

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
EUGENE DALE MILLER

An interview conducted on

February 26, 2016

At Eugene Miller's home

Interviewer: Megan Yackley

Also present: Christine Lamberson and

Louise Miller (Eugene Miller's Wife)

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

"War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present"

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Eugene Dale Miller are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 26, 2016.

Interviewer: Megan Yackley

Transcriber: Megan Yackley

Editor: Christine Lamberson

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

The following document has been edited. For an unedited transcript, please visit the Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection.

LAMBERSON: So there you go, so you can ask him and talk about–

YACKLEY: OK so if you can tell me your name

E. MILLER: My name is tha- Eugene Dale Miller. In college I went by Dale Miller. In the service I went by Eugene Miller. Uh and uh... What else you need to know?

YACKLEY: Um.

E. MILLER: I – I'm 95 right now. 'Course I was s-s-seventeen, 18 or 19 when I went into the service.

YACKLEY: Wh – When and where were you born?

E. MILLER: Where was I born?

YACKLEY: Yes.

E. MILLER: I was born in De Leon, TX. You know where that is?

YACKLEY: Yes I do.

E. MILLER: Comanche County, OK? And... what else do you want to know?

YACKLEY: Uh – when?

E. MILLER: I moved to Melvin, TX.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: You know where Melvin is?

YACKLEY: Yes I –

E. MILLER: Alright, between here an – and, uh, uh... But anyways, it's on a hill.

YACKLEY: Um – When did you enter the military?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: When did you enter the military?

E. MILLER: When I entered the military?

YACKLEY: Mhm

E. MILLER: Uh, 1942, sorry.

L. MILLER: [. . .]

E. MILLER: Uh –

YACKLEY: Into which branch?

E. MILLER: In – I was in the, uh – junior college at – uh – in December of '42. Eh...

L. MILLER: No –

E. MILLER: An - ... That's when uh...

L. MILLER: January of '42.

E. MILLER: January – When – Uh – they bombed Pearl Harbor. Back – in that – beginning of that year.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: And, uh – so I... eh... went to San Antone with a friend of mine and joined the Air Force.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: 1942.

YACKLEY: When you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor do you remember how you felt?

E. MILLER: Uh... Bad. And I figured I'd be getting in the service pretty quick. And a friend of mine and I decided that...-this – i – it was – December and we decided to do something so we went to San Antone and took the cadet exam and, uh – we both were accepted. And, uh, he was assigned to – uh, uh – B17s and I was assigned to uh – to uh – bombardier school. And, uh, I went to bombardier school here in San Angelo.

L. MILLER: You came back here to finish college.

E. MILLER: Well I finished junior college.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: And then went – uh, uh... – joined the Air Force.

YACKLEY: OK. Um – Were d – Were you ever an officer or a non-commissioned officer during your time of service?

E. MILLER: Uh – say again?

YACKLEY: Were you ever an officer or a non-commissioned officer during your –

E. MILLER: I was – I was a cadet in the regular, uh . . .

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: In – in the, uh, United States Army. And I graduated and the – then I got a commission and then I was an officer aft – after that.

YACKLEY: OK. Um...

E. MILLER: That – That was in, uh, uh...

L. MILLER: No, that was in '42.

E. MILLER: Oh, 1942, yeah.

YACKLEY: OK. What was your training like?

E. MILLER: What was training in the – in the service?

YACKLEY: Mhm, what was it like?

E. MILLER: Uh... Pretty strict. And, of course now I got my – uh, uh – I, I went to San Antone and they assigned me to – to uh... uh... –

L. MILLER: Ellington Field.

E. MILLER: Where?

L. MILLER: Ellington Field.

E. MILLER: Ellington Field in Houston. Alright, an- and I took my – uh – ground training there first and then they sent me to Goo – uh – bombardier school – at – in San Angelo and – uh – I – I –uh – moved – uh – to – Ma – Mathis Field and got my bombardier training there and – uh... that was in – uh... – '42.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: Uh, and then uh – my bombardier – I graduated as... uh, uh – bombardier in 1943.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: And then I was... Then I was... as – uh, assigned to – uh, a squadron in the service.

L. MILLER: No, you went to New Mexico for your navigation training.

E. MILLER: Oh! Tha – I forgot about that. I took my navigation training in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

YACKLEY: What was that like?

E. MILLER: O – well, it – uh... it was, it w-was a little rough because the weather there was – uh... - in the mountains if you do this in an airplane and you're – you're – you're doing a program, uh – uh... and you're keeping down your records, and you're doing this, and you're doing that. And it was pretty rough. Eh, but – uh – in, uh – uh I didn't have any problems outside of the fact that I just – just – just had to bear with it until I finished.

YACKLEY: What did you do once you were finished? You said you went into the – into a squadron, is that right?

L. MILLER: That's when you went to Florida.

E. MILLER: Let's see.

L. MILLER: You went to Florida after that.

E. MILLER: What was the base in Florida, do you remember?

L. MILLER: Well you – talking about one plane that crashed. I don't know.

E. MILLER: OK. Anyway, I went to a base in Florida from – from, uh, bombardier training. And – uh... I was – I was uh – I's assigned to a – uh... B-26 group. B-26 is uh – is uh, a medium bomber. And, uh, that's the bomb that – the one that I had to go overseas with. And, uh, that's when I flew seventy-seven missions in.

L. MILLER: Not there.

E. MILLER: Not there, but –

L. MILLER: Not in Florida.

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: Not in Florida.

E. MILLER: Not in Florida. Well –

L. MILLER: You been training there.

E. MILLER: Well, we did some training – I did some tr – low level training there, uh... On uh, - on uh, water and uh, uh... uh – torpedo training. And we blast torpedoes from the bottom of a bomber – we'd fly just above the water level – uh, water, and drop the torpedoes. And we took tha- uh, that training for several weeks and then we wer – we were reassigned to another base.

