we didn't have night fighters. But anyhow--

Mr. Grinslade: Now what year was this that you're talking about?

Mr. Miller: I think it was '94.

Mr. Grinslade: No, it couldn't be '94.

Mr. Miller: I don't mean '94; I mean--

Mr. Grinslade: '44?

Mr. Miller: --'44, yeah, because '41 and '42 was with the, was the Suwanee and Chenango, and then we came back. Yeah, I think it was '44. In fact, I know it was '44, because they had originally planned for the invasion of France, D-Day in France, for Omaha Beach and all that; they had originally planned to have southern France also invaded, because the invasion of Omaha Beach in there, they didn't have dock for unloading stuff and supplies. So they really needed this one, between Marseilles and Toulon, great seaports where you could bring is straight up. Even after they broke loose on D-Day, coming across, they're running out of stuff, so they need us to bring all that up there. Anyhow, back to where we were. Now, for this invasion, we had our two carriers, but I think we had five British carriers there, and a lot of British ships were there, too. I forget how many ships were involved, but a lot of ships. The reason they couldn't do it at that time, because they didn't have enough ships.

Mr. Grinslade: Which invasion are we talking about here?

Mr. Miller: Southern France.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. So now you're back in the Atlantic at this point?

Mr. Miller: Well, yeah, except we're going to the Mediterranean.

Mr. Grinslade: So after you went back from the Pacific, you came back through the Panama Canal, you went up to Norfolk, got refitted, and then you went over--

Mr. Miller: Then we went over to Rhode Island, where we loaded up the squadron and the admiral, and then we headed out.

Mr. Grinslade: To go to Europe.

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Now, you were talking about VOF; before you had mentioned a VGF. What's the "G" and the "O"? I know what the "V" is, and I know what the "F" is.

Mr. Miller: I'm not sure, but I think it was Grumman, because Grumman is the one who made it.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: But they changed it, later on in the war, after we were in the Pacific. They changed it in the Pacific to "VF." And then they changed it to where the Scouting was VS. But then they changed it to VC, and combined them to one, so it begins to get a little confusing.

Mr. Grinslade: A little convoluted there. Okay, so now you're headed back over to Europe, and you're on the Tulagi, and what happens then?

Mr. Miller: We didn't have any problems getting there, but we didn't know how many German U-boats were there. The U-boats did a lot of damage, but in the meantime, we're doing our job and, right off the bat, we didn't do what we did for Africa. Right off the bat, we started shelling the shore emplacements. Now I'm not sure whether they shot first, or we just decided that the way we did it for Africa isn't the way you do it. You've got to really shell these places, you know, that have these big German guns there.

Mr. Grinslade: Was this southern France, or was this--?

Mr. Miller: Southern France.

Mr. Grinslade: This wasn't D-Day.

Mr. Miller: No, no. This was about a month, a couple of months after D-Day, because originally, when they wanted them both together, they didn't have enough ships and men to do it. Anyhow, that was really a good job that we did there. What did you want to know about that one?

Mr. Grinslade: Just, so what you were doing there, you were still working as a mechanic on the ship?

Mr. Miller: No, no. I should have mentioned that. On the Tulagi, I just-- they're the one that needed the plane director. So they made me a plane director. Now, there's another instance where they told me, I had taken all these tests for petty officer first class. So they says, "Wow, you really did it great! You got a 3.7 out of a 4.0!" Okay, so I put my stripes on.

Mr. Grinslade: Yeah, we talked about that.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, but this is first class we're talking about.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: So I put my stripes on. Now, I'm on board there. They had a choice between me and, what do you call them, master-at-arms? He wanted to be in charge of all the plane directors on the flight deck, but they chose me. In fact, we have a picture of me on the magazine cover of Navy Aviation News magazine, doing my plane directing in France. I also got my commendation for outstanding-okay, let's get back to southern France. Now, one of my jobs was really, besides being in charge of the flight deck and making sure everybody does their job the right way. I made a lot of changes on the carrier. Now, I don't know if I did it right or wrong, because I didn't ask permission. I just did it, because I knew it had to be done. One of them was, on the front of every aircraft carrier, there's stanchions that come up out of the ground, and you connect chains to it. I didn't want that, because I lose so much space where, from the front edge of the flight deck to where

