

Transcription: Ralph Miller

I had that all cued up. I had one of our technical people help me. So it looks like it's recording -

Ralph Miller: Yes, and for your information, my grandson has a, a video camera tuned on me.

Oh, that's great. That'll make it even better.

Ralph Miller: Yeah, if mine comes out, I'll be able to furnish you a copy.

Yes sir. And so well let me go ahead and start off with the opening statement that we record for posterity.

Ralph Miller: All right.

Today is Thursday, October 25th, 2007, and my name is James Crabtree, and I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Miller from Texarkana, Texas.. This interview is being taken place by phone at the uh, I'm at the General Land Office headquarters at 1700 North Congress Avenue in Austin, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program and sir, do we have your oral permission, uh, for us to interview you as part of this program?

Ralph Miller: Oh yes, go right ahead.

Yes sir, great. All right, well there's a few basic uh, now this is your interview and you can talk about whatever you wish and for as long as you want. It's an honor for us to, to speak to you, but some of the basic things we want to do since we're recording this for history and posterity is to get a basic biographical sketch of your background before we go into your war experience.

Ralph Miller: All right.

Sir, could you tell us when you were born and where you were born?

Ralph Miller: Yes, I'll be really on narrative here. I am Ralph Warren Miller. I don't use my middle name, but I do use initial now and then. I was born in Kokomo, Indiana, November 26th, 1919, and with only those few days left in that 1919 era before the, the second millennium, I was in my first decade by the time I was uh, five weeks old.

Yes sir, and so what were your, what were your parents' names and were they also Hoosiers?

Ralph Miller: My father, Ernest Michael Miller. My mother, Susie B. Keeler Miller.

Yes sir. And uh, there's a whole list of questions here, but that's the basic gist. And I understand you're in Texarkana now. Were you there when you joined the Army Air Corps?

Ralph Miller: No, I wasn't. I enlisted in the Air Corps in Indiana where I grew up on the farm in Fulton County, Rochester, Indiana.

Yes sir. And when was it that you enlisted? Was it before or after Pearl Harbor?

Ralph Miller: It was long before – October the 30th, 1940.

Yes sir.

Ralph Miller: That was just after I'd accompanied my older brother to go register for the draft. And it influenced me. I said boy, I'm, I'm not gonna wait to be old enough to register for the draft and then be drafted, and with an interested in flying, why I enlisted in the Air Corps.

OK great. And uh, what age were you when you, I guess you'd already graduated high school, but were you in college or had you –

Ralph Miller: No, I had graduated high school of course 1937, Rochester High School, and uh, I was 20 years old when I enlisted, and those couple of years in between I'd worked in a farm mill, and so I had the, sort of a humorous thing happened when they, when on enlistment they listed my civilian occupation as miller, and I was known for a while as Double Miller.

Yes sir. Well how did you come to choose the Army Air Corps out of all the different branches?

Ralph Miller: Well, my interest in flying went all the way back to I was 7 I think when Lindbergh flew the North Atlantic and became my hero and I wanted to fly and, and uh, read and saved everything I could on it, would run outside to when I heard an airplane just to see it go past, and where we lived happened to be on a, on a sort of a line to Chicago, and so we did, I did see lots of old bi-wing airplanes, 6 gear, wire stretch, and Indiana had an air, an air uh, caravan every year, where a group of civilian pilots would uh, start in the northern end of the state around South Bend and then work their way down the state to the Ohio River, and they happened to stop in Rochester at our airport grass strip, and uh, I was offered a ride in a home built airplane for a dollar, and so I didn't waste my dollar, but I was 14 and, and uh, I was hooked. I wanted to fly after that.

That's great. What did your parents in particular, what did your mother think about you wanting to fly airplanes?

Ralph Miller: Oh, my mother tried to give me a little advice, uh, and of course, when I enlisted it was not into the flying program because I enlisted, it was at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, and incidentally I saw on the day I enlisted, I saw my first airplane crash where an old uh, C – oh, I think, I don't know exactly, it was a DC-2 I think. It was before the DC-3, but it was coming in from Wright Patterson Field over in, in Ohio to uh, and was winding up the strip at Fort Benjamin Harrison, and we, 10 or 15 of us outside watchin' that thing, he geared down coming in and some of the fellas were leaning on tall poles that supported a high tension line across the end of the runway, and we all said "pull up, pull up, pull up" and we forecast it and watched it and he snagged that, that heavy duty cable with his landing gear and __ picked to the ground and so that was our introduction to, to the Air Corps.

Did that sort of give you any doubts about -

Ralph Miller: No, no, no, no, no, no, that, that was just, just sort of, it was really something to remember introduction to the Air Corps by, but then my recruit drill and training was up in Maxford Field down in Montgomery, Alabama, and I had my first train ride down from Indiana to uh, to Alabama, and we had lots of tests in those days, and they, the testers tried to talk me

into going into photographic photography school or even to weather school both out in Denver, Colorado, and I said no, I wanted to get into flying, and well, you can't get into flying, you know, you have to have a college degree, and I didn't have. So uh, I wound up uh, going to mechanic school, uh, at Chenoot Field in Rantou, Illinois, and six months of uh, that, I did learn a lot about airplanes and I, I enjoyed it, but it wasn't flying. And so on completion of, of that schooling, uh, I must've done well because the colonel base commander called me in and said Miller, he said you know, we're building two more schools like this one, one in Shepherd Field, Texas, and the other one down in Buloxi, Mississippi, and he said they're gonna uh, need instructors and you'd be a good instructor, and you could uh, go have your choice, go to either one. You'd be cadre, you'd be promoted, and you could sit out the war. And I said what war? Because it was about June of 1941. And so he said, well you can't go to flying school and make an application from as a, as a student here. He said you have to be on a permanent base to make application, so I said well, then I'll decline offer of being an instructor in a school that's being built, and look for a permanent base, and I was assigned to Panama Canal Zone and went down there for nine months where I could at a permanent base in the 16th Pursuit Group, headquarter squadron, I put in three applications – one to go to flight training, one to go to OCS and one to go to as a direct appointment to West Point – and nine months later in June of 1941, uh, no – I went down there, I enlisted in '40, I went to Panama in '41 in June and nine months later, my did have that application for flight training approved and I came back to the states.

Yes sir. How did you get the notification? Was it a letter that they sent to you down at Panama? Or did your commanding officer inform you? How did you learn that you had been selected?

Ralph Miller: Uh, one morning, uh, I was working in the headquarters – in fact, I did some cryptography in mid-quarters, and uh, someone said Miller, you're goin' back to the states, and that's how I heard about it. And then uh, the orderly room, clerk in the orderly room hunted me up and said, you've got to clear the base. And I said what's that mean? He said, well you have to check out with quartermaster and supply and, and hospital, and PX, and, and get them to initial this form which they gave me, and, and so I was all over the base and said, and be down to the flight line at uh, one o'clock, and I got that all done in a few hours and I was at the flight line with all my belongings in a barrack's bag, and, and then on a DC-2, another one that like the one that I saw crash in Indianapolis, and we came back to the states.

Yes sir. So when you got back, did uh, did they immediately assign you to your training?