L. MILLER: Barksdale.

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: Barksdale.

E. MILLER: Oh, Barksdale. Barksdale is in Houston.

L. MILLER: No, in Louisiana.

E. MILLER: Where?

L. MILLER: Barksdale, Louisiana.

E. MILLER: Louisiana. She knows more than I do.

YACKLEY: Did you enjoy training?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: Did you enjoy training?

E. MILLER: Uh. Mm. Most of it, but some of it was pretty rough. But it was – uh, pretty – pretty enjoyable a – all over. I mean, yo – you're learning things and you're busy, and you're busy and you're learning things. But you're still taking, taking – uh, training.

YACKLEY: Did you find serving to be really challenging? Was serving really challenging? Was it –

E. MILLER: Well –

YACKLEY: Was it tough to do it or – um...

E. MILLER: Challenging? Uh...

YACKLEY: As in – uh, like morally challenging. Was it tough to – to join and what not?

E. MILLER: Well, it – you have to be regimented pretty well. You have to dress a certain way, you get up at a certain time, and you go to meetings at a certain time. And uh, uh – of course you had to, uh train to march and you had to – had to learn to take orders. Uh... Sometimes it was a little difficult to – to... accept the fact that you have to listen and take orders. And uh, but it – some of the, some of the training was, was – was pretty strict. Are you – do you ha – you had to adhere to a certain hour of the morning, get up, and you have to meet, uh – immediately have a meeting and then you go to – go to training school, uh all – all day long. You do – you do ground training first and then after you do that your – you take your training in – in a – in an aircraft and you drop your dri – your bombs. I dropped bombs all over this country out here.

YACKLEY: Really?

E. MILLER: Yeah. And, uh – got a call not too long ago from somebody that they wanted to come here and, and uh – go out on those – these ranches and, and search some – for some of these bombs that we dropped. And, uh – uh... do some research. I don't know ho – I never did hear how they do it, I never did hear how it came out.

YACKLEY: Did you uh, personally drop bombs? Or wha – like, what was your job on the plane?

E. MILLER: To drop the bombs.

YACKLEY: To drop the bombs. So you –

E. MILLER: Had to go through a bomb sight, and then you had to – had to see crosshairs and you dropped off of those crosshairs.

YACKLEY: Wow. That's so cool.

E. MILLER: But you had to take thi – these, these – training from out here, it w – was uh – dud bombs. In other words, they didn't do it. But, but you still had to use the targ – the – uh... crosshair deal, and you had to find your target, and th – and – and then, then drop it a certain time.

YACKLEY: Do you remember what race relations were like when you joined the military?

E. MILLER: Remember is what?

YACKLEY: Do you remember what race relations were like? Uh... You know, among whites and blacks and Mexicans, do you remember what that was like whenever joined the military?

E. MILLER: We had several Spanish and several, uh... colored – uh... uh, cadets. And, uh... they came across to me as – as – as... reg – st – strange human being with different languages. And, uh – we didn't – I didn't have any particular problem with the – uh... staying with them in – in the barracks and everything.

YACKLEY: Did other people have issues with them?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: Did other people have issues with staying there? Um, you said you didn't have a problem being within the same sleeping area as them. Uh...

E. MILLER: Not that I know of – r – remember.

YACKLEY: OK. Alright.

E. MILLER: Off duty we – we – we went to town and we – we'd be mixed group. And uh... we didn't have any particular problems with the people in the ci – uh... because we were a mix group. And uh... we had several of the boys – several – several of the cadets, uh went with the girls in the – in those cities. H – Had one friend that, uh – went with the mayor's daughter in, uh – uh... Louisiana, uh. What – What's the big city in Louisiana?

YACKLEY: New Orleans?

E. MILLER: New Orleans. Yeah... He went with – with his daughter and, uh – I went with a friend of hers.

YACKLEY: Wow!

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: Spunky.

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: Um... What did America mean to you when you went to join the military?

E. MILLER: Who?

YACKLEY: What did America mean to you?

E. MILLER: Well I – I had a mixed feeling with – uh, it was – I re – right after they bombed be – Pearl Harbor and I had a feeling for the people in – in – in, uh Hawaii. About the fact that they ha – had to a – a – accept that situation. And then – then that made me want to do something to, to help the fact that they did that to us and I need to repay. That I need to do some training and, and try to understand why they did it and to do the things tha – that – that would cause me to have a problem with them.

YACKLEY: Did you ever understand why they bombed Pearl Harbor?

E. MILLER: Not – not really. Not – now what their basis was I'm not real sure. I probably had had some guesses and – uh... i – i – it, uh... I think that it – th – th – the – they just, they – they just – they felt they had to take over that particular part of the country and they started with Hawaii.

YACKLEY: So you were deployed overseas, correct? Were you deployed overseas?

E. MILLER: Uh – Uh – Well – Well – I took some training in – in, uh...

L. MILLER: You were deployed from Barksdale.

E. MILLER: At Barksdale. S – Some training in the B26.

L. MILLER: You went from there – we went to Carls – to Ca – Casablanca.

E. MILLER: Yeah. Uh. From Barksdale uh – uh... I – I was transferred to, uh... - Well I was put into a B26 group. And uh... we were tra – we were sent to, uh... uh...

