

# **WORLD WAR II ORAL HISTORY SERIES**

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**Russell F. Milliken, Jr.**

Volume 16

Interviewed by

Donna Palkowsky, 27 June 2005

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Russell Milliken  
1944

## Interview Transcript

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Palkowsky	This is Donna Palkowsky. Today is the 27 <sup>th</sup> day of June, 2005. I am interviewing for the first time Russell Milliken and the interview is taking place at his home at 6024 Burnet County Road 211, Burnet, County, Texas. Okay, Russell, where were you born and when were you born and the name of your parents.
Milliken	I was born in Ira, Texas July 9, 1925. My father was Russell F. Milliken and my mother was Laura Edna Richardson.
Palkowsky	And where and when did you enlist in the service and what branch were you in?
Milliken	I don't know the exact date in September of 1943 is the month that I went into the service and I don't remember the exact date.
Palkowsky	That's okay. Now what branch of the service were you in?
Milliken	In the Army.
Palkowsky	And were you, did you enlist?
Milliken	I was drafted.
Palkowsky	Okay. And where were you when you were drafted? Was it in your hometown?
Milliken	I considered Westbrook, Texas my hometown but I was living in San Diego, California working out there at the time that I went in.
Palkowsky	Okay. Were you married at the time?
Milliken	No.
Palkowsky	Okay. Did you get married after you came out?
Milliken	I got married on April 20, 1944, after I was in the service.
Palkowsky	And what was her name?
Milliken	Nelda Jo York
Palkowsky	Okay. And where was she from?
Milliken	She was originally from Westbrook, Texas.

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Palkowsky	All right. Where were you on December 7, 1941?
Milliken	I was in San Diego, California.
Palkowsky	Okay. And who were you with? Were you with buddies?
Milliken	Well, I was kind of out there by myself. My mother died when I was 10 and my father when I was 14 and I just...I don't know what I was doing in California. I just ended up out there. Like to starved me to death.
Palkowsky	So you weren't living with anybody, you were just there.
Milliken	That's all.
Palkowsky	What was your reaction when you heard the news?
Milliken	You know at my age I was 16 years old and it didn't, it didn't bother me like it would now, you know, but back then we didn't take a whole lot serious.
Palkowsky	Okay. Tell me about your training. Where were you trained and how long and what type of training did you have?
Milliken Camp Walters, TX Ft Benning, GA Camp Shank, NY	The first two weeks I was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, took my basic training at Camp Walters at Mineral Wells, Texas. I went from there to Fort Benning, Georgia, went to parachute training school and I got out of parachute training school and was shipped overseas pretty soon after that. I don't remember. I went to a camp in Baltimore, Maryland just outside of Washington, D. C., can't remember the name of that camp and then we went Camp Shank, New York. I remember it and that's where my port of embarkation was.
Palkowsky	Could it be Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland?
Milliken	I don't know believe that it was Fort George G. Meade
Palkowsky	Okay. And where did you go when you were shipped out?
Milliken Queen Eliz to Glasgow,	We sailed on the Queen Elizabeth and landed in Glasgow, Scotland and they loaded us up onto a barge, a cattle barge, and we went to Liverpool, England. From there we went to our base camp at Nottingham, England. We had tents in Sherwood Forest over there.

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Scotland and Nottingham, England	
Palkowsky	So where was your first duty assignment?
Milliken Jumped at Normandy	Soon after I got overseas, of course it was D-Day, June 6 <sup>th</sup> , and we jumped in Normandy at that time, on D-Day. I guess that's about the first of anything I done other than training.
Palkowsky	Okay. So you jumped from your plane on D-Day in Normandy?
Milliken	Uh huh.
Palkowsky	And was there lots of fighting going on that day?
Milliken Action at Normandy	<p>Yeah. We jumped of course before daylight, during the night, sometime maybe 1:00 in the morning and there was a lot of flak and the 9<sup>th</sup> Troop Command flew us in.</p> <p>We used to blame them because those planes were getting tore up pretty bad and they was supposed to drop us at 90 mph at 400 feet and we told somebody we got 400 miles high and they scattered us all over the Cherbourg Peninsula.</p> <p>When I ended up we kind of regrouped, there wasn't but 9 of us on the ground where I was but you know we worked our way back around. We were just scattered all over and maybe it was for a good thing.</p> <p>We had Germans to tell us if we fought like soldiers we couldn't win but they didn't never know what we was gonna do.</p>
Palkowsky	Describe your clothing and your equipment and your weapons.
Milliken	<p>I was carrying a BAR which was a Browning Automatic Rifle and of course hand grenades and such as that.</p> <p>I don't know, we weighed quite a bit when we jumped with all the equipment. Of course everybody left their emergency parachutes in the plane because we wouldn't have time to use them anyway and nobody they didn't say nothing about it. They made us wear them in but we all took them off in the plane.</p>
Palkowsky	Okay. What was your meals like at that time? C-Rations or what?