Ralph Miller: Yes. Yeah, the orderly that, that sent me back was signed by General Arnold, uh, Commander of the Air Force.

Yes sir.

Ralph Miller: And of course when I enlisted in the Corps, uh, there were only 30,000 officers and men in the entire Air Corps, and in 1941 also, President Roosevelt said we're gonna build 50,000 airplanes, and that had caught my attention, and aided in my enlistment and, and being at a permanent base in Panama, I could make the application and it was approved in June of '42, so here I came.

When that was approved, sir, were you still considered enlisted?

Ralph Miller: Oh yeah, I was enlisted. In fact, the application was uh, to go to flight training in the enlisted pilot training program. That's the old flying sergeant program.

Yes sir. And were did most of your training take place?

Ralph Miller: All of it in Texas. When uh, we came back to the states we, from Panama we stopped uh, I think, delivered some mail in Costa Rica, and got some gasoline in Guatemala, and then overflew Mexico and landed at Brownsville, and they said you clear customs, and I said what's that amount to? They said you got to show all your belongings. So I went through my barracks bag out on the tarmac under the wing of an airplane and they said, sack it back up. And we came to San Antonio to Kelly Field. And they, they knew we were coming because they'd uh, got together about 160 I think enlisted from the, the uh, was the 6th Air Force I think, the Caribbean Air Defense Command, the Caribbean area, and they brought people from Panama and Puerto Rico and, and bases down in uh, in the Caribbean Sea, back and made a class out of it, and I was Class 43B. And uh, 43B indicated your graduation time if you finished.

Now sir, was that your first time to Texas?

Ralph Miller: That was my introduction to Texas.

And what was your impression of I guess first Brownsville and then San Antonio?

Ralph Miller: Uh, I remember it very well. I've been back several times, but uh, but then it was purely military. I think there were four or five air fields around there. I remember Alamo Field and Randolph Field and Kelly Field, and all but at Kelly Field, we had six weeks of pre-flight, uh, schooling – intense, very intense schooling. I didn't know you could learn so much in such a short time, but we studied, uh, had classes in uh, theory of flight and meteorology and navigation and I learned the Morse Code and could, could transmit and, oh I don't know, lots of other things, and from there we went to Cuero, Texas, for primary training where I finally soloed and got into the air. But Cuero was, that was a civilian school, uh, not an, not an Army base. It was Brate and Klein Service, I think, where the Air Corps, well about that time, this was humorous to me, but after Mr. Roosevelt said we'll build 50,000 airplanes this year, and then did, that the Air Corps realized that hey, we don't have but, we don't have enough people to fly 50,000 planes, and I think that's how I got into flight training.

Yes sir. And when you were in Cuero, you said it was a civilian run facility. Did they have barracks for you to live in?

Ralph Miller: Yes, we lived in barracks, uh, nice barracks. And uh, our instructor, or my instructor had four students. They were all, uh, three of us were enlisted and one second lieutenant I recall that had come from the Caribbean area, but he'd been in the field artillery, and uh, so we got along very well. And got 60 hours in a PT-19, and it doesn't seem long ago, but soloing is, is really something.

Yes sir. And when you were there, did you have any British pilots that were training with you?

Ralph Miller: No, no. I think all those Brits were up around Terrell.

OK, yes sir. And what was it like uh, you mentioned solo, soloing, what was it like the first time you, you soloed?

Ralph Miller: Oh, very exciting, very, very exciting. Uh, I had 8 hours with my instructor, and I had, and of course, he, he was sitting back there following through, and in the beginning, uh, with his feet on rudders and his hands on the stick control, and he knew the territory and had experience and I just loved him and we got along fine, and, and uh, although we were told we had an option now if you have any personality clashes or and this the whole class heard, uh, if you don't feel you're not getting along well with your instructor, you can ask for a transfer. Well, I never asked. I just said, boy, here I am and, and let's get at it. So it was, it was great. I liked primary.

Yes sir. Was there much attrition, uh, amongst the, the flight uh, people going through the flight program at that point?

Ralph Miller: Oh yes, yes, yes. The uh, the uh, washout rate was tremendous and uh, I think 180 of us started as aviation students, and 60 of us graduated, so I, I have a humorous story I'll tell you about primary though. I had only a couple of hours solo and I was, my instructor one day said, well take this airplane and go down south of town or somewhere and get on that long straight road and do S turns, which consists of just gradual turns, S-ing up that long, straight road, and he told me and go at 600-700 feet and then do S turns, and he said you get that coordination, that balance, that feeling of turning and everything, and that was my assignment solo for the day. Well, I went down the road so far and got confused. I really was lost in Texas although I know I was no more than 30 or 40 miles from Cuero, but uh, I found the railroad and I remembered the navigational advice, you find a railroad, follow the railroad. It comes to a town somewhere. So I followed that railroad, and in the distance I saw a small town, and came up on it and there was a water tank and, and the names of towns on water tanks, that still exists, so I came up on that tank and I started reading, and I saw a great big "M", and then it seemed like a long time before I saw M-E, and then M-E-X, and I about panicked. I thought gosh, I'm in Mexico. I'm really in bad shape. And then an "I" confirmed it, and then the "A" and it was the town of Mexia, and so it was easy to do a 180, turn around, and by that railroad back, back to Cuero. That was, that was my lost experience.

Well I'm glad you didn't invade Mexico.

Ralph Miller: It seemed like forever to circle that tank enough to read those 10-foot high letters.

Yes sir. Sir, how long did you spend in Cuero?

Ralph Miller: We were in primary and basic six weeks. We had had those six weeks in pre-flight at Kelly Field, and then we had six weeks at Cuero, and I had 60 hours and that, and then I had a ride with an army check pilot, and then it was on to basic.

And were was basic?

Ralph Miller: Basic at Brady, Texas, another civilian school, but you changed airplanes. So we flew PT-, no, BT-13's, uh, it had a 450-horsepower engine I know, and, and uh, they shook a lot. In fact we called 'em Volti-vibrators because they were built by the Volti company, and Volti vibrator, where we got another 60 hours now, but, but uh, I had another fine, fine instructor, Mr. B.D. Howell. I remember him well. And we used to hangar talk sometime in, in rainy days or something, and he'd flown with Wiley Post out in the oil fields of Oklahoma.

Wow, that's amazing.

Ralph Miller: And he, he uh, had patience enough to show me everything he said he knew about the BT-13 in 60 hours in basic, and then it's on to advanced.

What was your impression, sir, of Brady while you were there?

Ralph Miller: Oh, I loved the town. Nice, nice little, nice little town. Of course all of this in Texas was new to me, so I uh, I just enjoyed it, even the bus rides out to those, out to those bases. From San Antonio, they hauled us to Cuero on chartered buses and, and uh, bused us also from Cuero to Brady, and uh, for basic, and but we rode a train I recall from Brady to Waco for advanced, after that 60 hours.

And how long, sir, did you spend at Waco?