L. MILLER: Casablanca, you told me.

E. MILLER: Well, from – from where? From...?

L. MILLER: I don't know how you got from Barksdale to Casablanca.

E. MILLER: I'm... Where am I at in training?

L. MILLER: You finished your training at Barksdale.

E. MILLER: In – In Barksdale. OK then I – I was – was – joining – I joined a crew at Barksdale. And then uh...

L. MILLER: You took a ship over to Casablanca.

E. MILLER: Yeah. Then the – you – you flew with the troo – the crew for a while, until you got used to them. And –

[Interrupted by a neighbor stopping in]

L. MILLER: Here I got all that stuff.

E. MILLER: Where we at?

YACKLEY: Um –

LAMBERSON: Make sure you turn it back on.

YACKLEY: It is.

LAMBERSON: Oh, sorry.

YACKLEY: Um, did you ever follow the news before you joined? Did you keep up with – uh, news stories before you joined the military?

E. MILLER: You talking about military?

YACKLEY: No, um – just day to day news or world news. Did you keep up with the news before you joined?

L. MILLER: When you's in college.

YACKLEY: When you were in college did you keep up with the news?

E. MILLER: Yeah, some.

YACKLEY: How much?

E. MILLER: Uh – oh...

L. MILLER: Don't remember.

E. MILLER: I don't remember how many times – times but...

YACKLEY: Did you know – um, the role of the military – uh, in current events before you joined?

E. MILLER: Uh – I was interested in what was happening and I tri-ried to follow through with them and understand why...that they were happening.

YACKLEY: When you were in the service were you able to follow the news?

E. MILLER: Uh... Not to a great deal because we were either flying or studying or reporting about what we did on our mission.

YACKLEY: When you did hear about the news, how did you hear about it? Through word of mouth or?

E. MILLER: Well there was some – some of it was, uh – bothersome, uh – just like now days. There's so many people getting shot, in other words it's something I don't understand. And there were things happening then that...was foreign to me. Uh – I just didn't understand a why they happened.

L. MILLER: I think she asked how you heard fro – heard it. Newspaper, radio, or what?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

L. MILLER: How did you hear it I think was what she was asking.

E. MILLER: Oh. Oh, radio, TV –

L. MILLER: You didn't have a TV.

E. MILLER: Newspaper. Uh...

YACKLEY: Did you talk about it amongst your friends?

E. MILLER: Oh yeah. Yeah, we – we – we would jump with some of the new –of stories that we discussed and, uh... Some of them were friends of ours that were involved in some of those stories and that made it more interesting.

YACKLEY: Um... So you mentioned your seventy-seven combat missions.

E. MILLER: How many?

YACKLEY: Your seventy-seven –

E. MILLER: Seventy-seven.

YACKLEY: Do you want to, uh – talk about one of those?

E. MILLER: One of those? Yeah.

YACKLEY: Or as many as you want.

E. MILLER: I got one that's – that's caused a problem.

YACKLEY: Uh oh.

E. MILLER: Yeah. Alright, in my B26, I'm in the nose, and I carry six bombs with me. And, uh – we would take off early in the morning, we – we would have a meeting first, and it would discuss what the mission was and, uh – what time we would take off, and uh, uh – I... Sometimes I had to do the navigation to the mission and sometimes I had to lead bombardier. And, uh – I... Like I say, we had six bombs on - on a rack on each side of the plane. And, uh – it was – it was – my duty to go to the nose of the aircraft and get familiar with the bomb sight and get it warmed up and then – and then, uh – If – if I did the navigation I had to – to confer with the pilot to see we were headed in the right direction and so forth. And uh, just before we would get to the target I'd have to get my bomb sight ready to use. And uh, when we got to the target – uh – the pilot got it lined up and then he turned it over to me and I flew the plane with a bomb sight. And I had to fly it straight and level, couldn't go this way or this way or this way, and go through my crosshairs on my bomb sight. And when I – when the regular – we had figured out that the release point was such and such – such and such a place, and as soon as we reached that release point, I flipped the switch and dropped the bombs. And, uh – then, uh – and then as soon as I dropped the bombs I'd say 'Bombs away', and then I'd tell the pilot that they're bombs away.

And on this one mission, uh – we had been to the – to it the day before and drop – and dropped bombs on it and evidently we didn't do a good job. We had to go back the next day. And they – they had, uh – gotten railroad cars, uh – railroad tracks, and they had flight cars with bo – with anti-aircraft guns on them. And they ra – they put those on the railroad and just short of the target. They knew we were coming back, and uh – as soon as the – we got – we got, uh – soon as I got the, uh – visibility of the target, well I told the pilot and that's when he gave me the control of the plane. And I started it straight and level and – and, uh – ov – over the target. And as soon as I got the crosshairs in proper position I released the bombs and then – and then that's when I told him. But right after that – 'course they were shooting at us the whole time from the ground – and, uh – one of the bombs came in my bomb bay. I've got six bombs back there – 500 pound bombs – and I got six back there, and they, uh – it – 'course if they'd of gone off I wouldn't be here. But it knocked out all of the hydraulic system, and uh – I couldn't, uh – I couldn't finish dropping the bombs because that release switch wouldn't work without the hydraulic system. And I – so I had to – I told the pilot that – what the problem was and he said 'You go back there and straighten it out, and – I don't want to land this plane with all those bombs on there and the bomb bay doors open'. So I took up – took off my parachute and went back to the back bomb bay and, uh – released each bomb separately. And, uh – we were over water most of that time and I dropped them where they would go in the water, wouldn't hurt any civilians. And uh, I got rid of the bombs and then we had – he – I – just as I, uh – got rid of the bombs and we headed back to the coast of Italy, and uh – I went back close to the pilot and told him what the situation was back there –

L. MILLER: Excuse me. Dale.

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: Me! You didn't tell what happened to the plane except for the bombs.

