ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

LARRY MILLER

An interview conducted on

February 25, 2016

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

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 Larry Martin are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 25, 2016.

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

Transcribers: Stephen Robinson and Alicia Dudley

Editor: Carson Jones

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LAMBERSON: All right. It looks like it's recording. Okay, so, my name is Christine Lamberson and I'm here today to conduct a War Stories interview. We are at Angelo State University and today is February 25, 2016. So, what is your name?

MILLER: My name is Larry Miller. It's actually Lawrence, but I prefer "Larry."

LAMBERSON: All right, great. And when and where were you born?

MILLER: I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

LAMBERSON: All right.

MILLER: In 1946.

LAMBERSON: And did you grow up there?

MILLER: No, my folks got smart. Well, initially, they didn't. They moved to Buffalo, which has even worse weather, and then they decided they'd move to Florida.

LAMBERSON: That sounds good. A little more sun . . . that sounds great. And what . . . how did you come to have some contact with West Texas? When did you come to Texas?

MILLER: I married one.

LAMBERSON: All right. [Laughs]

MILLER: It all began in Florida. Her father was in the service and uh, it was . . . a lot of people leave home for tons of different reasons. It was time, you know, and uh I was tired of college at that particular moment. So, um, the father asked me to have a conversation with another serviceman who was in the area, who was in the recruiting service. So, I went down to talk to him and he had a few things that seemed to intrigue me, and so . . . it sounded good. The curious thing about it was if I was in a draft status, I probably wouldn't have been touched. Okay? I had a really bad injury to my leg when I was about seventeen, and I had an iron rod that was the full length of my femur. I was in what was known as "temporary deferment," but as long as I kept that rod in my leg, it was permanent deferment, but I didn't like the idea of having that thing in my leg. If I, unfortunately, would be in another accident, then they would have had to remove my leg. And I didn't think that was a good idea, so I had it removed from my leg. Then I was more draft eligible, but I was in college, so it wasn't a concern anyhow. It's just . . . it was time to leave home and do something else. So, um my wife was my girlfriend, and she knew these people. So, we went together and talked to them. Um . . . he um kind of threw a bait out in front of me. He was aware of the language programs available in the service, and that sounded interesting. And, you know, my test scores were good enough, so I thought I'd try and do that. So, off to Texas. I came for basic training.

LAMBERSON: Sounds good. So, when was it you enlisted? And which branch were you . . . ?

MILLER: Air Force.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: In June of 1967.

LAMBERSON: And so, then you came to West Texas for training and . . . ?

MILLER: Well it was Lackland at San Antonio.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And while we were down there, they select people based on the scores they get on the . . . ASVAB—or whatever it is—and they selected us to a take a language test in a made-up language, and we did well enough to get into the field. One of the greatest mistakes I ever made was to . . . well, they took the whole bunch of us. They were hot to train Chinese linguists at the time, and they took the whole mob of us in for a one-week course in Chinese. And I didn't fare so well, obviously, because I wasn't selected. So, the language I got . . . which wasn't anything near what I wanted. I would have preferred German or Russian or something like that, but I got Vietnamese! So, and um . . . of course they didn't tell you what you were going to do. Then you're off to Vietnamese training, and then you hear all the rumors and the horror stories of what's going to happen to you as a Vietnamese linguist and so on and so on. And we all went off to . . . well, I'll explain why that was the biggest mistake I ever made later on.

LAMBERSON: Okay, sounds good. So. after your training—well, wait. Before I ask that question, what were your total years of service? Just to kind of map out . . .

MILLER: Nineteen sixty-seven to 1997.

LAMBERSON: And so, you started your training . . . can you just give me uh an overview of your career in terms of your basic jobs, whether you were an officer at any point? Just an overview of the career.

MILLER: Well, I worked as a Vietnamese linguist for about twelve and a half years, and I tried to cross train into Hebrew. And I was successful in cross training into it, but then I applied for commissioning and was pulled out of Hebrew training to attend that, and then I served for seventeen and a half years as an officer.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, what was the training like for becoming a Vietnamese linguist?

MILLER: Well, the first part of it was thirty-seven weeks at the Defense Language Institute, West Coast, in the city of Monterey, California. And I had taken Spanish and those things, you know, so there wasn't any terrible problems with it. It was just learning a new language: how it's constructed, how it works. Of course, the good thing about Vietnamese was the Roman alphabet, so you don't have to bother with characters and things like that. That aspect of it was kind to me. So, after thirty-seven weeks of that, then we went out to Goodfellow, and we trained, first, on

essentially a ground course and then, later, an airborne course. And the training involved with that is you have to go out to physiological training so you can experience what it's like to be in an aircraft, fly at altitudes, and lose oxygen pressure. You learn to use parachutes and all that stuff, and then off to survival school in Washington in the middle of winter, so we could go to Southeast Asia. Kind of ridiculous . . .

LAMBERSON: Did you learn to survive in Southeast Asia while you were there?

MILLER: Well, they actually have a different school. They have what's called "snake schools," and they had one in Panama and one in the Philippines, but I never attended those. I was too busy working.

LAMBERSON: So, then were you deployed to Vietnam after that?

MILLER: You know, it was in and out. You know, your remarks about the protests in the United States, I was in Okinawa when a lot of those things happened, and they were invisible to us because our access to news was severely limited. It was kind of funny, we . . . we were initially stationed in Okinawa and we would fly down into the war, and we'd do our thing, and we would fly back out of the war. So, it's really kind of a unique way of being involved in a war; kind of like the drone drivers out in Nevada. They do their job with a drone that's in Afghanistan or Iraq, but then after five o'clock comes around, you run home to your family. So, it's kind of interesting in that respect, but we routinely deployed to bases in Vietnam, too. So . . .

LAMBERSON: And what were you doing when you were going back and forth?

MILLER: We were called "voice intercept processing specialists." So, we were basically listening to the North Vietnamese—the VC, whatever it was. So, that's what we did. I don't have a whole lot of problems talking about it either, so you can touch this as deep as you want to.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: Let me tell you a story.

LAMBERSON: That'd be great.

MILLER: When I was in England, I went to Bletchley Park. Do you know where Bletchley Park is?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Well, in the course of the little . . . you know, walking around, they explained that the people working in the mail room during World War II to this day refuse to talk about what they did, when all they were doing was running a mail room. But they were so tight-lipped and . . . I won't say threatened, but they had a loyalty oath, and they signed it and they believed in it. Most of the stuff that Tom did—and what I did—could, this day and age, be unclassified. The sticking point on it is the billions of pages and microfiche that they have stuck away in

warehouses all over the D.C. area. Nobody is going to sit there and declassify these documents while they've got a couple of wars going on over here. I had a friend of mine who was an NSA employee who basically told me exactly that, and that there is virtually nothing that couldn't be declassified. It's a funny thing, too, that the things we were doing back there, it was tube technology. We were closer to Guglielmo Marconi than we are to where kids are today. Our stuff was rudimentary by comparison with the telecommunications explosion that's happening, and if you'd like to talk about that, I have no problems with it.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: In fact, I've got a document here. I didn't get this from Hillary, I promise, but it could scare you a little bit.