Ralph Miller: At Waco, another six weeks. Another six weeks, but we had new airplanes now. We had AT-9's and AT-10's which were twin engine, and it, it has always amazed me that no farm boy in Indiana you know would get into a twin engine aircraft, but uh, but I loved it. I ate it up. I had a, and it was an Army run. We had Army Air Corps instructors there. I had Lieutenant Blain, and again, each of these instructors in all the phases were given four, four uh, students, and uh, we went to school with many of those classes, too, there were aviation cadets, uh, in the same classes and certainly down at pre-flight, and, and we, we enlisted men just, we just seemed to outshine the aviation cadets because we'd all had some prior service and at least we knew something of the military and uh, a little bit, some of us had worked on airplane engines and, and done other things, so uh, I think that the class of 43-B, the aviation students of it, uh, outshone the aviation cadets of the same class.

Now when you were at Waco, was Fort Hood being constructed at that time?

Ralph Miller: The what?

Was Fort Hood, uh, being constructed down in Killeen? I don't know if you -

Ralph Miller: Oh, I'm sure it was. Uh, that would've been uh, oh, let's see, about uh, I was at Waco about December of '42 to February the 16th of '43 when we graduated, but here in four, six-week courses, 24 weeks in six months, after I'd been to, in Panama as an enlisted man, it was six months later I'm rated pilot.

Yes sir, and what was that like when you got your wings?

Ralph Miller: Oh, fantastic, fantastic. I uh, I was excited as I am right now thinking about it.

That's great.

Ralph Miller: And then uh, assign, uh, well they passed out a form of course, but grad-, in graduation, they what would you like to do, you know? Transport or fighter, bomber, or whatever, well uh, I never considered myself very good at aerobatics, so I found security in the twin engine and I, I loved and so I elected uh, a bomber, the bomber flying. I actually at first I asked for the transport, but I didn't, I was sent to the bomber training that, and went to Aven Park Bombing Range down in Florida.

Yes sir. How much, uh, after you got your wings in Waco, how much time did you have before you had to report on to Florida?

Ralph Miller: I think they gave me a 10-day delay enroute, and so I was able, I went back to Indiana and then rode a train down to Florida, and Aven Park's out in central Florida and I remember going into Tampa station and riding a bus out through the orange groves to Aven Park, where I first, saw my first B-26.

Yes sir. What was uh, what was that day like, being able – did you know at that time that was the uh, plane, the bomber -

Ralph Miller: Yeah, we, we knew Aven Park was a B-26 training. In fact, the 336 Bomb Group was uh, an RTU training unit, and that's where I wound up. RTU meant they trained crews intact. They uh, put uh, six men together – a pilot, copilot, bombardier, engineer, radio operator and tail gunner, and trained as a crew, and upon completion of training, they would go up to a depot somewhere – Savanna or somewhere – pick up an airplane and fly it to the combat zone in Europe.

Yes sir.

Ralph Miller: There were two routes then, the northern route and the southern route, and uh, most, most of my, most of the people I know who went to England flew southern route, although some went the northern route.

So just to go back a little bit, before the, before you entered all the flight training, uh, where, I know this is a question you probably heard before, but where were you on December 7th, and, and what were your -

Ralph Miller: December 7th, I was in the Panama Canal Zone and, oh a state of emergency almost declared down there. We were operating under blackout and uh -

How did you learn of the attacks?

Ralph Miller: Someone, someone radio, uh, heard it that way and passed the word around, uh, and of course, it was a high state of tension down there because it's uh, our rationale I think was if the Japanese can get to Hawaii, they'll come and take the Panama Canal, and so, boy everyone was on alert and uh, things got kind of tough after that. And of course, that was the same time, too, that the, the U-boat was operating off of, off this country's east coast and in the Atlantic, so it, it was exciting.

Were there any, when you were down there, were there any reports uh, of U-boats, did you see any or did any of the guys in your unit ever observe any of the U-boats that might've been in that area?

Ralph Miller: No, no, uh, no I wasn't, but I had friends who uh, in flight training, who came from Puerto Rico and they were, in Puerto Rico they were on sub patrol duty a lot, and there was quite a, well, people just knew about it. But of course, rumors run ripe in a place like, like Panama, when someone announces that Pearl Harbor was attacked and, and uh, you may be next, you know. Oh, we were issued gas masks and, and well, got ready for whatever happened.

Sure. And I know uh, I was gonna go back now with the flight training, did you have through the progression that you were in, did you have other uh, friends of yours that went through the training, uh, with you the whole way? Or was it always in every class a new group of guys that you didn't know?

Ralph Miller: No, there were, there were a few of us, but uh, you didn't, you didn't do much bonding, didn't have much time to do anything but study because in flight training, if you uh, were out along the line and in an airplane to get an hour or so a day, you know, to get to that 60 hours and take a check ride with the Army check pilot, uh, we had all sorts of ground school, and stayed busy and, and you knew them but you didn't get too close to them because they may be one of the next one to leave, you know, and you never met anyone from, from home. The only thing you had in common was just being there sharing the same experience. But there were, I remember there were sure lots of Texans.

Oh really?

Ralph Miller: Yeah, and, and another oddity that happened, two in my class who did graduate were from Texarkana. That's true.

Sir and how, is that how you ultimately ended up in Texarkana?

Ralph Miller: No, that'd be another long story of how I, how I wound up, because we came to, we came here from Florida, Betty and I lived in Florida, but I'd gone back to Indiana, and uh, met Betty. She was a cadet nurse, and -

Oh wow, and you said you met her while you were stationed in Florida during training?

Ralph Miller: No, no, uh, I met her in, in the hospital in Indianapolis. She was the nurse and me the patient.

Really and how did that come about? What were you in the hospital for?

Ralph Miller: Well, at the end of my WWII days and uh, I had been out in the tail end, I'd been stationed out in Midland in 1946. Uh, I was flying old World War airplanes on out to the graveyards in Arizona and California and, and doing everything. I met an FAA examiner, and through him, I obtained a commercial pilot's license and I was really considering and really into it, go fly for the airlines, fly for United, and so I stayed in the Reserve, separated from the Air Corps, went home and was waiting on September the 1st to report in Chicago to United and contacted polio miolitus in August. So that's why I was in the hospital.

Yes sir, and that's how you met your wife.

Ralph Miller: Yeah, I met, she was a student nurse in Munsey, Indiana, Ball Memorial Hospital, and they didn't have a true pediatric section, and they sent them down to the IU Med Center where I was, and because polio was considered a childhood disease, why I was in the, in the area that she was coming down to learn about and that's how we met.

Yes sir. That's an amazing story that from something as bad as what you were faced with that you would meet her.

Ralph Miller: Well, you know, that's another, that was a love story. That was just happened. In fact last uh, let's see, 26th of September, we just had our 60th anniversary.

Congratulations, that's great. And you said sir that she was in the, she was a nurse in the military?

Ralph Miller: Well, she was a cadet nurse in training, and did graduate and is an RN, but uh, the war ended and the, the nurses in training, the cadet nurses sort of disbanded. They fulfilled their obligation to the, to the government by working six months either in public health or in Indian reservation, and she did hers in public health in Indiana, and we were married there.

Well sir, now jumping back to Florida, I know you said that you got there and you knew you were gonna fly the B-26, can you tell me kind of at that time what you knew about the B-26 and kind of your emotions, your feelings about going into the bomber training?