those chains were--and then you had to leave plenty of room so that the propellers wouldn't hit the planes when you parked the planes there. So I'm losing all that space. So I had the carpenter shop make me a scale model of the flight deck. They made me scale models of the planes; since we only had fighter planes on board, of the fighter planes with their wings folded and with their wings spread. So now I can figure out, how many planes can they get across, how can they do this. I'm losing them, but now I figured I'll leave those things down, no chain. Of course, hopefully nobody will go over, so I can bring the planes right up where the nose of the plane is out over, okay? That worked out great. That was the first thing I did. Then, to catapult a plane, on the deck they have painted a yellow line and then a rectangular square, so what you're supposed to do is, when you're taxiing the plane, you make sure his right wheel is going along that yellow line. Then when it gets to that square, you tell them to hold his brake and come around. So now, he comes around and his tail swings back, so they're on the catapult. But sometimes, he'll put his brakes on a little before or a little after, so I says, I know how I can do that. I had the carpenter shop put a 4 x 4, pegged into the ground. So now, oh, wow! He comes up, he hits that thing and the tail swings around--

Mr. Grinslade:

And he's there.

Mr. Miller:

--except for one thing. Sometimes the tail swings too far. So now, I have to do the same thing for the tail. So now, I got it working perfect, and the admiral calls down to me and he says, "Hey, Miller! Are we going to get all these planes off in 20 minutes?" I yelled back, "What's the extra five minutes for?" (Both laugh). He laughed so hard, I thought he'd fall off the bridge. But anyhow, we broke the fleet record that day.

Mr. Grinslade:

Oh, that's neat! That's neat!

Mr. Miller: Yeah, that was really great.

Mr. Grinslade: Now, did your Navy later on adopt that as part of their procedure for carriers, or this was only on your own ship?

Mr. Miller: I don't know, but I know that they adopted making the model of the flight deck and they even did it better, because then they used nuts, different colored nuts, for bombs, for torpedoes, for—I'll tell you, they really took it and did a great job with it.

Mr. Grinslade: So they learned from that then?

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Great. Well, efficiency is the whole name of the game out there. If you're not fast enough, you're behind, you know, so it's pretty good.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: So, how long did you stay as a flight director?

Mr. Miller: Well, from--when we finished southern France, we went back to the states, were reconditioned, did whatever they had to do, and we went through the Panama Canal to the Pacific.

Mr. Grinslade: So you went back to the Pacific.

Mr. Miller: Yeah

Mr. Grinslade: Wow! Okay.

Mr. Miller: Yep. And there, we--I'm not sure of the order--but we did the Philippines, and then we did Iwo Jima, Okinawa. By the way, there were several islands that I didn't mention with the Chenango, the Russell, the Reynolds, the Solomon islands.

Mr. Grinslade: Do you remember anything special about those islands you went to or what you did there?

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah. Yeah. As we were going through, I think it was called the Surigao Straits, which I think is in the Philippines, I saw a light on each side, and I says, I hope they're not Japanese, you know? But as we went through there into the, I think it was the China Sea; I don't remember, but that should be in there also, we heard that

they had 100 kamikazes waiting for us. That's when they started to hit. Not only when we went into the China Sea, but when we went into--maybe I'm getting my seas mixed up--but through the next one--oh God, my head! The carrier to our right was the Omono Bay. Omano? Started with an "O." {Transcriber's note: the carrier Mr. Miller refers to is the Ommaney Bay, CVE-79} Anyhow, so we watch his--he has a flight coming back from a mission they were on, and there's one plane was a little further back, and he didn't have any IFF on, so we notified the ship, and we said, "There's an unidentified plane following behind your return flight." All they had to do was send a plane from that return flight back and take a look, and they didn't. So they said, "Oh, it must be one of ours, and the IFF isn't working." A few minutes later, they notified, "Unidentified object just went through our flight deck, through out hangar deck, into the mess hall," and it killed so many people.