LAMBERSON: So, what is this?

MILLER: Look at the top and bottom, at the classification markings. Okay, but if you look at the bottom, it's a FOA[1] release. So, this is just one other thing. This is the best one I've seen that made a regular publication. It gives a strong idea of what most of us were doing over there. It's a world called "COMINT," Communications and Intelligence. I'm not sure if you are familiar with that.

LAMBERSON: Great!

MILLER: When I got to Okinawa, we had to go through a little bit of training there, but the training had really changed a lot because the war changed a lot. Initially, the war was a war against aircraft and SAMs[2], okay? And they trained people to monitor those communications, and they were challenges unto themselves. But it changed a lot once . . . even before I was there, and we started emphasizing the logistics-end of the war. So, I guess our event was more strategic than it was tactical, but what we were doing was essentially monitoring everything that was happening in North Vietnam that was flowing to South Vietnam. And believe me, it wasn't that hard because radio ops are radio ops worldwide. They get on there, and they make mistakes and give away things that they didn't mean to give away or, like Hillary, think no one's ever listening. So, I spent the first two years of that just sitting there monitoring what was going down the trail: men, supplies, everything. And the Vietnamese were . . . we had them wired for sound. It was duplication, it was triplication of what was going on down there. There was very little there that was . . . that was a secret to national command authorities, but take that for what it's worth. We had them wired. Rudimentary encryption systems that were easily broken. Um, we were very good at our job because our focus was totally towards military terminology. And when you are flying a plane, you know, you can only do certain things. We got surprised every once in a while, but we did a very good job of saving Americans' lives and contributing significantly to the war effort. For all intents and purposes, we knew, within a few thousand people, exactly how many folks were infiltrating into Vietnam. So, to this day I sort of condemn the national command authorities because they knew exactly what was going on because we were telling them. So, very interesting work.

[1] Filed Operating Agencies
[2] Surface-to-Air Missiles

LAMBERSON: So, then what happens with the information that you—How did you understand what you were doing within the context of the mission of the war and what the U.S. was trying to do there?

MILLER: Well, some of it was very easy. Some of it was very easy where they identify a cache of weapons or a number of people at a particular location. Well, you know, that's targeting data. And in the long term, if you know the size of every group that's going down the trail, well that has a strategic benefit to the command authorities because they know exactly what they're facing, if that answers your question.

LAMBERSON: Yes, absolutely, it does. One of the things we are kind of curious about is what you thought about what the U.S. was doing in Vietnam; kind of what you thought of what our mission, big picture.

MILLER: Well I think, you know, again, you talk to different people and what they were there for . . . I'm sure if you talk to people who were directly involved in combat, it was protecting your buddy's life and him protecting you, and that's a feature of warfare even to this day. You may not be fighting for a flag, but you're fighting for your buddy who's sitting next to you in a hole in the ground. So, you see different aspects of that, and I saw that too. I think one thought was the fact that I was working to protect somebody down South who is in a direct fighting position. Because if we could eliminate some of the threat before it gets on their doorstep, well then, we've succeeded with what we *should* do, you know, and we certainly took the war to those folks along the trail. And like I said, there was virtually nothing that was hidden from us due to their inability to cloak it.

LAMBERSON: And did you interact very much with the South Vietnamese, for example?

MILLER: Not very much. They had some people that were assigned to different units, but there just wasn't that much interaction between them. Usually, there were people that kind of—if you want to say tended them—took care of them, but with a very limited amount. There were some in Vietnam and there were some in Thailand, too. So, both places had some of those people. I met a few of them. Excuse me, I met one of them who was a . . . he was essentially a general who was in charge. Anyway, I met him. I met him out at two locations. I met him out at Goodfellow one time, and another time, I met him up at NSA. I didn't have a whole lot of interaction with him, just to say "hi," kind of.

LAMBERSON: And did you have any interaction with the locals in other places? Like, you mentioned being in Okinawa. Did you interact with locals there?

MILLER: Oh, yeah. We lived among the folks of Okinawa. I had a gentleman across the street who was a pig farmer, and so I was friends with the guy. He watched out for us; he was friendly. The Okinawans are different than the Japanese. We found them to be very friendly. I think they have . . . at that time, they had very good memories of the Americans being there. Are you familiar with the Battle of Okinawa?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Okay, so you're aware that the Japanese told them what we were going to do to them, and it didn't turn out that way? It was . . . unfortunately, there were a lot of Okinawans that died because they were afraid of what the Americans were going to do, but there were also those very humanitarian things that happened after the war, and well, even during the battle itself.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And did you, like, as part of your military training did uh— Were there any discussions about Vietnamese culture or about the Okinawans? Was this stuff you kind of just picked up by interacting with people, or were there an official discussions of this?

MILLER: Um we had culture, history, and geography lessons while we were going through language training, and we even did the covered dish thing. The Vietnamese people bring in their food, and . . . So, we had a lot of that, but unfortunately we didn't get off the base much. They had an orphanage that we used to go to. We all felt a little awkward about it because of course, they issued an M16 and two clips with it, and we're driving this blue Air Force van down there. It was a little Catholic orphanage that the unit supported, but really, that was it. I made it back to Vietnam in 1996. I was involved with the MIA effort . . . POW and MIA effort in Vietnam, you know. So, I had the opportunity to go, and it was rather unique. I was standing on a street corner and I was chatting with some kid . . . and they didn't have any idea why we were there, okay? They had no inkling of the war because something like sixty–seventy percent of the population wasn't even alive then. It's kind of a bitter thing among the veterans, I've heard. I've only met a few of their veterans, but here, they basically spilt blood for their country, and now they're sort of a forgotten group, you know. I guess it's probably worse than what our veterans are going through because at least we have the cash to support some of the programs. In the case of the Vietnamese veterans, you know, so . . .

LAMBERSON: Yeah, they don't have that. So, which base had the orphanage near it?

MILLER: Cam Ranh Bay.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and how long were you there?

MILLER: We were in and out. We were under TDY. Do you know what TDY is?

LAMBERSON: Yes. You can explain though, just in case other people don't.

MILLER: That's "temporary duty." Usually for . . . it has to be less than 179 days . . . for 179 days or less. We were usually down there for thirty or forty days, and it was just a rotation. But I was talking the other day about how the unit was kind to me. My wife was in baby watch, and they didn't send me down there all the time, you know, the last trimester when she was there. But as soon as she had the baby three months later, I started going down there pretty regularly, and that's what we did. We flew two different types of aircraft. We flew the RC-135, which is a jet, out of Okinawa. But down there, we flew on . . . we called them "trash haulers." They were C-130s with huts in them, but they worked well.

LAMBERSON: So . . . okay so, were you doing kind of similar things at each of the different locations that you were in, in Vietnam? Doing the same sorts of monitoring . . . ?

MILLER: Oh, yeah. Like I said, we had it blanketed. It was basic . . . at— Often times during the war, we had twenty-four-hour coverage of the place. Again, there was duplication. There were other people . . . there were Army units doing this too, as well as Navy. It was a full blanket of coverage from the communications and intelligence end. We didn't miss much.