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Milliken	Yeah. C-Rations and K-Rations when you could get them. We carried some of our meals in with us but normally you didn't have enough to last 'til you got contact with someone, you know, so you improvised. Lived off the land, I guess you might say.
Palkowsky	Well, now was there somebody that you were real close to at that time?
Milliken Friends	I had one real close friend, his name was Pete Moore. He was from a town in Ohio. It was amazing. We had 6 men in tents when we was in at base in Nottingham and there was 5 Moores and 1 Milliken in that tent.  Clyde Moore, he was from up in Kansas. He was a good boy. We lost him in Nineakin. He chickened out, wouldn't jump and they court martialed him.  But Pete Moore was probably, him and there was another boy from Mineral Wells, Texas, Orville B. McLaughlin, he was a good friend of mine. We buddied together a lot.
Palkowsky	Do you have a lot of special recollections during the time?
Milliken	No, back in those days most of the things that we done and things when we wasn't in the Army business I don't think needs to be recorded.
Palkowsky	Well, that's true. Most of you guys had to have fun.
Milliken	In our spare time we made all the pubs in England.
Palkowsky	Well, right, that's what young people do. So, you know I forgot to ask you if you have any siblings and their names and your children.
Milliken	I've got a daughter and two sons. My daughter's name is Ann Morrow and she lives back over on, well, the other side of Florence between there and Georgetown. And my oldest son lives right up here, Bruce Milliken and my youngest son, Joe Milliken lives in Odessa.
Palkowsky	Okay. Then did you have any siblings?
Milliken	No. [4 sisters and 4 brothers]
Palkowsky	Then you were an only child?
Milliken	Oh, me? I had, well, originally there was 8 of us. One of the youngest boys died when he was about 18 months old. We was living at Lamesa,

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	Texas, at the time and my 3 sisters older than I am, they're dead and one brother just younger than I am is dead and I've got one brother in Cahoma (???), Bill Milliken and I've got a sister that lives in Marble Falls, Vera Lee Hunter. The three of us is all that's left out of the 8.
Palkowsky	Okay.
Milliken	And I'm older than both of them.
Palkowsky	What were your immediate superiors like? Tell us a little bit about your superiors and your commanders and your subordinates.
Milliken	<p>I can't remember all of 'ems names. I know who the commanding officers were. You see we was just a combat battalion and we was an 508 individual battalion until going to combat, well we was always attached to the 82<sup>n<sup>d</sup></sup> Airborne.</p> <p>Of course General Gavin was the commanding officer of the 82<sup>nd</sup> but Colonel Mendez was the commanding officer of the 508. I knew who he was and everything but I had several different company commanders.</p> <p>We lost quite a few people, you know, at Normandy especially and later on too. I think the paratroopers were probably unique in the fact that officers were one of the men because we were usually isolated when you went into battle and I think they wanted to be one of the men because of, well, we just took care of each other.</p> <p>So, I think it was a little different than maybe regular infantry or something.</p>
Palkowsky	They had more concern for you. Okay. How frequently did you get letters and did you write letters?
Milliken	<p>See, I got married in April about two weeks before I sailed overseas and my wife wrote me nearly every day. I'd write her once or twice a week.</p> <p>I know the company commanders censored the letters, they thought I got more letters than anybody. So I had a lot of letters from my wife.</p>
Palkowsky	And did you get packages?
Milliken	No, once in a great while. Not very often then. It was kind of hard to do at that time, different than it is anymore.
Palkowsky	What were the concerns of your family and friends during the time you



WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	were gone?
Milliken	Well, I guess my wife was probably concerned. I don't know, going into the service when I did was the thing to do. People were different then than they are now. You know we had a cause and nobody questioned it. There wasn't no protesting and everybody accepted it.
Palkowsky	What did you miss the most during the time you were gone?
Milliken	I don't know, I guess just the freedom. I lived on a farm all my life and was used to you know having more freedom. Army life just wasn't my cup of tea.
Palkowsky	Did you have any contact with any POW's?
Milliken POWs	Well, yeah. Of course we had another thing there, normally when we went into combat our orders were to take no prisoners and that's bad.  And so but after we made contact with other troops and things of course we took prisoners and I know during the Battle of the Bulge we...I was on a -- supposed to have been a patrol for information, but a bunch of Germans give up and we didn't have much choice but to take them. Our company commander wasn't too happy about it but it's hard to kill a man when he's giving up. He's your enemy you know.
Palkowsky	Did any of your friends or any in your unit, were any of them taken POW?
Milliken	I think my company in Normandy especially.  We had more casualties in Normandy than we did anywhere else. I think we went in something a hundred fifty and come out back to base with about 15 people.
Palkowsky	That's too bad. Do you have any memorable moments or humorous incidents or you know during this time?
Milliken	Oh.
Palkowsky	Now you told us you had fun.
Milliken	Yeah, we had a lot of fun but you know it's hard to remember. Just going out with a bunch.  The English people then at that time they didn't understand us. The