Mr. Grinslade:

Was it a kamikaze?

Mr. Miller:

Yep.

Mr. Grinslade:

Oh, wow!

Mr. Miller:

We made so many mistakes, and yet we won the war. That was that. So now, we've got all these kamikazes, and we're shooting down a lot. Our planes are up in the air; they're shooting down a lot. We were lucky. We were doing pretty good; we weren't hit, but ships all around us were getting hit. Of course, they had to fight the fires that are, you know? When you hear a ship getting hit, you figure, all right; they got hit. But all the fires that are going on and the holes in the ship have to be patched, and everything that's going on at one time, and many of the ships got sunk because some of them not only got hit with their first kamikaze, they got a second or a third. It was just terrible, what was going on! Some of the ships, they got the fires fought and

under control, and they got the holes patched up in the flight deck, covered over with steel plates, and the planes can land, and then they get hit again, you know.

Mr. Grinslade: Start all over.

Mr. Miller: It was just, those kamikazes were not good. As somebody working on the ship, like me, I didn't take any concern of it. All I know is, I had to do my job. I think that's what most everybody did, because we were trained over and over, exactly what to do and how to do it. Now, I think it was after Iwo Jima, we went for Okinawa. Now, Okinawa is one island in a bunch of islands. The bunch of islands is called the Ryukyus. There are a lot of islands besides Okinawa that we had to be concerned about, because they had airfields on all these other islands. So, sometimes our job was to hit these other airfields and make sure no planes got off of them, or maybe our job was to make sure that their submarines wouldn't come in, because we had--I don't think we had--oh, that was for France. Yeah, we had, I don't know how many torpedo bombers we had, but they were loaded with depth charges, and they were making sure they could see these submarines. They were doing a good job.

Mr. Grinslade: Was your ship ever hit?

Mr. Miller: No. We were very lucky.

Mr. Grinslade: Very lucky, yeah.

Mr. Miller: There was an almost. We ran out of ammunition and bombs and depth charges and all that stuff, and we had to go back to Kerima Vita, I think that was the name of the place where we'd pull into, {Transcriber's note: Kerama Retto in the Ryukyu Islands was used as a major resupply base} and they would give us all we needed, and we had our planes up covering to make sure that we were protected. A whole bunch of kamikazes were coming, and they shot down some; only one got through, and he's coming

straight at me. I'm standing on the flight deck, and I could see him in the cockpit. So many shells and bullets are going right toward him. How he flew through that, I have no idea. He might have been dead, for all I know; just the plane was coming. At the last instant, the right wing just dropped a little bit, and he went over us and hit the next ship, and that ship went sky high. It must have gone 100 feet in the air, the flames.

Mr. Grinslade: So you guys came out of that smelling like a rose.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, very lucky.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow!

Mr. Miller: Yeah, and then at, I guess when it was over--oh, and while we were there, we heard that Germany surrendered, so I put that in, because, you know, they announced over the speaker, what's going on. Then, I guess we had to go back for repair or replenishment, or--we had to go back to the states for whatever they had to do to the ship, because every time you went back, they either put more guns on, or new guns, or they added an elevator, whatever they were going to do, but we had to go back. When we got back, while we were on the West coast, Japan surrendered.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so you weren't there for the bombs to be dropped. You weren't over there.

Mr. Miller: No.

Mr. Grinslade: Which were the last battles you were in? How many were you in on the Tulagi, and which ones were they?

Mr. Miller: Four on the Tulagi. It had to be; I think it was two in the Philippines. I think it was Lingayen Gulf and another one. Maybe it was three, because one of them was--what's that peninsula where the Japanese marched all of the prisoners?

Mr. Grinslade: Bataan?

Mr. Miller: Bataan. Off of Japan, we had an invasion there, but anyhow we got credit for four. That's what it said, but of course, they didn't count the kamikazes as anything, you know.

Mr. Grinslade: In the Surigao Strait, when you went through the Surigao Straits, there's not a lot of room in there for the ships to get by, that's why it was tough to be in there. That southern Japanese force got destroyed by Oldendorf's task force, because they were in there and couldn't go anywhere. Were you guys concerned in there? You said you saw the two lights and you hoped they weren't Japanese.