LAMBERSON: And were there any moments that kind of stood out to you as being challenging, or surprising, or somehow particularly striking?

MILLER: Yeah. I wasn't there for the first part of the war, and I kind of regret that. Are you familiar with all the names of the programs? "Linebacker," and all those things?

LAMBERSON: Some of them but, again, you can kind of define as you go along.

MILLER: Well, the initial ones . . . this time period, I kind of described as . . . what we were doing was MIGS[3] and SAMs, but I wasn't there during that time. But the mission grew, and the mission grew, and the mission grew, and aircraft changed too. The strangest mission I was on, it was . . . I was actually flying during the Son Tay Prison Raid, and it was the mission I did the very least on. I'm almost embarrassed to admit I was flying that day because I did virtually nothing, but the intent was— Are you familiar with the Son Tay Prison Raid?

LAMBERSON: Yes, but you can go ahead and explain anyway, if that's okay.

MILLER: It was an attempt to free the hostages, some of our prisoners in Vietnam. Well, they never told us what we were doing, really. They just put us on a plane and said, "go do this thing." In retrospect I think we were just there to make sure everybody was asleep in Vietnam because it was a *Zero Dark Thirty* kind of situation, and they didn't want any response from anybody. They didn't want to hear that someone knew they were coming. I sat there all night long doing virtually nothing because it was dead as a door nail in Vietnam that night. I was also there for . . . the other one I missed was "Linebacker II," which was the Christmas bombings. I was in school at the time—and that kind of bothers me—but I was there in 1975 for the fall of Saigon, for the fall of Phnom Penh . . . all the events that happened during that. I was listening to people on top of the embassy as they were evacuating people. I listened to people trying to land a C-47 on an aircraft carrier. I listened to people telling folks to ditch aircraft in the water because they couldn't land there. And then there were the other people who were basically told to fly down the Mekong River, make a right-hand turn, and go to Thailand. So, it was an exciting time in a losing effort kind of thing.

LAMBERSON: Where were you?

MILLER: I was in a place called Nakhon Phanom, Thailand at the time. So, it was very important for the national command authorities to know what was going on, you know, if there

[3] Multi-Intelligence Ground System

was any inkling that our extractions from Vietnam were going to be less than peaceful. So, we were there for that.

LAMBERSON: And what was that like for you?

MILLER: I don't think it affected me as badly as other people because, you know, we were doing what we could do at the time. But I had guys who went into a real blue funk over the whole thing. They thought that we had abandoned the Vietnamese and, in truth, I think knowing what I do know, our national command authorities knew years in advance what was going to happen, and they didn't do anything. But of course, we had Nixon out of office and Ford's in there, and Ford's got about no power whatsoever, and we weren't going to run the B-52s over North Vietnam again.

LAMBERSON: A really different political moment.

MILLER: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, can you tell me . . . let's talk a little bit more about the technology. What sort of technology were you using and how did it change during your time there?

MILLER: It really didn't change at all. It was tube technology; it was an outstanding platform for what we did with it. I think, again, it's the brain power of the people involved, and we were essentially busting the Vietnamese' guns faster than they were doing them. There were really no great surprises. Unless you've been in that position to understand how stupid people are . . . it's sort of the thing with Hillary. I don't think she realizes how susceptible to exploitation she was. It's just far too easy, and in Hillary's case, it's not that they had to hack into her device, it's somebody along the chain who they get into that . . . you know, and I'm convinced that the FBI is continuing to turn over rocks. And it's . . . I don't know where they're going to end because once it was out of her hands, it could go anywhere. And it's the same thing with . . . if you listen to the same people day in and day out, and you learn how they think and you learn what they do, you see the errors . . . just basic human errors that happen. I had one guy that . . . I was listening to this guy. He was passing this information to a guy on the other end, and I swear to god this is what happened. The guy on the other end said, "I don't have that day's codes. Could you give them to me off of yesterday's codes?" Well, we had yesterday's. So I mean, on the first message sent, they completely lost control of their own encryption, and we're not talking tough stuff here. We're talking, often times, it's a ten by ten matrix. It's nothing like the Enigma. It's nothing like PURPLE. It's nothing like that. This stuff, it's real rudimentary. I swear to goodness I almost thought it was the leftover from the French Indochina War that they just carried through with the same stuff. You know, sometimes people think that, "Well, no one is going to be listening to me." Well in that case, everyone was listening to them.

LAMBERSON: How big of a team of people were you working with?

MILLER: It depended. When we were flying out of Cam Ranh Bay, we had about ten people, but when we were flying out of Okinawa, we had a significantly larger crew, probably about twenty. Maybe a little bit beyond twenty.

LAMBERSON: And were you ever . . . did you come into much contact with the kind of on-the-ground soldiers, the combat troops, things of that nature? Were you usually separate?

MILLER: Rarely. When we were out in Monterey . . . well, there were different types of Vietnamese training. They put the Marines through a six-week course, the Marines. And they weren't going out to do what we were doing, you know. They were going out to be ground pounders and we felt sorry for them because we knew they were going to be in the thick of it, and we were at 35,000 feet, not getting much of it—or 28,000 feet, depending on how low we were flying. We saw them every once in a while, you know, at one of the transportation ports, heading inbound, heading outbound, that kind of stuff. The day-to-day? No, very little.

LAMBERSON: And day-to-day, were you pretty . . . kind of sheltered from any combat that was happening?

MILLER: Well, yes and no. Cam Ranh Bay was a relatively safe place; it didn't catch as many rockets as Da Nang did. I spent a night at Da Nang and nothing happened, thank goodness, but we had our moments. There were at least two instances where I could've been killed. It wasn't anything to do with . . . I mean we were shot at, but— On one occasion, we were flying along in Laos, minding our own business, and I went in the back. You have the facilities back there, which are kind of rudimentary too. You essentially have a pot to pee in, and that's about it. There were no women on the plane at that time, as you can imagine. So, I'm there, doing my business and looking out the window, and I hear "pft" . . . "pft" [Laughs]. And in my innocent mind I sat there wondering who they were firing at, and then the truth struck. The worst we had, we were flying around 35,000 feet over the Gulf of Tonkin and we had people on board who looked for fire control, radars, and things like that. And we had something we basically called "the A.C.," the aircraft commander, and what they do with the plane is they put it into a cork screw dive. So, there we all are, flying along and minding our own business, and the gear is going down at thirty-five thousand feet and the flaps are going down at thirty-five thousand feet. So, you become less airborne, and you're dropping like a stone. Have you ever heard of the "Vomit Comet?"

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Okay, well it's sort of the same. Everything was . . . was going everywhere, and we were trying to throw on parachutes and all that stuff. Fortunately, Boeing builds a very nice aircraft, and the wings hung on. So, we leveled off somewhere around ten thousand feet after, you know, a minute or so of terror. But the one that was probably scariest was, we were flying in clouds in Laos, and a plane nearly slammed into us. We could feel the roar of it as it went by. It was close, and it was close enough to feel the plane shutter. So I mean, that was close, you know. But we had others with one— It wasn't my mission, but they had a very nice picture out of the drop of a B-52 cell that had a 130 down below it. So, they didn't hit it, which was fortunate, but you know, it could have been . . . people died over there for stupid reasons. We actually lost two of our guys—two of our Vietnamese linguists—in 1998. They were in a Vietnamese helicopter out doing something for the POW and MIA effort, and flew into a mountain. We lost a few other Vietnamese linguists on some of the planes that Tom was associated with, because a C-47 flies

rather low, maybe ten thousand feet. They lost several of them over there, and I think it was about three or four of the Vietnamese linguists that we lost over there in that. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Oh.