E. MILLER: Well, I will.

L. MILLER: Well... it happened right before you got over the water.

E. MILLER: Just before I turned the plane back to the pilot, the right engine got hit by one of the shells, and it knocked it out. So we got one engine – oh, I'm sorry – we only had two so it knocked that right engine out and we still got the left engine. And, uh – the pilot, uh – uh – trimmed the plane up where he could fly it with that one engine with those bombs on it, and we had six people on there. And, uh – we had to fly back to the coast of Italy and, uh – then uh – 'course after I closed the doors and let the bombs go, had to report back to the pilot and he took us in. And, uh – flew it, flew it – and, uh – 'course when I was back there doing all that, that those big bomb bays open wind's, uh – strong, we're travelling 300 miles per hour, and it's cold back there and, uh – I had a hard time getting the things – those bombs out of their hooks and closing the doors. Had to pull them by hand, and the hydraulic fluid was all over the floor and it was slick as everything. And I was scared that – that I was going to be pulled out of the bomb bay – open bomb bay because I had left my parachute up front because I might've hooked it on to something and it would've caused me to be pulled out. And, uh – I left it up there. But, uh – uh – we – when we got to the coast of Italy and I had everything settled in the back, uh – he – he had everything under control and, uh – we got to this little, uh – island of Corsica. Right off the coast of Italy. And, uh – uh – he – he said I – he didn't – he didn't want to – he couldn't get his wheels down so he had to – had to belly land and, uh – that's the reason he didn't want to have the bombs back there and the doors open because he was afraid it would cause the bombs to go off. And if – if those doors – they were wide open – and they – and if the plane did any of this they could've gone to hook on to something and then we'd just be twirl wind, and uh – so he was a little afraid of it. That's the reason he wanted me to do all this other stuff. And, uh – after we land – after we landed he scooted the plane on its nose – on its belly and when it stopped – well everybody hurriedly got out of it because they weren't sure it was going to catch fire or not. And, uh – that picture I showed you where that bomb – that prop went through that thing, that's where that came through. It came within – well I was about as close as to me to you – the pilot – it came right between us.

YACKLEY: Wow.

E. MILLER: As soon as it was over with – as soon as we stopped sliding, well everybody got out and – and, uh – only – only had two guys that had a little shrapnel wounds but no – not bad. I didn't get a scratch.

YACKLEY: Were you ever injured in your service?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: Were you ever injured in your service?

E. MILLER: No.

YACKLEY: No?

E. MILLER: No.

YACKLEY: Wow.

E. MILLER: Not in seventy-seven trips.

YACKLEY: Wow.

E. MILLER: Had a lot of anti-aircraft stuff come up and hit – I've had – I've had a shell burst right in front of my nose –

YACKLEY: How did that happen?

E. MILLER: And, uh – the, the fragments would come through the nose of the plane and I could hear it buzzing around my head. But it never touched me.

YACKLEY: Wow. That's – that's awesome.

E. MILLER: And – it knocked out the windshield and it knocked all the control knobs off of the controls in the pilot's department. And then in my section it – it had made holes in the nose and the fuselage. And, uh – just – I could just hear that shrapnel buzzing around me.

YACKLEY: What were some of your other missions like?

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: What were some of your other missions like?

E. MILLER: Oh, most of them were just, uh – routine. Uh, you – you get up, go to breakfast, and you go to your plane and – I mean you go to a meeting, you learn where you're going and – and what you got to do and then you get on your plane and then – uh – Oh, you talked about – to one another about what could happen and what could not happen. And, uh – that – that was a little scary.

YACKLEY: What were some of those stories that you talked about between other people? About what could and could not happen? What did you talk about?

E. MILLER: Uh – that you could get shot down by anti-aircraft guns, or you could get shot down by a – uh – a fighter pilot. And you had to be aware of – of, uh – the enemy at all times. I only got to shoot at an enemy one time with my .50 caliber gun in my nose. He came – He came around this way, and I could see him just fine, but I didn't hit him, I missed him.

YACKLEY: That's OK. So where in Europe were you stationed?

E. MILLER: Sardinia. Sardinia is off the coast of Italy. Southern part of Italy.

YACKLEY: How long did you stay there?

E. MILLER: Uh, about a year.

YACKLEY: So –

E. MILLER: I flew all seventy-seven of my missions in a year.

YACKLEY: Wow. So then you came back to the U.S. after that year?

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: OK.

L. MILLER: You stayed there longer.

E. MILLER: Well... we stayed there for –

L. MILLER: You stayed there longer than you were supposed to.

E. MILLER: Yeah, we stayed a little longer than we were supposed to.

YACKLEY: How long were you supposed to stay?

L. MILLER: Because...

E. MILLER: Huh? I don't remember how long we were in, uh – after, after uh – I was supposed to fly 35 missions and come home.

YACKLEY: Oh, wow.

E. MILLER: And, uh – I flew 35 and, uh – we didn't have enough replacements. And, uh – we had one other guy who had 35 and I had 35 so we had to flip a coin and I lost. I had to fly 35 more missions, well actually 42 more missions. Because I got seventy-seven altogether.

YACKLEY: So when you were stationed in, uh – Southern Italy did you go out on the town? Did you go out and –

E. MILLER: Oh, yeah!

YACKLEY: What was that like?

E. MILLER: Oh, it was, uh – uh – there was a little town, uh – right at the top of a hill in the – it was called Villacidro and we would go into town and people would have us come to their homes and have a meal. And, uh – we would do that quite often. But now in – in – I had time in Rome and I got pictures all over the place from Rome. And then, uh – the people – the people were – 'course they wer – the language, the language was dif – was different. And I had one fellow, that one of my pilots was, uh – uh – flew up French. And, uh – when we would go into town in Italy, I'd go with him. And he could converse with the people in that town. And, uh – they – they – they accepted us real well.