Mr. Miller: I wasn't concerned; I just hoped they weren't Japanese.

Mr. Grinslade: Could you see both shores?

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so it was that tight then.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow! Okay. Were you ever like, super-scared out there? Did you ever think, this is it, this is my time, it's over?

Mr. Miller: Yeah. The only time was when that plane was coming at me. You know, you're not supposed to keep a diary in the Navy.

Mr. Grinslade: I didn't know that, but okay.

Mr. Miller: So, I kept it, and I took it out of my pocket, and I wrote down, "This is it," and I put it back in my pocket. I knew it was the end.

Mr. Grinslade: Do you still have that diary?

Mr. Miller: That was a pocket diary, but all the information I put into books of diaries. On the covers, I have from and to; in fact, one of them has a picture of me. I think I got it from my sister. At that time, they could make up stamps with a picture of a sailor, so I had one of those stamps on the cover of one of the books. A few times, I got caught, and once you get caught, they take it away, but I had all those others. I ended up with what, four?

Unidentified male: I think there were four of them.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, I ended up with four.

Mr. Grinslade: So this was basically your notes that you would transfer later to a bigger document?

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. That's a great way to do it. You just weren't supposed to, right?

Mr. Miller: Right.

Mr. Grinslade: Were they afraid if you got captured, that would give the enemy some information or something?

Mr. Miller: I guess they were afraid that we would put down places and dates where we anchored, where we replenished, or where we did this or where we did that, or what courses we took.

Mr. Grinslade: They didn't want the Japanese to find this out.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. That makes sense.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. And the other thing you couldn't have was a flashlight.

Mr. Grinslade: I can see that. I understand.

Mr. Miller: Because at night, you know, you don't want any--

Mr. Grinslade: No lights anywhere. No lights anywhere.

Mr. Miller: Right, yeah. And of course, during the day, no radio. So everything's going by flag hoist and signaling with semaphore. At night, it's by blinking light, you know, morse code. Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: So after you went back to the states to Seattle, that was mid-'45 you went back to Seattle? Right before the war ended?

Mr. Miller: No, I think that was--when was the war over, '44?

Mr. Grinslade: 1945, August is when they dropped the bomb.

Mr. Miller: Oh, it was '45? So then it was '45 when we were there. So, right away they got underway, because they were going to be part of the Magic Carpet. Since they had no more need for me, when we got to Hawaii, I got transferred. I got transferred to this aviation machine shop ship. It was a ship that only had--would repair

aircraft engines. It was a new ship; anyhow, I got transferred to that, and we went through the canal and got to Norfolk, and--oh, where'd I get transferred from? I think it was Norfolk. Then they transferred me into a B-17 Navy squadron.

Mr. Grinslade: A Navy B-17 squadron?

Mr. Miller: I never knew they had B-17s in the Navy. It was VPB-Patrol Bomber-VPB 101.

Mr. Grinslade: I'll be darned.

Mr. Miller: I got transferred to Atlantic City. There was an airport there, and that's where they flew out of. I was there a short time, and they says, "Okay, we're packing up and moving to Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York." So when we got there, they said to me, "We need a machine shop." I says, "Fine. I'll build you one." So I went ahead, and since the war was over, they sent me out to all these facilities, and I could pick whatever I wanted. So I picked a lathe for small work, a lathe for big work. I picked a planer, shaper, you know, everything that I needed. In fact, one thing that I didn't really need but was offered to me and I took it. It was a DeWalt cross-cut wood saw.

Mr. Grinslade: (Laughing) Okay.

Mr. Miller: I made a beautiful machine shop there, I'm telling you, I was so proud of that thing. But I was missing one machine that I couldn't find any place, and that was a Bridgeport milling machine. I had a milling machine, but it wasn't a Bridgeport. That was really the best machine that I wanted.

Mr. Grinslade: If you have the right tools, it makes things so much easier.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah, yeah. So the next thing I know, they say, "Pack up. We're being transferred to Quonset Point, Rhode Island." I'm leaving my machine shop (laughs).