MILLER: But I didn't get so much as a paper cut.

LAMBERSON: That's good. And so, did you have much—you mentioned flying over Laos. Did you have much contact or interaction—whether in terms of monitoring or in terms of actual like day-to-day interactions—with people in Thailand, and Cambodia, and Laos with that kind of larger regional context of the conflict?

MILLER: No. We flew over the area and we flew out of the area. Missions I flew in Laos, we . . . we recovered elsewhere. It was either in Okinawa or it was in the Cam Ranh Bay. We used to do ops stops at several places, but nothing in Laos, nothing in Thailand.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and so you mentioned already a little bit that you weren't getting a lot of news during your deployment. So, what kind of information were you getting from home—or about how the war was going? Let's start there.

MILLER: Virtually little, because we were, you know, Stars and Stripes. And at that time, you know, they did a pretty good job of weeding that out. I mean, I completely missed the Kent State riots. For all I knew, it never happened, you know. You know, we could tell at certain times that there was unrest or a bad feeling about the war. That was pretty . . . pretty obvious. We even had some people we associated with who weren't, what you would call "supportive," of the effort. You know, it happened. But really, I never . . . I never got any mail from home . . . from my folks about it, or anything like that. And you know the . . . the other good thing of course, for me, was when I was in Okinawa, my wife was over there with me. So, that was our world, you know? And there were some B-52 riots in Okinawa. Are you aware of those?

LAMBERSON: No.

MILLER: Okay. We had B-52s that were flying out of Okinawa to go to . . . to go down there and bomb, and some of the Japanese people didn't like it. Usually, it was the ones associated with the local communist party and all that stuff. And sometimes it was very bad, and folks were stuck on-base or off-base and so on. So, that kind of thing happened over there, you know, because some of the Japanese were against what was going on with the war. So . . .

LAMBERSON: And so, did you have a sense, or any sort of opinion or thoughts on how you thought the war was going, or what you were doing? Or were you just kind of going day-to-day?

MILLER: I think it was pretty much day-to-day, you know. We knew that what we were doing was as good as anybody probably could have done. You know, it was one of those things. And with the wealth of intelligence that was being provided, you kind of would suspect that the national command authorities would . . . would be using it to the utmost. And again, at certain times you did see that, you know. I think the Son Tay Prison Raid, with the exception that they

didn't get any prisoners out, that was—[laughs] How can I say successful? You know what I mean? But for the . . . well, maybe that does—okay, gets me into the modern history. It's a miracle that we got Bin Laden, an absolute miracle. And you know—it was before that movie came out, but—operational intelligence has to be operated on. And sometimes it turns out well, and sometimes it just gets all mucked up. For instance, Carter with the attempt—okay, he gave the call, they attempted to do it, but he was working on operational intelligence that . . . but the very fact that Bin Laden was stupid enough to stay in that house for that length of time . . . I mean, it astounds me that anybody would do that. And the same thing happened with the Son Tay Prison Raid. Okay, you know these guys are there, so you send over some drones. You send over some planes to take happy snaps. You do all this stuff. Well after a while, there's a chance they're going to move them, so you do it when you got it. And it's like that—you saw the movie, I assume—*Zero Dark Thirty*, it just astounds me that the national command authorities didn't do something right away on that. I mean . . . I mean, the degree of . . . the percentage of whether he was in that building or not is just absolutely ridiculous. Intelligence will only give you certain things, and you can't . . . you can't force it into giving you things that simply aren't there. And that's what happened with those folks. And to some degree, perhaps, it was what happened with the Son Tay Prison Raid was, you know—But nonetheless, when you see those people in Washington, sometimes it just drives you nuts the way they, you know, could've, would've, should've, but they don't.

LAMBERSON: But on the . . . at the time, you didn't feel that frustration as much, or you didn't see it?

MILLER: I think there were people who . . . it's real funny. A friend of mine that . . . he was on one of the flights with me, and he was in a different end of the business, okay? And quite frankly, he was the best that the Air Force ever had. And he and a friend of his—another person I know—were going . . . do you know what a frag is?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Okay, and not in terms of "fragging people."

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: It's a . . . a message. A frag tells you what operational sorties there's going to be.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And as they were preparing for the Son Tay Prison—what turned out to be that—they both, looking at what was fragged for that evening, . . . because it was a display—if you want to call it that—over by Haiphong. So, the sky was lighting up over there while they were going in the back door, doing this thing. Well, these two friends of mine, it both hit them at the same time; they said, "We're going in for the prisoners." Okay and you know, once you know that that's what you're doing . . . but most of us were just dumb as dirt. We didn't know what was going on. Somebody said, "Here's what you do; do it. Don't ask questions." You know, but in

retrospect you can find . . . you can figure out a lot of the things. I was just there to see if anybody was awake, and that's good enough, you know. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Did you hear very much about kind of—and I'm not sure which moments you were there for—but you mentioned that you weren't necessarily hearing about, like, Kent State and whatnot. But did you hear a lot about, say, the Tet Offensive, or when the My Lai Massacre news came out? Did you hear about those kind of . . . that type of news?

MILLER: Well, of course the Tet Offensive happened in '68 so, you know, I was still in language school. But in retrospect, so many things from that timeframe that eluded the press . . . and really, the press is some of the dumbest people in the world. They don't know how to ask a question. They don't know enough about what they're talking about, so they get buffaloed on things. The classic, Schwarzkopf was briefing the press during the first war and some guy asked him a knucklehead question about aircraft, and I mean, basically wasted peoples' time talking about this when there were more important issues to talk about. And it's the same thing with the press. The misinterp— okay, are you familiar with the famous picture of the police chief in Saigon? Okay, why are we interpreting that as terrible? It was martial law in Saigon. This is not . . . you don't just declare martial law because things are going well, and he blew the guy's brains out on the street. Are we going to feel bad about that? I mean . . . okay, what's your attitude about it? I mean, what's your feeling about that picture?

LAMBERSON: I . . . I mean I study how people respond to things. In that sense, I think it's fascinating, right? It's a moment that is . . . this sort of moment is captured that public opinion, or that the American public, interprets as suggesting that the war's not under control. Right? And I'm interested more in how they interpret that than, I guess, the . . . well, I should say my area of expertise is more about how the public responds than whether they were right or wrong, if you will. So, because I wasn't there, I don't know.

MILLER: Right, I see. Well along with that, it's sort of painted with a broad brush where the South Vietnamese are the bad guys.

LAMBERSON: Sure, sure.

MILLER: Well, and then of course there's no press crew that's escorting the Vietnamese in Huế. So, the massacres that did evolve there are . . . you know. The same thing with the that terrible picture with the little girl that—you know, war is hell. Guess what folks? You know . . .