Ralph Miller: Well when I got to Aven Park, I knew it was a B-26 base, but getting there, it was awe inspiring to, to see them, to hear them, to be around them, and what I learned about it, I did it like I was back in AM school or any school. I had learned everything about it, and my first, and the being, being oh yes, when we graduated uh, as enlisted men, we were made flight officers. But not second lieutenants, uh, and so the flight officer uh, was considered it seemed to me, it was considered sort of third lieutenants. So when crews were put together for training down at Aven Park, it was just natural that the pilot was going to be the lieutenant and the, we flight officers were, were gonna be copilots. The uh, the, it took a while for people to realize that we were, we were equal to or better than they as trainee pilots. In fact, if you have time, I'll tell you a very interesting story of how I got into the left seat of a B-26.

Well we've got plenty of time, and we want to record all these good memories.

Ralph Miller: This happened one day and I was assigned copilot and my lieutenant pilot were up with an instructor pilot who flew with us quite often. My pilot would be in the left seat and the instructor pilot in right seat, and me, I'd just stand between the two seats and, and watch this whole operation. Anyway, we were out over the Gulf of Mexico off Fort Myers, and we'd flown together probably six or eight hours in the past, in this phase of training, and my, the instructor pilot told the pilot, said uh, well tune in Fort Myers radio and find the north-south leg and bracket the beam, locate it, bracket it, and fly it to, to Aconis Islands, which is a, the radio in those days, radio range stations emitted beams in the form of a cross, sometimes angled, but uh, always in, and this pilot that I was assigned to, he wandered all over the sky and exasperated the instructor so much, that the instructor said get out of there, looked back, saw me, said can you find the beam and fly it? And all the time that that fellow in the left seat had been having trouble, I had been looking at the radio facilities chart which was spread out on the console between the seats, and I knew where Fort Myers was and I knew where land was, and I knew and I knew how to do, so I slipped in the left seat, tuned into Fort Myers frequency, located the beam, identified as what quadrant I was in. I was at 4, found the beam, bracketed it, flew it to Fort Myers radio station and above the radio station. In those days it was a void, a no, called the cone of silence, but I hit that cone of silence, and that instructor pilot said well, can you find Aven Park? Can you find home? So I looked at the facilities chart, found the frequency number, dialed it in, picked up the beam, flew to Aven Park. He said can you land this airplane? And that's permission enough, I entered traffic, did all the radio work, entered traffic and shot a pretty

good landing, and the next day, went down and read the bulletin board, and my, that crew, now I was rated the pilot and my former pilot was now my copilot and he was very unhappy.

And how long sir was he your copilot for?

Ralph Miller: I never saw him after another day or so. I don't know whether he asked for it or what happened to him, but uh, after that, I was, I was left seat person.

Yes sir, that's a great story.

Ralph Miller: It is and, and they learned also because all my uh, all my former uh, flight officer, going through training people, they became pilots also. There was lots of musical chairs going on down, seats going on down in those B-26's.

Yes sir, so it became more about, I guess you'd say more about your quality as a pilot than it was what ___ you were wearing.

Ralph Miller: That's right, so after that, you know, that sort of feeds a person's ego and makes you ready for anything.

Yes sir. Now you said as well sir, that uh, the training there in Florida, you were trained as a crew together. Did the crew you trained with, is that who you went uh, overseas with?

Ralph Miller: No, no, no, I'll tell you how that happened. In training, we did a lot of flying and strange field landings and things like that, and normally we'd, we'd go from Aven Park up into the Carolinas and up into Greenbourne, Charlotte, and I don't know, half a dozen others, with a few other odd trips, but in late training, a long over-water flight was part of it. At the same time that I was training as a pilot, there were other instructors in the other things there, uh, radio operator might be flying with an instructor in, in radio, or navigator may have an instructor uh, in navigation or gunners even carried the, but the crew was together, and the last part of training was a long overseas flight, and I scheduled mine to Mobile, Alabama, and Brook Field I think in Mobile. And so I had that long over-water flight, uh, and then in Mobile, weather, by the time we got there, the weather got bad and they wouldn't let us go back to Aven Park over water, but finally cleared us around the, around the Gulf, and, and I got into McDale Field in Tampa, and then on to that Aven Park the next day when the sun came out. But in the process, I had a bad, bad case of, of hemorrhoids, and my, they put me in the hospital. I got that airplane back on the ground and they actually lifted me out of the airplane and sent me to the hospital, and so where I had operated and then sent home on leave and then at the same time, the outfit moved from Aven Park to McDale Field in Tampa, and I was back in Indiana recuperating a little bit when a telegram said report to Lake Charles, and so that's where I went to Lake Charles. And then with my crew was split up. They'd gone off and had been filled in with other, into other crews that needed an engineer or an operator or someone of their training, and so at Lake Charles, I don't know, I went to Lake Charles. They said well you're gonna be an instructor pilot. So then I was an instructor pilot down at Lake Charles.

And then sir after, when was it that uh, you finally were sent to Europe and when you were sent there, what was going on in the war at that point?

Ralph Miller: Well, getting ready to talk to you, I got out my old log book, and it's full of memories, and I could tell you. Let's see, what was going on by the, when I didn't, because I

didn't go to get the ETO, although everyone you know in the training command, uh, wanted to, and felt qualified and needed to, but uh, I got to be ETO in September of 1944. By that time, V-Day had happened, uh, we had had troops on the ground in Europe, and we had, but we didn't individually then, we didn't know, I didn't know what was going on in the world. You're so wrapped up in what you're doing one day at a time and uh, where you are and who you're flying with and all. But at Lake Charles, I had, I had uh, a grand experience as an instructor pilot because it just fed my ego to be an instructor pilot, you know, instructing lieutenants and an occasional captain. Let me tell you a story of how I, when I quit being an instruct-, a flight officer, and January of 1944, 11 months after I'd graduated, and as a flight officer, being an instructor pilot, I was at the line one day when someone said Miller, Major Walker wants to see you. And so Major Walker was our adjutant, and group adjutant, and I went over to headquarters, saw Major Walker, saluted, and reporting as ordered, sir. And he said Miller, he said, we're gonna promote you. And I said I guess I was brash, but I said as what? And he said why, a second lieutenant, of course. Well, that didn't hold out much, you know, because second lieutenant and flight officer, we had the same pay and allowances and, and he said, second lieutenant of course. And he said but first you have to answer a question. Why, the question is, why should you be promoted to second lieutenant in this Air Corps? And I said, well I guess it's necessary to make first. And he said dammit, Miller, that's the wrong answer. He said now the right answer is you'll be of greater value to the service. I said, I said it. He said raise your right hand. So that's how I became a second lieutenant and gave me my third serial number because my, I'd had an enlisted serial number and had a flight officer serial number, now I had a commissioned serial number, and of course that was, that's not too many people had three serial numbers.

And how long sir was it that you spent in Lake Charles?