Mr. Grinslade: So, you lost your tools to start with, and now you're losing your machine shop.

Mr. Miller: Laughs.

Mr. Grinslade: The government giveth and the government taketh away.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. By the way, this squadron that I was transferred into, they had--they took all the guns off them, because you know, the war's over. In the bomb bay, they built a big radar system, and they put, I guess made out of fiberglass, a dome around it, in the bomb bay. These planes flew in to the eye of the hurricane.

Mr. Grinslade: So they were hurricane hunters.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay.

Mr. Miller: Then what happened, the cold war came along. So now, they're using these planes, and they added more to it, and they said--they tried other planes to do it on and they tried ships to do it on--but they said no, it has to be a plane that can stay in the air for a long time. That's why they picked the--I think they added fuel tanks to it, so they can stay in the air for, God knows how many hours. They had two crews on board. While one's sleeping, the other one's working.

Mr. Grinslade: And these are B-17s?

Mr. Miller: B-17s, yeah, But they were cold. You get up there, they weren't pressurized, so you had to wear everything warm, warm gloves, and here to work these things with your hands like this, so it was very difficult. Howard Hughes came up with the Connie, the Constellation, the one with the three tails. In fact, was it here?

Mr. Grinslade: That looks like one, yeah. That's it.

Mr. Miller: That's what he came up with, and it's pressurized and it's nice and warm in there. Oh, it was really wonderful. Then in '47, I got--before I left the ship, they said to me, "If you sign on for four more years, we'll send you to O.C.S." I says, "Well, you know, I really wasn't that good in school. What happens if I don't pass?" I didn't know that they pass everybody, unless you do something

wrong. They said, “So, we’ll make you a seaman again.” I says, “Thank you.”

Mr. Grinslade:

Have a nice day.

Mr. Miller:

Because I wanted to stay in the Navy, yeah.

Mr. Grinslade:

Let me go back to the end of the war when you were in Seattle at that point. So, what was your feeling emotionally when you heard the war was over, when it was finally finished? How did you feel about all that?

Mr. Miller:

I don’t know if I even thought about it. You know, when you’re young, you only think about what you’re doing, you know. Some of the older men, like for example, after my wife passed away, I was going with a woman whose husband had been a lieutenant commander in the Navy on a minesweeper. Well, when he was on the minesweeper, he was a lieutenant, but he ended up being a lieutenant commander in the Navy and had his own sailboat.. But anyhow, he was older when he came in, and when he came out, he’d be home, and at a certain time every day, he’d go to the curtain and say, “They’re coming,” because every day at that time, the kamikazes would come. So it affected some people, and I think it was usually the older people who it really affected, But for me at least, I don’t know, maybe it did, and I don’t know it.

Mr. Grinslade:

We call it PTSD today. Back then, it was probably shell shock or thousand-yard stare, one of those things. You’re battle-worn is basically what it is.

Mr. Miller:

Yeah. So the only thing that really I felt affected me was that I couldn’t talk about it...and now you can’t stop me (chuckles).

Mr. Grinslade:

Well, you didn’t want to talk about the other stuff; I mean the guys getting their heads chopped off from propellers and things. That’s pretty nasty things, but your ship was never hit in a combat situation, even though you went through it.

Mr. Miller:

The Chenango was never hit, and the Tulagi was never hit.

Mr. Grinslade: Wow! So you were one lucky guy.

Mr. Miller: Very lucky. All around us, they were getting hit.

Mr. Grinslade: So with the African things and the southern France things, you ever got hit?

Mr. Miller: No. But a lot of ships around us got hit there, too, and a lot of them torpedoed from the German U-boats. We sank one U-boat; we thought it was German, but it was French. They were out to get us.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, yeah, you bet. Well, at that time, yeah. Well, it was actually, they were under German control; they would always do what the Germans wanted them to do. Okay, now let me go back; at sea, when they had funerals at sea, they would commit them to the deep.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah. They'd sew them in this canvas bag, and it would be on a plank, and we'd all be there, and they'd blow taps and whatever, and then they would tilt it over, and it would slide down.