LAMBERSON: Right.

MILLER: . . . which was different, you know. And the same thing: just recently they talked about the American hostage that was, unfortunately, in the location with drone strikes. Indeed, I feel very badly about it; it's a shame it happened. They were bleeding the family for money; it was horrible. I'm sorry he got killed. We sunk ships during World War II that were full of POWs because they were flying under a Japanese flag. It happens, you know. Sherman was right, don't try and make anything pretty about the thing; it's ugly. It's always going to be ugly. So, why? And maybe it's just the simple people from . . . all over America. They look at something and

they just view it—Bam!—there's that guy, shooting. "Aren't those people horrible?" You know, when in fact, they were gun fighting for their lives. And of course, the total misinterpretation of the . . . the tactical defeat of the Viet Cong during the Tet Offensive, you know, that was lost on Cronkite. I mean, he just did not understand that that was . . . they were on the ropes. That was a kind of last-ditch effort, so to speak. But all of a sudden, the American press turns against the war. Well, that won't bring life back to anybody, you know.

LAMBERSON: And were you . . . so, you were hearing the news about the Tet Offensive as it was happening, right—because you were in language school?

MILLER: Yes, but you know, we were so busy studying and things like that, that I don't think it made as big of a dent as it would later on. You know, if you're busy doing one thing . . . and you know, we were just poor G.I.s and we weren't downtown, scattering our bazillions on the community. We were knuckling down, trying to study and learn this language.

LAMBERSON: Okay, that's very interesting. So, to talk about a slightly different subject, you mentioned that your wife was with you in Okinawa. So, what was . . .what was your deployment like for your family? For your wife? For your parents?

MILLER: Well, my wife has . . . has some interesting memories. Okay, remember I told you about the one where we kind of corkscrewed towards the ocean?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: She still remembers that night because we came off the plane after the briefings, kind of scared shitless—you know what I'm saying?—because we all could have died that night. It could have happened. So, just like anybody else, I'm sure she worried that . . . especially when I was deployed down South, but there was a pretty good wives' group there.

LAMBERSON: Really?

MILLER: Yes. So, they were supportive . . . very supportive, and we had a commander during that time who made that kind of thing happen. So, I think we felt very well-supported. There was a flow of information back and forth; it wasn't just, you know, putting a letter in the mail. No, there was . . . getting carried down by the next crew along with the boxes of cookies and stuff. So, there was that too and . . . and you know, all of us hung tight. You know, *Band of Brothers* kind of thing. I'm going to a reunion in Philadelphia with those guys, you know. It wasn't as though we were just there for a little . . . it depended upon where you were at, too, though. Because some locations, folks were there for years, and years, and years, and years. Other locations, you were only there for a year then you're gone. Tom's—the unit Tom was with—that was a one-year ticket to Vietnam, and then most people got out. Got out of there, went elsewhere in the service. And the location I was with in Thailand, it was a one-year tour. Most people left after one, and then done. The year I was there, they just about turned . . . it was the year of the fall of Saigon and all that. So, as you can imagine, the Vietnamese mission kind of shrunk a little bit, but not entirely, you know, because I continued to work the Vietnamese problem until 1979. Then I went off and did other things but returned to it in '93 for the POW

and MIA effort. It worked well, you know. I was a trained Vietnamese linguist and they were looking for essentially an intel officer to do it. So, I kind of sold myself based on my ability to read, speak, and figure out Vietnamese. So, that worked well. So . . . and I enjoyed it. I . . . as you can imagine, this job is intuitively appealing. If you like puzzles, this is something you'd enjoy doing. I mean, I enjoyed staying on top of the guy on the other end. You know, if he did something, could I understand enough to react to it? And otherwise, you know, you'd be sitting there hunting in the dark for these people sometimes. If you don't know that the guy says, "go up ten" on his radio, you're lost. You don't find him again. So, it was . . . it was fun chasing them; it was fun staying ahead of them. It was fun seeing the stupidity that, like I told you: "Yeah, just go ahead and give away yesterday's codes." No problem, you know. So anyhow, it's fun.

LAMBERSON: Interesting. And so, where was your wife and family when you were at Cam Ranh Bay?

MILLER: Still in Okinawa.

LAMBERSON: Okay, they stayed there.

MILLER: So . . . yeah. We deployed out of there. And you know, there were other folks at other places throughout the Pacific who were also involved with keeping an eye on Vietnam. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so, for how long was she in Okinawa?

MILLER: Two years.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: I would stay there longer. Like I said, I enjoyed doing this, but there were some other things that we wanted to do. I wanted to come back and get my degree from Angelo State University. And so, when I reenlisted—and I reenlisted at about the three-year point—I said "Well, this is what I want to do." And they guaranteed me that I was going to go back to Goodfellow and be an instructor out at the base, and knew that I wanted to go to school here. So, with that in mind, one day they came in and said, "Larry, you're going to go to intermediate Vietnamese." And I said, "Well, wait a minute. I got this piece of paper here that says I'm going to—" So, essentially they gave me everything. I had my cake and ate it too. So, I went to intermediate and then I came to Goodfellow. You know, I picked up my degree out here in 1974 . . . with Endress and Watson—Watkins. You know those guys?

LAMBERSON: Uh Endress is actually an advisor for this project. Watkins was before my time. I mean, Endress had already retired before I got here but he sort of—

MILLER: Yeah, and Dr. Ward. If you see Endress, remind him of those names because they were real good people. I always knew they knew my name. And you know, a lot of schools you go to, you're just one in 300 in an auditorium. Been there, done that, huh?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: And I don't like that much at all, so . . . in fact, I have a funny story. My son and my daughter both graduated from ASU. Well my son, he started out here but he had to go to a big school . . . big school. So, he transferred down to UTSA, and they chewed him up and spit him out, okay. So, then he had to do something else. So, first thing he had to do was get his grade point average to a reasonable level so he could transfer back into Angelo State. So, my son's attending a class out here, and of course, he's having to make up other courses because of the shallow performance in the other ones. And one of the professors is starting the class off, first day, going through the roster, reading through the names. He gets down to my son's name and looks at him and says, "Mr. Miller, isn't it about time you graduate?" [Both laugh] That's a professor that knows my son, so I was happy with that. So anyhow, I came out here and got my degree, and after I got done with that . . . that's how I missed Linebacker II. I was out here. I have some regrets, and Linebacker II is one of them, you know, where— Are you familiar with that?

LAMBERSON: Yes, but again, you can explain again—

MILLER: Oh, okay.

LAMBERSON: —if you would.

MILLER: Well, we mined the harbors, sent in the B-52s. Basically, we were going to bomb them back into the Stone Age. And then they . . . the Vietnamese said, "Okay, stop," you know. Anyhow, I was out here during . . . during that time. Some friends of mine went over there out of Goodfellow, but not a whole bunch of them. So . . .

LAMBERSON: So, when did you come back?