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	<p>English people took their family down to what we call a beer joint and they call a pub and they set and drank one ale or something, sipped on it all night and played the pianos and sang, such like as that.</p> <p>They couldn't understand us, we wanted to drink 6 or 8 beers you know, then start a fight if we could find somebody to fight.</p>
Palkowsky	Those were fun times though, I mean to get away and go do that was fun, wasn't it?
Milliken Rockets over London	Oh yeah, it was a way of forgetting what was going on, just get away. I know I made the mistake, I had a weekend pass and went up to London and I wanted to see, you know, London just for the sake of seeing it and at the time the Germans were sending them B-1's and B-2's over and those rockets and I didn't stay long in London. I didn't like that at all.
Palkowsky	Did you see any USO shows. You know they had so many of those.
Milliken	We seen one or two. I know Sonia Henny coming over because she witnessed one of our practice jumps in France and that show, well, her visit just to see somebody like that.
Palkowsky	Well, that's great. Did you tell us what the engagements, the battles that you were in, the actual battles?
Milliken Imaken, Holland	<p>Well, we were of course in September of '44 we jumped in Imaken Holland at that time and our objective was to clear a landing strip for helicopters and keep that bridge over the Wael River there.</p> <p>I told somebody one time I said, "We were good. We took that bridge three different times". But anyway. There was one of the lucky times in my life, in the life of 508 especially.</p> <p>We were scheduled to jump at Auham and they changed it at kind of the last day but we was at orientation at the airport and the British jumped up there and jumped in on them. I don't remember how many but a multitude of SS troopers and they were wiped out completely. We jumped on a Sunday afternoon, I think it was sometime afternoon about 1:30 or something like that, clear skies, pretty day and didn't have any contact hardly any at all that day just periodically and the most thing I remember about in Holland was the people.</p> <p>You could have a street battle and no sooner was it over and they was out mopping the blood up off the sidewalks and things, cleaning up. They were clean people.</p>

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Palkowsky	That was hard, wasn't it, watching that?
Milliken	Yeah.
Palkowsky	During that time what was your most difficult period of the whole thing.
Milliken	Oh, I don't know. I've told people I was raised in church but after my mother and daddy died I didn't go for a long time. Of course at my age then I didn't even know you could die, you know. That was just something somebody else done and probably my spiritual life, whatever, the biggest concerns I had was getting myself.
Palkowsky	Tell me a little bit about who raised you after your parents died.
Milliken	On our own.
Palkowsky	All of you kids were on your own?
Milliken	Well, my two younger brothers, my older sister was married and the two younger brothers went and lived with her and my youngest sister just younger than I am she went and lived with an aunt up in Pampa. And my next to the oldest sister got married soon after Daddy [died].  Me and the three of us lived there, we raised chickens and cows and hogs and we made a living, barely, but all three of us trying to go to school.  We lived right by the school house but anyway when the next older sister married and my other sister. I'd been out in San Diego about a year and she came out there so we just kind of on our own.
Palkowsky	When you were in the service, were you ever injured or anything, hospitalized for any reason?
Milliken Feet frozen at Battle of the Bulge	Well, I wasn't injured in the Battle of the Bulge, but got my feet froze and one of the great miracles in the world, we'd been up on line for about 30 days and they pulled us back and made us pull off our boots and I didn't even recognize my feet they was just as black as they could be. And I was shipped back with a bunch of us, shipped back to _____ (???), Belgium and was laying in the hospital there.  This doctor and this aide was coming down through this aisle and all the soldiers had their feet out there where he could look at them, you know, and he would tell them which take off a foot or so many toes or what.