Ralph Miller: I stayed in Lake Charles until about August of 1944, and getting to the ETO was a, well, was quite an experience. We had orders when, some orders that a whole bunch of us, 15 or 18 instructor pilots, to report to Kerns, Utah, at that was a big staging area, and there we were outfitted and inoculated and everything else, got on an old World War I troop train, uh, I remember the wicker seats, the wooden sides and the cook car, not a dining car but a cook car in the middle of the train, and a four-day trip across the country to Camp Kennelman, New Jersey, where we three or four days later got on the Il' de France which had been converted into a troop carrier, and sailed out of New York and were in Glasgow, ____ Scotland four and a half days later and uh, rode the Royal Scott down to a replacement depot at Stone on Trent in England, and waited a couple of days there and then our whole luggage showed up. It was a mountain as big as a house and we found our foot lockers and all our stuff and next thing you know, the, read the bulletin board in the morning and report with all your belongings and we were trucked out to an air field, got on a C-47 and flown over to France and, and that's when I joined the 387th Bomb Group. That was in September 1944.

So on your entire journey from the states over to Europe and knowing that you were entering a war zone, what were your thoughts and feelings during that time?

Ralph Miller: Well, exciting. Of course my trip on the, on the Il' de France, we went unescorted and a little apprehension, but the submarine man said largely been curtailed and the Il' de France was the fastest uh, ocean liner, and did a little evasive action and, and made record time and uh, it just seemed like you know, just part of the thing unfolding. You know, I ____ the Il' de France went, made that trip, had 8,000 Air Force personnel on it.

That's a lot of people on one ship.

Ralph Miller: Well, I just, it was 8,000. There were 30 of us in a state room that had been for two when it was an ocean liner, but they had welded pipes and strung hammocks and everything to uh, to accommodate 30 for sleeping and this was the good part. The, most of the men were down in the hole. I, we ate, and had on the ship we had a, had to have a meal ticket. You were assigned a time, only two meals a day were served, morning and evening, and you had a number and a line and if you weren't there, it was tough luck, wait 'til next mealtime. And uh, pretty well regimented. We wore life preservers all the time. We had lifeboat drill every day. And but you know, it's like anything as I said, an old farm boy from Indiana, just, just eatin' it up.

Yes sir. And you said that the name of the ship, was it a French ship?

Ralph Miller: Yeah, the Il' de France, yeah, they'd loaned it as part of lend lease I suppose at that time, and, and converted. It later was being reconverted back to a liner, uh, caught fire, uh, turned curdle and was destroyed after the war.

Yes sir. And during, when you got to, you got to Europe, were you able to send a letter home to your family to let them know you'd arrived, and what did you put in it?

Ralph Miller: Yeah, yes, and mail was censored of course. And we had B mail, uh, that you, a sheet of paper you could write on and B mail and send for free, because no one had access to stamps or anything, or you could just put it in an ordinary envelope, write free in the upper right hand corner, identify it uh, and mail worked pretty well, yes.

Do you remember the first letter you got from home after you had reached Europe?

Ralph Miller: No, I don't. No, no I don't. I don't remember when or even if. Mail was kind of dicey at times.

Sir if you wouldn't mind, could you maybe take us through what it was like uh, on your first mission there in Europe, what your thoughts and feelings were and how you, how it all came about, like what, if it was in the morning or the evening?

Ralph Miller: Oh, sure, sure. Yes, I had been in, in the three's in a group and the uh, 556 and then found myself in the 557 squadron and never figured out how that happened, but uh, the postings on the bulletin board usually in the afternoon before a mission was planned the next day, but I uh, was scheduled to fly with a, a Captain Miller, incidentally, and I was his copilot and I have my log book here. I could almost tell you what the target was, but I remember very well. Uh, the copilot really didn't have a great deal to do, if the pilot flew the airplane. I could watch the instruments and adjust cylinder temperature or whatever needed in that regard. And about the join-up, we, the B-26's took off I think 20-second intervals on, on a runway, but uh, these were some were good runways. These bases and being in September of '44, uh, the advancing allies had liberated all the, all these bases and they had been former Luftwaffe bases and we just moved into their, into their uh, situation into the uh, Germans had left old airplanes around and all other signs of it, but when they left uh, we, we moved in, and uh, that first the three of sevenths, I think we were shadowed on. We lived in tents. We read the bulletin board. It was an organization and a mess hall and had everything else going for it, a bulletin board, and when I was, saw myself scheduled to fly, we had briefing first and where briefing officers would outline, tell us what the target was, tell us where flack might be encountered, where fighters were

seen yesterday, or all the things that go on along the other information of altitude and bomb load and, and all, and I flew with Captain Miller, and experienced this, but I had all sorts of time just to look around, and I saw those red tile roofs and everything, and we were still bombing in France. And uh, the target was a, was a moneyselling yard, that's a big rail depot, tear up the rail system. And I can't find it in my log book right now, but I don't really know where, what the target's name was, but anyway, we got over there and I saw flack, I saw that, those black clouds around, and uh, a matter of two and a half hours or so flight and we're back home and I get out of the airplane. The ground crew chief says how was it? How was it lieutenant? And I said, hell, I don't have anything to compare it with. I don't, I can't tell you. He said was it rough? I said I don't know what degree of roughness it was because I'm just an observer. So that was my first mission and the second one, I was in the left seat, and it felt right at home, just more of the same. We saw flack almost every time we'd go out. We saw enemy fighters sometimes. The gunners would test, test their guns on the way to the target, uh, over enemy territory. Well it, you know, it was exciting.

How many missions did you end up flying all tolled?

Ralph Miller: I flew 55 actual missions. I flew four missions with, with the 557 squadron back in the group, and then I was picked out I guess or selected somehow or other probably because the number of hours and experience I had in the airplane and partly from having been instructor pilot back here, uh, I was transferred to the 1st Pathfinder squadron. And so I flew four visual missions with the group and 51 lead missions as Pathfinder pilot, a total of 55.

Yes sir. Was there any of those 55, sir, that stood out to you as the most memorable?

Ralph Miller: Oh yes, yes. Most memorable I suppose was uh, the day up over Germany that we got hit real bad. My radio operator was killed. My navigator badly injured right leg, and uh, I'll never forget that.

Yes sir.

Ralph Miller: But following being hit, uh, we as Pathfinders always had the opportunity, the offer was made after the mission if we led the mission, and you should realize that we did not lead every mission. We, we were alone and capable of taking the lead to be able to drop on equipment with the entire group behind us could, would drop when we dropped. That was the purpose of Pathfinder. So we flew, we flew a number two position to be able to lead on equipment if the weather was bad or clouds obscured the target, we could have dropped, but if the cloud cover was not covering the target, then the group leader actually led and was, his plane was the lead bomber. But yeah, your question was what? One most memorable? I think that, that time I said, that was in, in March of 1945 on about my 44th mission when, when my radio operator caught a piece of flack in the back of his neck between his flight helmet and his flight vest and was killed, and his, in his seat at the radio which is in the compartment right behind the pilot's compartment. The, that's an awesome feeling. My engineer who normally stood between the copilot and I, when he wasn't on the gun or something, said, he said, we've got hit. He said, that shot got us. I said, and I on the radio, I called for Don Dale and Fitzgerald, radio operator and navigator in that compartment, got no response. I sent to Bosley, my engineer, I said see what went on back there, and they came back to the cockpit and said I think Fitzgerald is dead and Don Dale's bad, and I said shoot 'em with morphine and we had little squeeze tubes with a stout needle on aboard and first aid kits. I said shoot 'em full of morphine and I'll get on the ground as fast as I can, and I peeled off, actually dove to the ground, exceeded the red line