MILLER: The first time was March of '71.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And then . . . it was kind of funny. Nineteen-eighty, I commissioned, okay. And originally, I had put in the dream sheet for what you want to do after somebody says or . . . and the first one was essentially a scope operator on AWACS[4], okay. But they said my vision didn't qualify me for that, so they had this other one—signals intelligence officer—that sounds like what I did before. So . . . and then I got the assignment. Now when I was studying Hebrew, I would've gone to Athens. And my wife had never been to Athens, so it sounded like it would be good. And then all of a sudden, here I wasn't going to Hebrew; I was commissioned and they came down and said, "You're going to Okinawa." The same place I'd been. So, I wound up being a second lieutenant, working with people who I had trained, that had been NCOs with me, who had been my supervisors. So, I mean this was . . . this was weird. They couldn't have sent me to a worse assignment if they wanted to make sure I didn't run into people that I had served with before as an NCO. I mean, this was . . . there was no place else in the world that it could have been as complicated as this. But, it worked out well.

[4] Airborne Warning and Control System

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

MILLER: Nineteen-eighty.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: So, I went back over there as a second lieutenant intelligence officer, working with the same people I worked with before.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

MILLER: The guy that wrote my last fitness report as an NCO, I wound up writing his last fitness report as and NCO when he retired. It was . . . but everybody was a good sport about it. It all worked well. So, yeah.

LAMBERSON: That's good. So, when you came back in '71, what . . . what were you— What did you think of the war? You know, you come back to a really different kind of landscape of public opinion probably.

MILLER: I don't know. I think I was still . . . and really, there are a lot of folks who have a problem with—even to this day—the war, you know. Okay, I know people who still have Jane Fonda urinal targets. It's true. I kid you not, there was one, the other day, I saw. I can't recall the exact . . . it was like, "You can always forget about this and you can always forget about this. But hating Jane Fonda goes on forever." You know, she was in Monterey while I was in training there, and some . . . some of the folks went. I don't know anybody who went to that. I don't . . . I don't watch Jane Fonda movies to this day. I have absolutely no use to her as a person. She hasn't been contrite enough. I don't know how she could be contrite enough on those things.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: But a lot of people still have . . . you know, and I have to be a little bit careful talking even to my friends about it because the way I think about things may be entirely different from them, and I have no reason to alienate them over a struggle that ended a long time ago.

LAMBERSON: Right.

MILLER: I'll tell you a story of this too.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: In 1996, I got into a screaming argument with a general. And he hated the Air Force because the Air Force, as far as he was concerned, didn't do a good job of close air support during the Vietnam War. This is 1996, okay. And . . . and I told him that first of all, if that was the only reason that we lost the Vietnam War, we wouldn't have lost, okay. And the other thing

was I told him that his statement was an insult to those Air Force people that died trying to give him close air support in a bad situation. So, it didn't help my promotability much. So . . .

LAMBERSON: I could imagine.

MILLER: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: So, were you . . . I mean, when you came back in '71, were you kind of— Were there things that were kind of surprising or difficult? Because you're coming back and you're going to ASU and, you know . . .

MILLER: Well, okay. There we are in Monterey, and that's kind of—

LAMBERSON: And when . . . this is kind of on your way back?

MILLER: Yes, around March of '70 . . . I don't know if it started immediately, but I assume it did because, you know, I left there and . . .

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: So, let's, for the sake of argument, say it was March of '71. I lose track of dates. I'm old.

LAMBERSON: You're actually doing a great job. You're being much more precise than usual.

MILLER: I didn't figure . . . I didn't think the community like the military much, and . . . have you ever been to Monterey, California?

LAMBERSON: I have, yes.

MILLER: Okay, well it's . . . it's . . . I'd say it's Bernie Sanders country sort of.

LAMBERSON: Okay, yeah. Sure.

MILLER: You know, they didn't like the military very much. They gouged us, I thought, for rentals and things like that. But I never thought as though anybody particularly wanted us in the neighborhood, and if they could have taken over the— Do you know where the property is for . . .

LAMBERSON: I don't. I haven't been there, precisely.

MILLER: Oh, it's a nice chunk of ground they've got there, smack dab in Monterey, California. So, it's an appetizing tidbit if they can ever get their hands on it. But and you know, there were other places in the country that, even before that, . . . you know, one that always amazed me is Rantoul; I think it's in Illinois. It's the home of Chanute Air Force Base. They never had a good relationship with the military. Okay, even during World War II it was uncomfortable, you know,

this place out here. They crazy love the military here in San Angelo, and you don't know how good it is until perhaps you've seen bad, you know. But the folks in Chanute, they had signs, you know, the normal bigotry, but attach servicemen on the bottom of it and that's what they didn't want to have coming in. So, you see that, and I could feel that in Monterey. I never saw anybody do anything favorable to me because I was a service person. I always felt like I was . . . they'd just as soon not have me there at all, you know. So . . . but we lived our life there. I was only there about nine months, and then we came here. And you know, as far as I'm concerned, there's no better place to live on the planet than San Angelo, Texas—which goes back to another story. It kind of gives you the same thing. My wife had been to San Angelo before we married, okay. She was friends with some people who had a house up here. She stayed the summer up here. So, when I'm out in Monterey initially, and we find out we're going to San Angelo, she made a trip up here. She found an apartment; she got everything all set up so that, essentially, I just moved in.

The first day we were at that apartment, the welcome wagon lady hit the place, okay. And we went downtown and didn't have to pay a deposit on electric; we didn't have to pay a deposit on gas because we were military. Now certainly, if we didn't pay our bills, well, they'd go to the first sergeant and they'd get their money, you know. But it's that kind of act of kindness that you don't see all over this country, and it's . . . and it's there to this day. My daughter picked up a mutt the other day in the street; it's a Cavalier King Charles she found roaming around in the street. My wife has always wanted one of the darn things. So, I take it to our vet because I . . . I want to find out, first of all, if it's chipped. What I can find out about it, and all this stuff. So low and behold, there's a chip but we've lost connection with the people who own it. So, it's probably going to move in with us. They took the dog back there; they started working on its ears. Because a dog that's been out on the streets for a long time has got matted hair all over the place. They did all this stuff and didn't charge me a nickel. Yeah so, you still see the milk of human kindness even today, and I think it's only in San Angelo. I don't know if I'd see it elsewhere. So, anyhow, you see . . . you know what happens in San Angelo may be an anomaly based on other parts of the country. I never felt comfortable in Monterey because the people didn't make me feel comfortable. You know, I avoided going downtown unless I wanted to go and eat or something, but I had absolutely no friends downtown. And , it wasn't as though I was trying to make any because there we were at the base, and the military kind of hung together, you know. So . . .

LAMBERSON: So, then you came back . . . you came back to San Angelo? Or you came to San Angelo—not back to San Angelo—came to San Angelo to Goodfellow. And then you left the military to go to school here, right? And then reenlisted? Or were you still in the service?

MILLER: Oh, I was still in the service. They call it a . . . let me see just a second. It's "Operation Bootstrap."

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

MILLER: Essentially, I was down to thirty hours. The big decision I had to make was they wouldn't let me get a degree in English, but they would in history.

LAMBERSON: Okay. It's better anyways, you know.

MILLER: I like them both so it worked out well.