YACKLEY: OK, so they – they liked you guys, they didn't have any prejudice against you?

E. MILLER: Yeah. They – they accepted who we were and why we were there. And, uh – uh – I enjoyed going to all the places in Rome. And, uh – went to St. Peter's Cathedral, and – uh – Coliseum, and uh – just wen – just went around the town.

YACKLEY: How did you keep in contact with your friends and family back in the United States?

E. MILLER: V-Mail.

YACKLEY: Mail?

E. MILLER: V-Mail. It was a one-page letter and it had to be, uh – okayed before it would be sent in to the city—ah to, to the States.¹ And it was called V-Mail. I think she's still got some that I sent her.

YACKLEY: Oh wow.

E. MILLER: Yeah. V-Mail.

L. MILLER: What about your stove?

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: What about your stove?

E. MILLER: Oh! Ok. In, uh – in, uh – Sardinia, where I flew all my missions out of. We were in tents. Ok?

[Interruption occurred to work on the battery on the audio recorder.]

E. MILLER: - off the coast of Italy. Stayed in – in tents, four to a tent. And uh... uh I – I uh... Had a little extra time to look around and I found me a big, uh – box about the size of this table – about half as big as this table – metal box. And I put it in my tent. And I – and I made a stove pipe on it and ran a stove pipe – uh, stove – through the top of the tent and then I would – I – I got a 55-gallon drum from somewhere an. I got the gasoline from the, uh... I got gasoline from the, uh... uh – where the airplanes were kept, uh... and, uh – got a 55-gallon drum and I got it – uh... the, uh – airplane fuel and put in the drum and I ran me a – uh, I ran me a copper tubing from there. I put it up on the side of the hill. You know, ran a copper tubing from there down to my stove that I had made a burner out of, and a coffee can with, uh - sand and, and gravel and stuff. And, uh - we, uh - we used that for a stove and I used it to cook with a lot. I got some, uh - pans and I - I - I - I got, uh - cigarette - You had a commission. You got so much stuff each month and I didn't smoke so I traded those to the community people for chickens and eggs and - and, uh. I got some pans and I - I got some flour from the - from the - and the native people and, uh - some pans and, and some, uh - oil to cook with and I cooked chicken. If we didn't want to go

¹ Recording switches to video. The digital recorder ran out of batteries.

over to the mess hall, we didn't know what they had and we didn't want to go, so I would cook fried chicken and make biscuits and gravy on that stove. We would have big and, uh - only one in the whole squadron that had - that had a tent that would have heat in it. And that way we could cook meals in there if we wanted to.

YACKLEY: So, what - what are some of the most vivid memories that you have? Besides the stories you've told me so far.

E. MILLER: Well, after all this is over with and I'm wondering why I hadn't got in trouble, got hurt, or got killed and, uh - especially when that - those bombs come in at - they came in my bomb bay and I had to, uh - correct everything, and I'm standing outside of that plan at ten - ten thous - twelve thousand feet and I'm by myself. I thought I was, but there had to be somebody there helping me. And it had to be God. Couldn't be anybody else.

YACKLEY: Yeah.

E. MILLER: And it had to be God. And, uh - I've always thought back on that after I came home: Why did I not get killed? And I had to be protected? It had to be God. That's all. And then that time that propeller came through in front of me, somebody was watching over me then. Because it didn't touch me. If it had of it would've - I would've - it would've killed me.

YACKLEY: Um. Whenever you returned back to civilian life, was it difficult?

E. MILLER: What?

YACKLEY: Was it difficult to return back to civilian life?

E. MILLER: Well, it, uh - we weren't married yet. I didn't - I didn't want to marry her when I went overseas because I didn't know what would've happened to me, and I came close to getting killed so many times that I - that it - it - I still made the right choice and - but I came home. Uh - I rode - I rode a boat from - from, uh - Italy to New York. From there I caught a train from New York to go to El Paso, and from El Paso to here I rode a bus. And from the bus station to her house, I rode the city bus. And it got to her house, she was fixing a flat on her car.

L. MILLER: Somebody had to.

YACKLEY: Yeah.

E. MILLER: And by the way, she was the only one that had a car in college. And, uh - and she was fixing that. And she didn't - she didn't realize I - you didn't know I was coming that quick.

L. MILLER: No, I just knew you were on your way.

E. MILLER: She - I just got off the bus and went up and - "Hey."

YACKLEY: Oh, wow.

E. MILLER: And, uh - we've been married 71 years.

YACKLEY: That's incredible.

E. MILLER: Oh, did I tell you an incident that happened to me in Casablanca? Uh, I got to thinking about her at Christmas time in 1943 so I called a boy here in San Angelo and said, "You go to the jewelry store and get an engagement ring and take it to her house and see if she will accept it." And so, he took it to her house and she accepted and of course as soon as I came home from overseas, uh - asked her to marry me. And, uh - I got married at her parents' house and, uh - uh - I thought - I always thought about that story - about that ring from Casablanca. And, not knowing whether she would accept it or not. And, so is - we've been married 71 years. Pretty well says she had no problem accepting it.

YACKLEY: Did you have any issues when you, like, uh - How did civilians, here in Texas, accept you when you got back from, uh - overseas? Were they accepting, um -

E. MILLER: No - No problems.

L. MILLER: You were in the service a year after you got back?

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: You were in the service a year -

E. MILLER: I stayed in the service.

YACKLEY: Oh, OK.

L. MILLER: A year after you got back from overseas.

YACKLEY: Was it tough transitioning from the chaos of battle to a more quiet life?