between six red line 360, but we were around 400 mph getting out of there and in the distance as we got near the ground, I saw a base with airplanes and some kind of a landing pattern, and figured out that it had to be ally something or other, so I killed the air speed, hold that nose up off the runway, let the nose down, reached up and fired a ___ pistol, put that big red flare up overhead. That signified wounded on board. Landed on the strip, didn't know where it was, on the ground, pulled off the runway immediately over the grass. On the opposite side of the runway came a jeep. I got out of the airplane with a brief look back into the, into the navigator's compartment, and the jeep pulled up and it was an RAF base and this ___ said, are you the plane captain? And I said yes. He said our officer requests your presence. So I got in the jeep with him and we headed back across that runway between spitfires landing and taking off, and their operations officer says I'm gonna ask you a few questions. And he said what's your name and what's your outfit and where'd you come from and what was your target, and, and said I must put this on the wire to bomber command, and then he said, would you care for a cup of tea? And I declined that, and he said I guess that's all. So I'm back in the jeep. We make a mad dash across the runway again to the airplane and, and by that time, and ambulance had taken Fitzgerald and Don Dale away, and Bosley, my engineer, gave me that report, and I said well, he said I've looked the airplane, we got some, a bunch of holes in it, and I said will it fly? And he said you brought him in here, didn't you? So seven of us had landed and five of us took off again and we went back to our base. That's probably the most memorable, that's one of my most memorable missions.

Yes sir. And sir, did you have a chance to, to correspond at all with, with their families after the war ended?

Ralph Miller: No, never did. Never did. And not all entirely my fault either, as I told you earlier, uh, when I did separate and went home and contacted polio, I spent 8 months in the hospital, and that, that was my, my second war. So I can tell you my most memorable Christmas.

Yes sir, please do.

Ralph Miller: 1944. We were at a base and I should tell you also that, that Pathfinder squadron was based almost all, always away from the other groups of the 9th. In those days, the equipment that we used was British, and we had uh, British technicians, RAF technicians work on that equipment, uh, and they guarded that equipment and as if they were real MP's, and we, we didn't know anything about the equipment, but there was a memorandum on how to destroy it, and we were cautioned, don't let it fall in enemy hands, and uh, when but being based separately meant that to lead a, a group, we, we were rousted out at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and go to our operations to be told what group we were going to be assigned to that day, and we'd take off in that old gamey muck and, and fly 100 or 200 miles to a strange field and let down through the same thing and land to go to briefing with the group to find out what the, what the target was. We always felt that we really should have had two missions because often times that trip down to whatever group we were going to, and we always set down, it was never up, and going down to a group, but we moved a lot, as the bases, more bases were liberated, uh, and we lived in tents, and so my most memorable Christmas was that one in 1944 when living in tents we were about 100 miles from Baston and uh, Battle of the Bulge was announced and the weather was bad and we, and there was no flying, and all the rumors running around that, you know, the R Denz offensive was on and the German breakthrough and they were heading for Rotterdam or Amsterdam or somewhere, and very poor supply and we, we didn't have much to eat, and that's, that's my most memorable Christmas.

Sir, when you were over there, was there someone that you were closest to during that time and did you stay together throughout the war?

Ralph Miller: Well yes, there were, there were a few who would always turn out to be your tent mates or your room mates or something, but I elected not to, to habitate with my crew or too much with members of my crew. I didn't want to get too, too close, uh, there's just something about it. I'd only been in, in France three days when I attended my first funeral, and friend that had been an instructor pilot at Lake Charles with me was killed in a Jeep accident and I went to, his name was Charlie Faulkner. He was from Richmond, Virginia, and uh, after the war I did go to Washington DC and reported to his father about Charlie's last days, but my crew, no, I, I was friends with very few. My crew really didn't know how to treat me. They'd say uh, Lieutenant said uh, what do we call you? They appreciated the enlisted men especially appreciated the fact that I had been an enlisted man, and they'd, and I told 'em, I said well when we're in the air, you can call me anything you want. When we're on the ground you can call me anything you want. I said, but don't make a fool out of me in front of the, any brass, and so we had that kind of relationship.

Yes sir. And when you were over there, sir, was there any time that you came in contact with the POW's, any POW's?

Ralph Miller: Yes, yes, at the tail end of the war, we saw oh, I stood and watched four of the brass captured Germans marching and, in a stream miles long. They marched them down to a huge uh, barb-wired enclosure in an open field type things, uh, that's uh, and after, after I'm back to friends, my dear friend, my most, most revered friend was named Louis H. Carrington. He and I uh, had similar backgrounds. We'd been together in the states. We'd been instructor pilots. We'd both been flight officers. In fact, he had been a flying sergeant before he was a flight officer. And Lou Carrington and I were uh, we were just, we were just true buddies, you know, and Lou I think was from Deerpark, Texas, and we just hit it off. We were fortunate. We had a lot, a lot of freedom, and the uh, I may back up a little bit to tell you that the equipment that we flew this Pathfinder equipment was British. The Brits had developed it to use in their night bombing thing where they cast a straight beam over a target that a mosquito bomber would, loaded with incendiary bombs would fly that beam over and drop on some signal on some target over France or Germany from England, and then incendiaries that the mosquito dropped eliminated the target, and all night long the RAF bomber command would trail over there and drop on, use those book fires on the ground as aiming points and, and actually did hit lots of hilltops, but they, the Brits gave our Air Force that technology, and it came to the United States at the Mathews Institute of Technology, and they modified it and changed it to use it as the way we used it, and that was on with two circular beams in the air, one over a target and the other one to, to tell you and these, these radio emissions came from two ground stations, mobile, two trucks equipped to send those beams out and where those beams intersected became my pathway to target, and, and this could, often was and was often above clouds through cloud cover where we drop on our equipment, the group behind us would drop when we dropped, having seen our bombs fall, do everything that we did, and we were picking off bridges and marsheling yards and all storage depots and things like that through the clouds, and in February of 1945, a month of 28 days, I flew 22 missions, and that's, and finished, had my 55 in early April, and my dear friend Lou Carrington and I were sort of everyone's pilot. And the British technicians who took care of our equipment would always invent some uh, reason oh, we need some parts for that equipment. We have to go to the depot. Would you take us to the depot? Well Lou Carrington and I did. We would fly a couple of British guys back to England to a depot for them to get some pieces

and parts and equipment for the Pathfinder equipment that they maintained in our airplanes. So I've flown the English Channel, across the Channel many, many times, uh, both ways, and I can tell you that uh, it's impressive, the, we had an IFF button you don't want to forget and to activate because the IFF stood for identification friend or foe, and you don't, didn't want to uh, go into England without identifying yourself because their, their coast guard and their anti-aircraft was pretty good stuff.

Yes sir. Sir of those 55 missions, how many do you think were at night? Did you do any night missions?

Ralph Miller: No, not really. I did a lot of night flying though.

And I guess the one big question is where were you on VE Day and what were your memories of that?