LAMBERSON: No, I know. Okay, so you got your degree in history and then you went back to more full time. And then you went over to Thailand?

MILLER: Almost as soon as I got done here, I went to Thailand.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so, during that period of time, of course, the U.S. . . . you know, the Vietnamization is taking place. The U.S. is kind of officially exiting the war. What was your thinking about that?

MILLER: Well, I stepped in at a somewhat unusual time. I've got this . . . this period where I'm training people to go over there. And this is from '72 . . . well actually, '71 to the end of '74. So, I'm training people to go to these units and do their job. So, I get over there, you know, and you kind of get . . . because the peace treaty had been signed in '73, okay. And . . . but there were an awful lot of signs that it wasn't . . . you know, again, Ford's end . . . it . . . the Vietnamese figured the game out really well. They did an excellent game. First of all, they paid attention to Washington and the revolution. If you keep the British over here long enough, and you don't lose the big battle, they'll get tired and go away. And they did that with us. And the same thing happened with the Vietnamese and the way they read the change in the presidency. Did Nixon have the power to do things? Did Ford? No. And he . . . he could have gone before Congress all day long and said, "I want to send the B-52s," and they weren't going to do that. There's no doubt in my mind that after the . . . the peace talks and the Geneva Accords in '73 that for the next two years, they knew exactly what was happening in terms of supplies down South and getting back . . . getting ready for . . . it's . . . it is impossible to have hidden that from what we were doing.

So, do I think Henry Kissinger knew exactly where this thing was heading? Yeah, he knew; they all knew. It's . . . it's just . . . it's a fact. And you know, the . . . again, the unfortunate thing is, I don't even know what the deadline is for release of all that information. But I think some American public thirty or forty years from now is going to be horrified with the information that was available that we didn't . . . we simply didn't act upon. That shows exactly where it was all headed, you know. You know, there are Benghazis of the past that will come up and, you know . . . I don't know who's doing anything with that information. You say there's one thing that's an FOA; that's one tiny bit of information that somebody's got on it. But there are warehouses of data that was pulled from the, you know, . . . from the airwaves in Vietnam that gave you a far . . . but I don't know how in the world anybody'd get started on it. It's just a mass of information that . . . you know, the paper will slowly deteriorate and rot away and the microfiche will somehow fall apart and nobody will ever see it. But you know, for instance, this thing that . . . that our leaders knew exactly that the Vietnamese weren't stopping, and that they had every intention of . . . of acting because we weren't . . . you know, that's . . . I don't know if anybody's ever looked upon that as a possible academic study or what. It should be, but I don't know how in the world you would get into it.

I don't know how in the world this FOA thing happened. This . . . this thing on Vin Windows is extremely interesting. I saw it online; it's out of a publication. So, if anybody's gone to jail for it,

I haven't heard about it. But the other one, the FOA request . . . well, that FOA request, I mean, you and I can pretty much read it, as far as I know. The only thing that's been redacted in it is some peoples' names. So, you get a kick out of it. It gives you an idea of the fusion between intel and other data. It's rather intriguing. Well, I have to tell you this too. This was long before I got in the war, but it was a friend of mine who . . . who was in there during the very early days of the war. And he was . . . he was located at a place called "Monkey Mountain," and it's near Da Nang. And I've talked to him and asked him a lot of questions about that early part of the war because I don't know what happened, and it's intriguing to see what did happen. And he told me what he was doing over there when he was there, and what he was doing was working weather traffic, okay. It was uh North Vietnamese weather traffic, and it was really important. And you're saying to yourself, "What's important about weather?" Well, you have to understand, again, that we're talking about so many years ago when we didn't have all these satellites in orbit, monitoring weather and all that. And the best information we could get to support our military operations was what they were looking at. So, we were using their own weather to plan what we were doing with aircraft. You know, nowadays, everybody's got weather. You know, you can go to Google Earth and take a look at practically anything, but that's one thing you can do with intel. And this thing here is out of their own mouths, they're telling you things that you can fuse together with radar picture and so on. And it's . . . I find it extremely interesting. I mean . . . but, you can have that if you'd like.

LAMBERSON: That'd be great.

MILLER: And this is a picture of a young guy in a flight suit. That's the aircraft we flew in the background. And—

LAMBERSON: Oh, wow.

MILLER: And then I've got a helmet bag there, and the satchel is all of our . . . well, it's one of our cases of intel, because we had to go airborne with a lot of information on them. Do you know what "order of battle" stuff is?

LAMBERSON: No.

MILLER: Okay, from a ground pounder's sense, it's . . . it's a . . . "Where are all the tanks? Where are all the men? What do they have?" Well, from an intel order of battle, "Where have people been operating frequency-wise? What times of day do they come up? What codes do they use?" and so on. So. we would have to carry our own satchel of information along with us. Otherwise, you know, you'd just be poking around in the dark, kind of thing. And you know, call signs and that kind of information that would be critical to knowing who in the world was passing information. If he says, "kilometer marker sixty-seven," where . . . what is he talking about? Where is he? Is it . . . which road? You know, if you don't have that information, you don't know what you're doing.

LAMBERSON: Right. Of course.

MILLER: Anyhow—Oh, I brought something else! It's just a construction block, but it's the most valuable construction block I've ever known. This is a brick out of the Hanoi Hilton.

LAMBERSON: Oh, wow.

MILLER: This doesn't belong to me; I borrowed it for today. So . . . because it . . . you know, most wars, you have something you can . . . you can say sort of signifies what people went through. In the Civil War, you've got battlefields all over the United States that give you a little bit of a picture, but we don't have that. A friend of mine was going by the location of the Hanoi Hilton, and they were knocking part of it down. They . . . they have built a museum over there to their great victory over us, and all that. But anyhow, they were knocking down another part of it because they didn't find any use for it, so my friend goes by and— Okay, are you familiar with that phrase "One man's trash, another man's treasure?" Well, he goes up to these guys who were knocking the thing down. He says, "Hey, you guys want those bricks?" They said, "No, you can take as many as you want." So, he loaded up a pallet, and Senator McCain's got two of these. Do you know who Pete Peterson is?

LAMBERSON: No.

MILLER: He was the first ambassador to Vietnam.

LAMBERSON: Oh, right. Okay.

MILLER: Okay, he's got one of these things too, and some of the other POWs. My group, we were blessed with this character who got a pallet of these things, and he gave them to us, So we . . . we have historically presented these at our get-togethers. It's kind of funny; I actually have a poem written about a brick. Robby Burns would love to hear it for sure: "Ode to a Brick." But the same character . . . the first one we presented, I thought he was . . . I thought he was going have a heart attack on us. Because you know, to . . . to some people, it's a big deal but to other people, who you know were there and participated, it has a lot more meaning to it than a stupid construction brick. So, anyhow . . .

LAMBERSON: Wow. So, tell me a little bit more about your work for the MIA and POW stuff. What was that like? And what were you guys doing?

MILLER: Well—

LAMBERSON: So, this was in the '90s?

MILLER: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Right, okay.

MILLER: The effort had been going on for a long time.

LAMBERSON: Of course.