Mr. Grinslade: So, the whole ship's complement was out there for that.

Mr. Miller: No, only those that were available. Remember, the ship had to run, and everybody had to be doing their job, but on every ship, there's two different groups, you know? Like one is working and the other is not. It's the same on a submarine, right?

Mr. Grinslade: So the off group would be out there with the funeral.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, a pretty solemn affair, I would guess.

Mr. Miller: Oh, yeah They had an American flag. You know, the board was on the bottom, the body was here, an American flag on top. But when he slid out, the American flag didn't go with it.

Mr. Grinslade: So all you saw was the canvas sliding out the bottom of it.

Mr. Miller: Yeah, They also, the garbage, you know, they had a big round canvas thing with a wire inside. There was certain things that had to go in there, and certain things had to be weighted, so they'd go

to the bottom, because they didn't want any information, you know, to float up to the top, to give the enemy any notice of what we--but something happened on the Chenango. Now this is not while I was on it, but a kamikaze dove on the ship. He dove in between two and he lived through it, and they had him up in the sick bay and they were working on him. He says, "Is this the Chenango?" because his job was to get the Chenango. They knew; they knew the name of the ship.

Mr. Grinslade: Oh, yeah. They had spies everywhere. Well, they could hear the communications going on, things like that, too.

Mr. Miller: Something else I didn't tell you; I don't know if you're interested.

Mr. Grinslade: Go ahead.

Mr. Miller: On the Raven, we were--

Mr. Grinslade: This was a minesweeper.

Mr. Miller: --yeah. We were having problems, and we were wondering why we had all these problems, and we found out there was an ad in the paper; I don't know if it was a Navy, probably a Navy paper. It said that they found the workers were sabotaging our ships when they were building them. They were putting nuts and bolts into the gearboxes. Here, our ship--we found all those nuts and bolts in there, but that was before we knew about what was going on. There was something else that--oh, our engine would break down many times. If we were lucky, only one broke down so we could go on the other, but there were times when they both broke down. The compass was backwards. So many things were wrong.

Mr. Grinslade: And this was Japanese saboteurs that were doing this?

Mr. Miller: No. No, it had to be--it was out of Norfolk. It had to be German.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay, so this was Norfolk.

Mr. Miller: Yeah. Or, it had to be some of our people who didn't want us to go to war. I don't know.

Mr. Grinslade: They had protestors back then as well.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Interesting.

Mr. Miller: There was something else that I wanted to tell you that I didn't. I don't remember what it was.

Mr. Grinslade: Think about it. Well, anything else you can think of?

Mr. Miller: I can show you a few pictures. Where's my--

Mr. Grinslade: We can look at that. Are we finished with the interview? Do you have anything else you want to tell us about what you did over there?

Mr. Miller: I don't remember. I know I wanted to tell you something that was important, and it's slipped my mind. It isn't what it used to be.

Mr. Grinslade: Well, if you think about it, and you remember it later, just jot it down or email it to our men, and we can attach it to the--

Mr. Miller: It might even be in that thing I gave you.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Well, I'm going to later read that into the report, so it all goes in there, plus we'll attach it so if somebody wants to come up and hear your story, we'll say we have these things also. Would you like to read those as well? We can do that.

Mr. Miller: Okay.

Mr. Grinslade: So, are we all finished here then?

Mr. Miller: I think so.

Mr. Grinslade: Okay. Well, it's been a pleasure and an honor to talk to you about this, and I really appreciate your story and appreciate your service. So thank you very much, and we hope you live a long, healthy life.

Mr. Miller: Thank you. I'm surprised I lived this long. First of all, I'm surprised I lived through the war. And then I always wondered, why me came home and they didn't. In fact, I tell everybody, I wear these not for me; I wear it for all those that couldn't.

Mr. Grinslade: Sure. You bet.

Mr. Miller: Yeah.

Mr. Grinslade: Well, a lot of people feel the same way, why they were picked, and the other guys weren't. It's just not your time.

Mr. Miller: Yep.

Mr. Grinslade: All right. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Miller: It was my pleasure.

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