E. MILLER: Oh, I still have bad dreams every once in a while.

L. MILLER: You spent the first - most of that first year going to the doctor.

E. MILLER: Yeah.

L. MILLER: Trying to find out what was wrong, I mean, you seemed normal but things upset him real easily.

YACKLEY: Right, PTSD aspect of it.

L. MILLER: I know. I have wondered since then if he has PS— of course, we never heard of it then.

YACKLEY: Right, yeah.

L. MILLER: But his father died a month after we were married. And he got married and came home. And all of that at one time was a lot to handle.

E. MILLER: A lot happened that first year after I came home.

L. MILLER: And you took - tried to take pilot -

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: And you tried to take pilot training?

E. MILLER: Yeah, I was going to take pilot training and, uh - the, uh - gasoline made me sick. So I gave that up.

YACKLEY: Oh, wow.

L. MILLER: You were finally assigned a permanent job about six weeks -

E. MILLER: I would -

L. MILLER: Before the war was over.

E. MILLER: [overlapping of voices.] I went to work for her father [pointing at L. Miller].

L. MILLER: He was moved every two months to some place else.

E. MILLER: He - he [Referring to L. Miller's father] had a little gift shop here in town. He had uh - jersey cow, uh - uh - soft cream place, he called it the Jersey Cow. And he also had a large, uh - service station and he had a used car lot and he - he hauled his own gasoline, and I kept his books. And, uh - I went to work with her - her [points to L. Miller] her, her husband, and kept his books and ran his business for part of it. And I didn't have to go to Korea be - I was in training out at Goodfellow -

L. MILLER: In the reserves. In the -

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: In the reserve. Not in training, just in -

E. MILLER: Yeah, I was in reserve and, uh - They - my - my group went to Korea, and he was sick so I had to stay and take care of his business so I didn't have to go to Korea.

YACKLEY: Oh, wow.

[Audio shifts back to digital recorder. Small break while the recorder batteries were changed.]

E. MILLER: I'm going to do the one my daughter did. For her -

L. MILLER: Not your daughter, your granddaughter.

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: Your granddaughter.

E. MILLER: My granddaughter. An – Her name is Rachel Miller. And this is – this is the one I wrote and this is the one she wrote back to me. This is the one I’m going to read, OK? Uh – It was her, uh – English, uh... – in, uh – college. OK.

The year was 1939. The crowd at the graduation ceremony at the Lakeview High School in San Angelo, Texas roared with excitement as the principal called out the name “Eugene Dale Miller”... “He will be attending San Angelo College on an athletic scholarship for basketball and football. He was a fine young man, and we are proud to say he attended Lakeview High School.” Dale, as he was called by his friends, went up to the stage, received his diploma, went and sat back down, and wondered what he was going to do with the rest of his life. The question was answered.

His first year at SAC, Dale met his best friend, Louise Elizabeth Davis. She admired him because he was cap – he was captain of the basketball team and very well liked. Ne – Neither of them ever considered dateline – dating. He had too much on his mind in sport – with sports, a job, and school; he didn’t have any money to take her on a date.

Then, two years later, when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941, Dale and a friend left San Angelo to go to San Antonio where they took the aviation cadet entrance exam. They were both accepted; however, Dale was not called for active duty until June ‘42. He took – he took cadet – he took cadet training in San Antonio, at Ellington Field – and at Ellington Field in Houston before be senting – being sent to Mathis Field for bombardier training. Mathis was back in San Angelo. Louise – Louise in – let’s see... Get the page.

L. MILLER: The pages were numbered.

E. MILLER: Oh, since – since he hadn’t seen Louise in over 6 months, he asked her out on a “real date”. A little while later, they attended the cadet grad – graduation at Mathis Field. He asked her to pin his wings on. She did, and then he kissed her. It was the first time she knew that she was in love with him.

Then, after 6 months, months training at different bases in Texas, he had a ten day leave and was able to come home before going – before being sent overseas. Louise and Dale had kept in touch during the – during the long six months by mail and by phone, and although he had not been able to get her out of his mind, he did not want to commit his feelings toward her knowing what might happen in combat.

This is Dale’s story, and I’ll let him tell it in his own words. The following is his recollection of his love for Louise and his fight for his country. “After finishing training, I was sent with a B-26 bomber group to North Africa in 1943. We lived in tents just outside the – of Casablanca. As I said, even though I tried to forget her, I painstaking – could not get her out of my mind. So while stationed just outside of Casablanca in the month of December 1943, this is when I called a friend in San Angelo and had him go to the jewelry store and pick out a rind – a ring. She accepted it and as you know, most of our trying to – most of our “romance” was carried on by mail. A lot of it was by V-mail

from overseas. V-Mail was a reduced size photo copy of a letter, one sheet long. That was the only letter we could send. She was - job was two-fold, one mission I was -

Wait, wait I must've missed something. Yeah, I skipped a page.

Our bomb [squadron] moved from Casablanca to Tunis (Tunisia) where we flew missions hitting targets on the island of Sardinia and Corsica, which are located off the coast of Italy. When our squadron was moved from Tunis to Sardinia, we had to live in tents again. We set up our tent - man, man - four-man tent right at the base of a hill. I found a large metal box and cut a hole in the top of it for a stove and made a door in the front. I picked up a large coffee can, put sand and gravel in it for a burner. I confiscated a 55-gallon drum for a fuel container. Then I confiscated some 100 octane [gas] from the fuel depot. Then I found some deep copper tubing, put on a cut-off valve in the line, and attached the line to the gas - gasoline drum which I had placed up a hill. Then I connected it to the box in the coffee can burner. It made a very good heater. We con - we confiscated milk and flour and... - from the Navy depot. I would trade mine to the Sardinians for chickens and eggs. And I had managed a skillet and some pans from somewhere and when we did not like the food at the mess hall I would cook biscuits and gravy and - and fried chicken. We felt very special as we were the only tent in a - with a stove. After the island of Sardinia was cleared - was cleared out, we moved our ten - base and flew our missions from there over Italy. Our - our targets usually were designated to be railroad marshaling yards, viaducts, railroad bridges, and highway bridges. The B-26, being a mediu - medium bomber, usually dropped its bombs from an altitude of 10,000 [feet] unless we were at a low level runs.