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	<p>Well, he got to me and I kept a looking at him and I said, "I know you, don't I"?</p> <p>He said, "No, you don't know me, soldier."</p> <p>I said, "Ain't you from Colorado City"?</p> <p>He looked at me and said, "Yeah".</p> <p>I said, "Well, you're one of the Rhodes brothers". There was a Dr. Bill Rhodes and Dr. Oscar Rhodes. He was Dr. Oscar Rhodes that was a doctor there at Colorado City.</p> <p>He sat down there and we talked a little bit and I said, "Doc, I don't want to lose them two".</p> <p>He said, "Well, we'll look at them tomorrow".</p> <p>Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow, you know. This went on for about a week or 10 days and he finally said, "I believe I'll ship you down to Brussels" and he said, "You're going to be alright now".</p> <p>And, which I did. I got alright. I never seen him again until he belonged to the same church I did there at Colorado City when we lived there at Colorado City and we was having a feed one night and I happened to be setting next to him and we got to talking about that and he said, "Oh, we could have saved the Government a lot of money if we'd went ahead and took them feet off".</p> <p>But, I kind of look back on that kind one of the miracles. How in the world do you run across somebody from a little old town like Colorado City, you know.</p>
Palkowsky	So what did they do for your feet?
Milliken	<p>Well, they didn't do a whole lot for them. Just pads, cold and hot, and what they was doing it for was gangrene.</p> <p>That's what happens to you. So, actually as far as hurting they didn't hurt, you know. Well, even today I don't have as much feeling in my feet as they used to have. I still got all my toes.</p>
Palkowsky	How did you hear about the war being over?
Milliken	Well, we was stationed just outside of France, Paris, France at a little

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	place called Susan. You could nearly hear the shouts. We was scheduled to start going on in to Germany and that stopped that and so that's when I heard about it.
Palkowsky	What was your feeling?
Milliken	I guess happy, I don't know.
Palkowsky	Were you aware of the atomic bomb?
Milliken	No, I don't believe. I don't think I'd ever heard of it. I don't think we had it at that time.
Palkowsky	Did you have any special memories around the end of the war?
Milliken  French friends with everybody  Gen. Eisenhower's honor guard	Well, not... other than celebrating. You see the French people were, I guess you shouldn't say things like this but the French people were friends to whoever was there. When the Germans was there they were friends with the Germans and when we liberated them they was friends of ours. So, not that they were bad people but that's just the way they were.  Of course I don't know what the understanding was in Paris. I understand that the United States or Britain or any allied countries ever bombed Paris or Germans didn't bomb Paris. It was exempt from the war. I don't know what it was but there was a lot of celebrations there. We'd go over there and marching and so on but we didn't take any of it.  Well, the war hadn't been over hardly at all and General Eisenhower selected us as his honor guard in Frankfurt. We served as his honor guard in Frankfurt.
Palkowsky	That's a wonderful memory.
Milliken	I was a Staff Sergeant at that time and we got to stand guard at his door and got to see all of the other generals and all the coming and going you know. You got to see a lot of dignitaries that way.
Palkowsky	Did you see any dignitaries, countries that were friends of the United States?
Milliken	Oh, yeah. I don't remember exactly. I know I was wanting to go home. Some of us was declared essential, you know, to stay. I don't know why I was essential but anyway.  The amazing thing, I look for those pictures when my brother-in-law

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	<p>comes visit me. He ended up over there, he come to visit me in Frankfurt and we took a lot of pictures and the only building left standing in Frankfurt was I.G. Farben building. That's where General Eisenhower's headquarters was and that was, everything else was just rubble.</p> <p>I'm reading and hearing stuff over television today about what they're doing in other countries, terrorists and this, but see, we made surprise raids at nights most of the time. Going into people's houses and confiscating any guns or any kind of weapons, swords, cameras, everything, I mean completely disarmed the people.</p> <p>But you see they had people that was die hard Nazi's, I guess, and you know an old farmer could kill you just as quick with a pitch fork as he could with a gun. So, that's what we were up against for a time.</p> <p>Pretty soon everything kind of leveled out and the German people had been told so long and so loud that they were superior to everybody else that I think they kind of believed it for awhile.</p>
Palkowsky	Were you anywhere close to combat to the concentration camps were?
Milliken	No, I went up to Berlin but I never saw a concentration camp or any of those. About all I know is what everybody else heard or read.
Palkowsky	Well, describe your return home and the reactions of your family.
Milliken	<p>Well, the first thing that bothered me when I came home, I thought I was going to get to come home and we landed in New York and they held us over two weeks for the Victory Day parade up there and I wasn't a very happy soldier at that time. I wanted to come home and so they held us there for 2 weeks and we made that Victory Day parade and they loaded us on a train, a slow train from New York. It took 3 days from New York to Camp Fannin, Tyler, Texas.</p> <p>I got down there and they told us if we would re-enlist we could go home that day. Otherwise we'd probably be there 3 days. I told them you kept me this long I'll just wait and go when we got out. We called them "ruptured duck" when you was discharged. There wasn't a bus out to Dallas until that afternoon so two more guys and me got a taxi to Dallas where I could get a bus to get home. So, I was anxious to get home.</p>
Palkowsky	What the reaction of your family and friends?
Milliken	I guess I know my wife was glad to see me because we only had a week before I was shipped out after we were married. But anyway I think