Ralph Miller: One of my most favorite times, as I told you, both Lou Carrington and I finished our missions on the same day and in April. After that time, we were just free spirits. We, we'd go everywhere. And we took an airplane full of people I remember one time down to the Riviera. They was always wanting to go on R&R, and so we were their transport. We flew those Brits across the Channel to get parts. We had the freedom and, and reveled in it, uh, so on just a few days before VE Day, uh, Lou Carrington and I were in England and landed at the place is now Gatwick outside London, and we were in London for a night, and the next day we go out and went to go back home to the continent, and were told no more. Negotiations are going on and orders are no one's, no one will fly over the Channel in either direction, and you go back and have fun and check with us and we'll tell you, but actually uh, we were in Piccadilly Circus downtown London when VE was declared in Europe. And had a ball because the Brits were really set, had more cause to celebrate than we did, but we went along with it.

Yes sir, what were, I mean I guess the emotions were euphoric, but can you describe the emotions of not just yourself but the people you were around, the civilians there in London and -

Ralph Miller: Say again, let me hear -

I was wondering if you could explain to us what the emotions were like there that you saw in London.

Ralph Miller: Oh, I tell you, it's almost indescribable. It's not any, any answer I know, but, but all of the pictures that we've seen, you know, of, of everyone hugging and kissing and, and uh, everyone with a champagne bottle whether they were celebrating in Paris or London or New York any, they're all about the same. It was just a, quite a just a big letdown, a momentous occasion.

Yes sir, and after victory was declared, how much longer was it before you were able to return home to the United States and see your family?

Ralph Miller: Well, quite a while really. The after the Armistice was signed, I think that was May 8th, uh, '45, uh, my outfit was disbanded. The first Pathfinder squadron was a provisional squadron and immediately disappeared at just, as if it never existed, and everyone in the Pathfinder squadron was on detached service because it was a provisional squadron made up to

do what it did, and wiped out when it was no longer needed. But after uh, Lou Carrington and I used those days after the 18th of April and our last missions, oh, very well. I told you we flew people places. We also went back to our group, I mentioned the 387th, and where I really belonged and was on their table of organizations, and they made me a captain, and Lou said boy, you think it'll be for me? So the next day we went down to the 344th group and Lou was made a captain, and we was, we had time to wander and roam and we, we saw I don't know, we saw scenes that well, we're not proud to talk of, but we just, we just traveled. We were just, uh, had no, no one to report to, uh, and the move was to get men and material to the Pacific because that war was still going on and had a point system uh, where anyone less than, or with 90 points or more, you know, was sort of to go home and those with less were the ones that were going to the Pacific, and point system, both Lou and I had twice as many points as we needed, and uh, so we just waited to see what happened next.

With the point system, how were points accrued? Was it based on the number of missions or was it a combination of missions and – I mean, the theater - ?

Ralph Miller: Well partly, it was uh, as I recall part of it was one point for each month of service, uh, one month for each month overseas, uh five points for each award or decoration, uh, but uh, 90 was the magic number I recall, and I think I had 168 or something like that, and Lou more than that, and uh, we were exempt from that and uh, no one seemed in a hurry to do anything with us, so we just wandered around and got by, and you could always find a pay office that would give you some money if you needed it, and that's another thing I'd like to tell you about. The various countries that we were in, you had to, we had invasion money, uh, the coin of the realm of the country you were in was to be used when you were in that country. But with fast moving and the, and the transportation system that we had, money was all over. It didn't mean anything. And we uh, could go to a finance office and, and exchange money, and to get money that you need, and if you were paid and you happened to be in France, you were paid in Franks, and if you were in Germany, you were paid in Marks, and if you were in Belgium which is awfully hard to do, another form of Frank, uh, call it a Frank but about 1/10th of the French Frank. Dutch had Guilden. They were about 37 cents. It was an interesting, interesting experience for us, for me, but uh, nothing to spend money on. I had an allotment and my, my big pay went to my mother in Indiana. I always figured on living on my flight pay which was 50% and uh, and a fogie, uh one enlistment the time had gone on so long, I'd got a few percent for being in past three years, and uh, we, it was easy to come by, and difficult to spend.

Yes sir, do you remember uh, your first day when you got actually back home and saw your family again?

Ralph Miller: Very, very well.

Can you describe that for us a little bit?

Ralph Miller: Sure. The long trip was home was really flying that old C-46 back from England, where we stopped first in Wales and then in Ireland and then in Iceland and in Greenland, and then in Labrador, and down into Bradley Field, Connecticut, and I got into Boston, caught a train to Indianapolis and got on a bus, and rode 90 miles north to Rochester, Indiana, and as I got into, as we approached Rochester, all the noise and the hoopla, but bells rang, whistles tooted, people standing along the street, uh, all sorts of excitement visible from my window on the bus, and I thought oh boy, they heard I was coming and it's a big celebration for old Miller, and so for it was about a mile to the bus station, and in that mile, I had these visions

of having to have something to say to this welcoming committee that I just knew was gonna be there, but the bus turned the corner and was at the bus station and there was no, no one there, but it was VJ Day and people were celebrating the end of the war in the Pacific.

Oh wow, that's a great story.

Ralph Miller: And I had to, I had to call my mother for a ride. [laughs].

That's amazing the time there, so you had not heard any of that until you actually got off the bus.

Ralph Miller: That's right. You're so out of contact with the rest of the world. We never knew what was going on, you know. You concentrate on what's going on where you are and staying alive and finding something to eat and all those kind of things. But to get back into your own home town on the very same day that VJ Day happens, I thought that was amazing.

Yes sir, that is, that's a great story, and uh, now after you got home, how much time did you have with your, your family before you ended up being discharged or I guess ending up being sick and being in the hospital?

Ralph Miller: Oh, well lots, because I got home in uh, I think it was probably August or September, and I had a delay enroute. Because the war ended, why I was still in the Air Force which had grown out of the Air Corps. I told you earlier that when I enlisted there were 30,000 officers and men in the Air Corps. When the war ended, there were almost 3 million in the Air Force. And so I had a small part in it, but uh, the chronology of that time when I got home from Europe, I spent I think 10 days or so and then reported down to uh, Waco, Texas. I was still in the service, and there, I flew old airplanes around. They had a big program going on of, of uh, what to do with all the airplanes, and a lot of people got out, but I stayed in until oh, the next year and signed up and I was in the Reserve. I was transferred from Waco out to Big Spring, and later on to Midland, and when I, well I, I piloted then flew uh, bombardier trainees, cadets going, because the training program was still going on, but winding down, and in between time, I flew uh, an old B-26 that had been left on the base there. They finally got the engines worked on and running enough and uh, took it out to Victorville, California. Well not really, I was headed for Victorville and it was supposed to go to the boneyard in California, and uh, I had uh, funny, makes me laugh to think about it, but here I was Captain Miller and I'd had all this experience in B-26's and that's why they wrote orders and made me into take that airplane to the boneyard and to select someone as copilot, a young fellow just graduated from flight training. He needed four hours for flight pay, so he asked if he could, he'd never seen, it was his first and only B-26 he'd ever seen, and he and I took it out. We stopped in uh, Tucson, got some gasoline, and then headed out through the mountain, uh, lost an engine out in the mountains, left engine conked out and I followed the, uh, from the Salton Sea up north somewhere and finally landed at Kingman, Arizona where we left the airplane which was another scrapyard collection area, and we had plane, we had train tickets from Victorville back to Midland, but no train was available in, in uh, Kingman, Arizona where we left the airplane. So we hitchhiked back to Midland and spent two or three days doing it.