OK... OK...

YACKLEY: Maybe this page.

E. MILLER: OK.

My job was - was two-fold. One mission I would be scheduled to be lead bombardier, and others as lead navigator. Each crew member was supposed to complete 35 missions and then be rotated back to the states. When my turn came, we only had one replacement, and there were two of us eligible for replacement. Since both of us could not return to the States we had to flip a coin to see who got to go. Guess who. I lost and had to fly 40 some odd - fif - more missions.

I remember most of my missions due to heavy flack (anti-aircraft missiles) and fighter planes over or near the targets, but one stands out most vividly. My squadron was assigned our pri - primary target, a viaduct at Bucine, Italy. On this day, the Germans had brought in several anti-aircraft guns that were mounted on rail cars. Since intelligence had failed to find this out, we were caught off guard. They had positioned the guns along our approach route - our approach route to the target and when we started our final bomb run, the controls of the aircraft were turned over to the bombardier and - through the Norden bomb sight, that was me. Prior to releasing the bombs, there can't be any eva - evasive action by the aircraft. Can't go up, down, or sideways. The flight pattern had to

keep straight and level in order to focus – in order to focus on the bomb, uh – prior to release – turned over to the bombardier through the Norden bomb sight. Prior to releasing the bombs there can't be any evas – The flight pattern had to be kept straight and level and – and while looking through and lining up the cross hairs of the bombsight on the target, then releasing the bombs by engaging the release switch. Flack became exceedingly heavy, and they had our altitude and speed just right. Just as I engaged the release switch, several shells exploded around the aircraft, one in the open bomb bay, one by the windshield, one in front of the, uh – nose, where the bombardier's position is. Since I was very busy with the sight, I did not see any of the bursts, but was aware of them because of the sound. I could hear the shrapnel making a shrill buzzing noise, penetrating the plexiglass of the nose and the skin of the aircraft. There was holes in the nose, part of the windshield was knocked out, several of the control knobs were knock – shattered. The bomb was exploded – the bomb that expl – the bomb that exploded in the bomb bay had knocked out all the hydraulics fluid. The crew members – fluid was spewing all over the place. The crew members got the hit with shrapnel – Two crew members got hit with shrapnel; however, it was not bad. Due to the changed – damaged hydraulic lines, all the bombs could not be released from their racks. Just as the control of the aircraft was transferred from the bombardier back to the pilot, another burst hits the right engine, knocking it out of control. The pilot had to feather the prop – props to the engine. Then that left us with only one engine in pra - operating order – operating order. We were over enemy territory with a hel – badly damaged airplane. We began to lose altitude, we started throwing out all of the stuff that we didn't need to maintain the aircraft in flight.

In the bomb bay area there's a narrow walkway, from the front of the – the fron – from the front of the aircraft to the tail called the catwalk. We knew that the bombs were hung up and had to be gotten rid of, and the bomb bay doors had to be closed before we could land because we could not lower and – we could not lower and lock the wheels of the plane because of the hydraulic problem. There was only one way we could get this done. I removed my parachute to get on the catwalk which was very slippery due to the hydrau – hydraulic fluid that spilled over it. I went back and dislodge – dislodged the bombs, this was done offshore where they would not drop on innocent civilians. As I recall, the wind was awfully strong and it was hard to keep from being sucked out or pulled out of the open bay – bomb bay doors. It was quite cold back there. With the force of the wind and the weight of the doors, it was a bit difficult to get the doors closed. I finally got the door – I finally had to get the engineer to come help me. Just before we were over friendly territory, we finally succeeded in pulling the doors almost closed. There was a small crack left. With one engine dead, the propellers feathered, and one engine working, we belly landed in the dirt. The small crack between the bomb bay doors really allowed a lot of dust and dirt to come into the interior of the plane. With the left propeller still turning – turning at maximum velocity, it hit the ground and the tips broke off and came barreling through the aircraft entering on the left side and exiting on the right, leaving a gaping hole about six or eight inches in the – in the aircraft from where I stood. And there's pictures in there, in the book. Just as soon as the aircraft stopped sliding on the dirt, we exited, not knowing whether a fire would erupt or not. It – It is – as soon as we took care of the wounded, we were flown back to our base and debriefed. We were then sent to the field – Isle of Capri, for a – uh – rest and relaxation.

After returning home from overseas, Dale and Louise were married on September the 23, 1944. They had won – three wonderful children, and, uh – let’s see. I don’t rem –

YACKLEY: I think that one’s right here.

E. MILLER: That it?

YACKLEY: Yes.

E. MILLER: Yeah, OK.

My father – He had three wonderful children, my father being the first. Dale is my grandfather, and I am forever proud of him. My grandfather has always been a very modest man. After returning to the Isle of Capri, he was recommended for the DFC Medal (Distinguished Flying Cross). The board that recommended there – reco – see – there never had been – The board that called and represented – recommended and called him in and made him aware of the situation. There had never been an enlisted man in his squadron be put in for the DFC Medal. There was only one DFC available for this squadron, due to some sort of quota. The engineer that had helped my grandfather pull up the bomb bay doors was also up for the same award. They asked my grandfather if he would allow them to recommend the engineer for the DFC and recommend him for the Soldiers Medal. My grandfather – grandfather agreed, and it was done.