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	everybody was happy. I'm surprised my brothers and sisters were happy. We fought like cats and dogs most of the time but they were all happy that I got home.
Palkowsky	Were there any surprises when you got home that you didn't expect?
Milliken	I don't think so.
Palkowsky	Any changes that had taken place?
Milliken	No.
Palkowsky	Well, is there anything else you'd like to tell us? You've got a chance here to tell us a little bit about your life. What did you do when you came home as an occupation. Did you go back to farming?
Milliken Big Springs, TX	<p>The first thing I done I bought a service station in Big Springs, Texas. Me and my wife, we rented a little apartment over there and I had a good trade.</p> <p>I wanted Halliburton's trade and wanted Duncan Drilling Company's trade and they wanted me to be open at 6 o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock at night and I had the kind of business that I nearly had to be there. Back in them days the service station your regular customers wanted you to wait on them they didn't want a hired hand to wait on them.</p> <p>But anyway we done that until I decided to go back to the farm and I sold out and we went back to Westbrook. Well, on the same farm my wife was raised on and we lived there a couple three years and then I bought a farm down at Colorado City on the GI Bill and then I decided I wasn't satisfied trying to make a living.</p> <p>My daughter had been born and I went to work for Magnolia. Back in those days I farmed on the side and I finally moved to Snyder and we lived up there about 5 years and then moved to Midland. My daddy-in-law and mother-in-law give us a farm up there and I worked for Mobil Oil Company for 32 years and farmed.</p>
Palkowsky	You've had your share of work.
Milliken	Well, we joke one time. My wife was good humored. She had to be to put up with me but she said something about buying the kids some shoes, about money, and we had money problems. Everybody had money problems, I guess, and I said, "Well, I guess I can get another job".

WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

	<p>She said, "I don't know when".</p> <p>I said, "Well, I'm not doing nothing between 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the morning but sleeping".</p> <p>She used to laugh about that. But, I was. I was running custom combine on the side and I had two combines and two grain trucks running, working for oil company and farming.</p>
Palkowsky	That's a hard life.
Milliken	I didn't know nothing but work. I raised up pretty dumb. I thought you had to work for a living. You know, I thought that was the only way you could get money.
Palkowsky	Is there anything you'd like to tell us?
<p>Milliken</p> <p>Buddy killed in foxhole at Battle of the Bulge</p>	<p>I don't know of anything that I could add. Of course you know details of anything.</p> <p>I think about the mysteries of life. I know in the Battle of the Bulge after we opened up the gap and left, the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry we was supposed to hold it open and we made what they called a strategic withdrawal. I called it a retreat and we went back about 10 miles and set up camp and we all dug deep fox holes.</p> <p>Me and a boy named Donahue was in the same foxhole and I know shells were bursting around but didn't think nothing about it. Woke up the next morning and he was dead, shrapnel had hit in a tree and went right through his heart and I didn't even know it all night, you know.</p> <p>Just another case the Lord said two men in the field; he'd take one and leave the other one. And I often wondered what he left me for.</p>
Palkowsky	Couldn't understand.
Milliken	<p>[Looking at scrapbook.]</p> <p>My wife put all that together and I used to know where I was in that but I've forgot.</p> <p>I think that was my pay schedule.</p>
Palkowsky	We're going to take some pictures. Is that okay?



WWII Oral History Interview  
Russell Milliken

Milliken	<p>Yeah.</p> <p>That was a training manual what we done in Fort Benning. We had five weeks of training and we'd jump and then you'd have two more jumps after that down there. I started keeping a record but looks like I quit. I don't know where it is.</p> <p>I think all that's in there is old Stars and Stripes in there.</p> <p>I got a couple of Belgian citations, one on one shoulder and the French Croix de Guerre.</p> <p>That's wings for Paratroops.</p> <p>And of course this is for whatever theatre you was working in.</p> <p>Until I dug some of this out I didn't even know what some of it was.</p> <p>My daddy was veteran of WW I, we was living at Lamesa when I was a kid and had a corn field and the crows was trying to eat it up and he made a scare crow and used his uniform on it and I remember all us kids begging him not to and Mama crying. He's kinda like I am he had no use for it anymore.</p>
Palkowsky	Taking pictures, etc....and lots of words not understandable.
	End of tape