Wow, yes sir. And you mention that boneyard, I imagine there were thousands of planes there. Did they have you actually taxi the plane to its final stopping spot, or did you turn it over to somebody else?

Ralph Miller: No, most of 'em were almost unmanned. I remember uh, the one at Kingman, I was met on the, on the strip, right on, on the runway, by a Jeep with a "follow me" sign on the back of a Jeep, so I follow him and here I'm taxi-ing a B-26 with one, one engine out and doing it almost entirely with brakes. He led me two miles and finally waved me up behind a B-17 so close that the B-17 guns in their tail turret was touching the nose of that B-26 that I was in, and, and I shut the engines off when he gave me the signal. I shut the engine off, I should say, and leaned out the window, and it was hot, and I said, you gonna put chops on it? We don't have any chops, he said. I said well, these brakes are hot, they'll seize up. He said just leave 'em on anyway. It would chop it all up. And that's what happened at my last B-26, sort of a _____ to a grand airplane.

Sir, wow, that's a great story as well. Well sir I know we had spoken earlier, you said you're now involved and you're a colonel with the Commemorative Air Force.

Ralph Miller: Yes.

Have you had a chance to fly in a B-26 since then?

Ralph Miller: No, no, they had one for a few years you know, but famous for as one of the last flyable B-26's, but it crashed uh, out by Midland, what, four or five years ago. There may be one flying B-26 left down in Florida, but I doubt it. There is a B-26, the, at the Air Force Museum at Wright Patterson Field in Dayton, Ohio. I saw it, because it's static and in a hangar and everything, but B-26, the Martin B-26 was sort of phased out and has the dubious distinction of being one, one replaced by the A-26, which I'd knew as the Invader, and but the B-26's that were left over in Europe, they were all chopped up or made into yo-yo's or something.

One thing I didn't do earlier when I spoke to you was ask you about medals and awards that you earned while you were there.

Ralph Miller: Yeah, there's an interesting story. We got an air medal for each five missions, you know, so I, I do have 11 air medals. Of course the air medal itself, but as a ribbon, to denote another air medal puts a bronze cluster on an air medal ribbon means that you have two air medals, with five bronze clusters, or change for a silver. And so I have two silver bronze clusters, and on my air medal ribbon. But I never attended in being on the task service with Pathfinder and on the front line so to speak most of the time, in my career I never attended or was part of an award ceremony. We would hear about it maybe through our old ___ room that says hey, you've got it, you know, and that kind of stuff, but never, never had any award ceremony or, or uh, documentation really. It's just that you had it. But I do have uh, 11 air medals and uh, 2 BFC's and uh, the ETO ribbon with three, three battle scars. They were the Battle of the Rhein and Battle of the Bulge and Battle of something else, I don't know. A star on an ETO ribbon, three stars on the ETO ribbon, the American Defense ribbon, and the Good Conduct ribbon, all that other to make up half a chest full if you put it on. I must tell you also though how I came to be, I came to get the ribbon because I'd never been to a ceremony. They were never officially ever offered in any form, uh, about and after the war when I got home and had been in the hospital and, and recovered enough and Betty and I were married and had family, we have three daughters. My middle daughter was about 15 when she said, uh, dad, where are all of your medals and why don't you get 'em? So I wrote to the records keeping people up in St. Louis and asked for them, and I got a Dear John letter from them that my records were largely wiped out in some disastrous fire and if I wanted to pursue it, furnish them information, they'd try to recreate it and it made me a little uh, PO'd, so I ignored it for another 15 years or

so, and then thought oh, what the heck. And I wrote 'em again and uh, described some of where I'd been and uh, what, and who I'd been with and when and gave 'em dates and names and everything, and they actually did send real, the real medals, to me and it was, and that's been oh, 15, 20 years ago. And at the same time I got a letter from France and a certificate type thing as a Diplome, they call it, and that, a few years ago, the country of France thanks you, Captain Miller, for helping restore order to our country.

Yes sir, that's amazing.

Ralph Miller: And, and I have been back to Europe a few times, uh, and the most impressive thing there to me are the American military cemeteries, and I did find out where my radio operator was buried, near Eindhoven in Holland. I never knew for years and years and years.

Wow, yes sir. Well sir, I want to thank you for sharing all these memories with us and our future generations and historians because you know, we're gonna take this interview and save it for posterity, and we'll also be making copies for you. We'll send you copies, and uh, hopefully get all that done very soon. But I guess the final question, is there anything else that uh, you'd like to share with us or uh, you know, any other things, that maybe any thoughts, final thoughts that you have that you want us to record here in this interview today?

Ralph Miller: Yes, one thing. Let me tell you, I write a little poetry now and then, uh, short, terse, uh, but means something, and I'd like to tell you and let you record.

Yes sir.

Ralph Miller: One of my favorites is names, it's only a five-liner, yeah, I call it Texas.

Texas

The front's gone through
The skies are blue
There's beauty all around us
Heaven's blessed us here in Texas
To have all this surround us.

That would be my introduction. Now the last would be my epitaph. I wrote my epitaph in 13 words, and here it is:

I tried a lot
I did my best
I'm satisfied
Now I'm headin' West.

That's great, sir. Well sir, we really do appreciate uh, you taking the time and sharing all this with us, and uh, it's really been an honor. I can't state that enough. It's been a real honor to be able to speak with you today, and I mean that from everybody here at the General Land Office and the State of Texas and the Voices of Veterans Program.

Ralph Miller: Well, good, well it's been a catharsis for me, uh, in regards, I truly do uh, subscribe to the Commemorative Air Force's slogan, Lest they forget, we don't want to let anyone forget what a price was paid for what we have.

Yes sir, and also, one thing I also didn't mention as well is the, a copy of, I mentioned before we're gonna send you an actual copy of this recording, but we'll also send you a transcript copy for your approval so you can look it over beforehand.

Ralph Miller: Good, and if, if my grandson's videotape shows up, I'll send you a copy of that so you'll know what we all look like.

Yes sir, anything you want to send to us, please do, and uh, I'll get you that address so you can send it.

Ralph Miller: Oh, I think I have it, don't I?

Yes sir, you do.

Ralph Miller: All right, I'm looking at Mark Refler's card and – yeah, OK.

Yes sir, that's it exactly. So well sir again, I really appreciate it. It's been a great interview and uh, the recording looks like it went great. We got an hour and 47 minutes on there, so we've got a lot of good, good memories to save.

Ralph Miller: Good time.

Yes sir. Well sir I thank you so much and I'll be in contact with you soon and let you know when we're, we're mailing this stuff to you.

Ralph Miller: All right James, thank you very much.

Yes sir, thank you sir. Take care.

Ralph Miller: Good bye.

[End of recording]