To this day, my grandfather is not bitter about losing the DFC to another crew member, and says he is very happy the engineer who as – assisted him in his time of need. My grandfather is the bravest, most caring, gentlest man I – I have ever known. He may not have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, but he’ll always – he’ll always be a hero to me. Sorry.

YACKLEY: No, don’t apologize.

E. MILLER: Sorry I broke down.

YACKLEY: No, no.

E. MILLER: I apologize for breaking down in that.

YACKLEY: No, don’t. It’s quite alright.

E. MILLER: I do appreciate you girls. And I hope you got – you got what you wanted. I don’t know what – what – what – uh, pictures she wants. She can have any she wants.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: There's - there's that one with the big hole in the fuselage. And, uh - there's quite a number of them otherwise, but, uh –

L. MILLER: Dale, she may not have been through with you.

E. MILLER: Huh?

YACKLEY: It's -

E. MILLER: Are you through with me?

YACKLEY: Do you mind if I ask you a couple more questions?

E. MILLER: No, I don't mind.

YACKLEY: OK, um - one of them is: how did you view the enemy? I mean -

E. MILLER: I'm sorry?

YACKLEY: How did you view the enemy when you were over in Italy. What did you think of the enemy?

E. MILLER: What did I think of them when I was flying over Italy?

YACKLEY: Yeah.

E. MILLER: Is that what you're saying?

YACKLEY: Yeah, when you were stationed in Italy, uh -

E. MILLER: Well I was busy - uh, uh - working with the bomb bay and, uh - w - w - thinking about the target and what - what I was going to do after I - when I got over the target. And I was t - too - too busy just to, uh - think of very much of anything.

YACKLEY: OK, alright. Um -

E. MILLER: I was recovery - I was mostly thinking about the - the actual mission itself.

YACKLEY: Do you, um - do you have any advice for current - uh - service members?

E. MILLER: Uh... Don't forget why they're in the service. To the - do things that will - protect - will protect the things in this country. Protect the people in this country, and make them safe. And, uh - I think the most of them that I've talked to out at Goodfellow, uh - they - they realize that's the - that's the reason they're in the s - service, is that they want - they want to protect this country, and the flag for which it represents and the people that that run the country. And the people that live in it.

YACKLEY: OK, um - Do you have anything else to share? Anything else you would like to share with me about your time?

E. MILLER: I could show you my ID.

YACKLEY: Yeah, sure.

E. MILLER: I think, maybe. I got it in here. I got it - Yeah here it is. I don't if you want a picture of it or not, but -

YACKLEY: No, we won't take a picture of that. Nah. 'Cause it's still valid, right?

E. MILLER: Huh?

YACKLEY: It's still a valid ID, you can still get on base with it, right?

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: Yeah, we won't take a picture of that.

E. MILLER: It's what I use to get on the base with. And, uh - What I do most any - anything, uh - with my business with. I get my - all my medicine out at Goodfellow. And I get all my, uh - doctor stuff for - with a thing that's called Tri - Tricare for Life. And that's because of this - of this -

L. MILLER: Because you stayed in the Reserve.

E. MILLER: Huh?

L. MILLER: You got that because you stayed in the Reserves.

E. MILLER: Because I stayed in Reserves.

YACKLEY: You were a Major?

E. MILLER: Yes.

YACKLEY: Wow. So you were a Major in the reserves?

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: Wow.

E. MILLER: I draw - I draw a check from the government every month.

YACKLEY: And you should.

E. MILLER: Yeah. And I get - Let's see, I get all my medicine and I get all of my med - uh - hospital bills and - and, uh - because I'm still in - in reserves.

L. MILLER: You're not in reserves now.

E. MILLER: I - I'm under something called - uh, Tricare for Life. And that pays it all, and I use this a lot of the times. As a reserves. 'Course I went in as a - uh - private and, uh - graduated after m - my cadet training into a - to a first lieutenant then I go to the second - I mean the first - second lieutenant and then first lieutenant, and then a captain, and then the major.

YACKLEY: So how long, how many years in total were you in the service? From -

E. MILLER: Active and Reserves?

YACKLEY: Yeah.

E. MILLER: 25.

YACKLEY: 25 years.

E. MILLER: Yeah.

YACKLEY: And you went Reserves, uh - in what year? Do you remember what year you went into the reserves?

E. MILLER: Went to - Went into the reserves? Do you remember?

L. MILLER: About 3 years after the war - after you were discharged -

E. MILLER: After I was discharged.

L. MILLER: After you were discharged from active duty, I don't remember.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: That'd be 19 what?

L. MILLER: I can't remember.

YACKLEY: That's OK, no big deal. Wow, well I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us.

E. MILLER: Well, I'm sure there's - sound's all messed up, but -

YACKLEY: Oh, no. No, not at all. No.

E. MILLER: But most of i - i - it is true.

YACKLEY: Most of it?

E. MILLER: Most of it. [Both laugh]

L. MILLER: I didn't hear anything that wasn't.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: I don't - I don't think that any of it is not true.

YACKLEY: There's your lie detector right there.

E. MILLER: Yeah. That's the best thing that's happened to me.

YACKLEY: Oh, yeah. Dr. Lamberson?

LAMBERSON: Yeah?

YACKLEY: Do you have any questions that you've thought of while listening, or?

LAMBERSON: No, I think you did a great job.

YACKLEY: OK. Awesome.

LAMBERSON: Make sure - just restate his name again.

YACKLEY: Oh, uh - Eugene Dale Miller.

E. MILLER: Eugene Dale Miller.

YACKLEY: OK.

E. MILLER: In college I was Dale Miller, in the service I was Eugene Dale Miller.