MILLER: And you actually have an alumnus, I told you, who . . . he . . . he can just tell stories forever that I don't even know anything about. He was there for . . . he was . . . he was there as the first U.S. representative in-country. And then of course, as we established relations, it all changed. But he was there because we had just a low-level thing going on. It was originally called "JCRC," Joint Recovery something or another. JCRC[5], Joint Casualty Resolution . . . Committee, or something like that, and they changed it into Joint Task Force Full Accounting. And now they've changed into something else. They've morphed into a . . . their effort with the JCRC and the Joint Task Force Full Accounting was simply Vietnam, okay; Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia. But the new one is also . . . because you know, Papua, New Guinea, we keep turning over B-24s down there, and you know, you got to do something with them. Or a crash in China, that was somebody flying a hump during World War II and you know, every once in a while, you know, . . . yeah. P-51 crash in . . . in Germany that they'll find, or something like that. So . . . but this guy I know, he was with them even long after I left. I think he retired around, maybe 2008 or so. And he . . . he is good. His Vietnamese is better than mine because he lived in-country. That always helps your language abilities. Very, very good. I don't know if he'd want to talk to you or not. I wish he would. You'd need several days to talk to him. He had personal relationships with many of the Vietnamese officers over there who had been our adversaries during that time frame. I just don't know if he would be willing to talk to you. Again, I found it intuitively appealing. We had access to all the records that anybody knew about, which, you know . . . and they were very good about it. All the shoot-down logs from the Vietnamese, all the material that was taken off of folks after they were found, you know. We had dog tags and I.D. cards forever. It's kind of a dirty business though. It was a cottage industry that has developed over there of people who will lead you to an American body, and they're looking for money or getting out of the country, you know. Do you happen to know who Sean Flynn is?

LAMBERSON: No.

MILLER: Errol Flynn's son?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, yes.

MILLER: You know he was lost in the war?

LAMBERSON: I did not know that.

MILLER: He was a freelance reporter in the area and he was in Cambodia. And I mean, muy macho, big . . . big Harley Davidson motorcycles driving down the road, you know; it's got "adventure" written all over it. He got grabbed by them and then he disappeared. And you know, we had folks that thought they were about that close to it and then discovered that this guy is just giving them a song and a dance, trying to get money out of them. Most folks who showed up to a hotel with a femur in their hands, they're saying it's an American. And you know, Asians and Hispanics and Anglos, they all have their different kind of bone structures. You know, Asians, shorter. It's . . . it's a dirty business. We were successful over there. There were a few people who I can say that their remains have come back to their families as a result of what I did; far

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less than what Keith Flannigan did. Keith . . . like I said, Keith was on top of it a long time. It's interesting business. It's still going on today; it's sad. Fortunately, technology's supportive of it, you know. DNA has been pretty good. Have you seen some of the things they're doing with DNA testing?

LAMBERSON: A little bit. We had . . . we interviewed another person who did some recovery of someone in . . . who was actually shot down in Cambodia. So, we've talked to a few people related to that case.

MILLER: It doesn't always resolve it to the satisfaction of families, though. There . . . there's no two cases alike. It's just extraordinary. You know, some of them, as much as anybody, would want to try and find something out about them. You know, "Charlie was sitting on the ammo dump when I went up," or "he crashed in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin and he's now in two-thousand feet of water." Where do you start? They . . . they've tried some underwater operations over there on a B-52. They never found anything. Went out into Laos one time and you can see remains of the aircraft there. In fact, I picked up a piece of flight suit that was there. And they had dug these archaeological trenches, and I swear to goodness, it was about half the size of a football field. They had dug these— You know what it looks like?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, of course.

MILLER: They dug, and dug, and dug, Well, I'll tell you the circumstances of the crash. It was a gunship, AC-47. Plane crashed in the middle of the night. There's not really any hostiles around, but there's villagers around. So, they go out there to see the crash, and for sake of argument, they found four guys over here, and they buried them. They found four more, they buried them. Okay, go out—and this is night time—tgo out the next day, they find one more body, they bury it in the middle, okay. So, you know, with the assistance of a lot of Laotian workers, they're digging these trenches and digging these trenches, they found one tooth. Guess whose tooth they found? They guy in the middle. Never found anything . . . the boss I had over there at the time—and they had been out on many digs on this one. And like I said, it was enormous what they had dug. And he said, "We have tried all we can. We cannot do any more. Call this closed." And . . . and then you get in this picture where you're returning the remains of a loved one, and it's a tooth. That isn't going to make anybody happy. Co-mingled remains. Planes don't go in like this [gestures], they go in like this [gestures], and they bury themselves deep. And the . . . what you find many years later is badly shattered remains that are too small for DNA testing. Well, okay, you've got every reason to believe these are human remains. You've got dog tags; you've got, you know, the gun the guy signed out for. You got all this stuff. That is them, but you can't separate it. So, you do a joint grave, and that doesn't make people happy either.

I have different feelings about it than a lot of the other people involved in it. We have left people in our wars all over this planet, and they're still there. And we're not bringing them home from the beaches of Normandy where they're buried. They're there, and these guys are lost and, you know, you can't say the United States government hasn't tried. This is . . . this, without a doubt, is the most phenomenal effort of returning our guys home that has ever happened in the entire history of mankind. And yet, for some people, it's not good enough. And you wish you could . . . I don't know a heartless person that would . . . would say, "Yeah, we shouldn't do this." It's

good to do this, but at what point do you stop? You know, I can see where—and there are so many stories—a guy, a Marine, is going to go out and do his laundry (wink, wink). He's all out by himself. He doesn't get jumped by the NVA, he gets jumped by some thieves because he's trying to get friendly with some young lady. Okay, and it's all a setup. They . . . and they kill him, and then they bury him. And we go out there, how many years later? And here are these guys that did it. They know exactly, you know, . . . "yeah, we did it." We're not taking them to court or anything. "Where'd you bury him?" They take you to a field and they say, "Well, he's somewhere out here in one-hundred square meters." Well, where do you start? "Oh yeah, let's cut all the trees and vegetation down and go look." No, it's ridiculous, you know. And that story was repeated time and time again. You wish you could do a better job. You're happy when you do have some successes. And some of it is—what's the term I'm looking for?—serendipitous. You go wandering through the village and you catch some old guy and you say, "Hey, do you know where there's any Americans buried?"

"Oh yeah," and they take you right to the place. And then you get others that are buried in a Vietnamese cemetery and nobody's going to let you in there to do that. So, it's . . . it was extremely interesting. It was, at times, very frustrating, and at the same time, very rewarding in another way, you know. I got to look through all this information that was extremely interesting to me. I enjoyed it. And Gary Flannigan, he is the world's greatest expert at it.

LAMBERSON: Yeah?

MILLER: Oh, yeah.

LAMBERSON: So, were you mostly like, talking to people to do research or sifting through documents?

MILLER: No, no, no. I didn't even have to go there most of the time.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay. Okay. You were here?

MILLER: I was . . . we actually had . . . it was a funny thing. It was sort of like an unclassified intel effort. We had all this stuff, and you know, we were applying our intelligence skills to it. But it wasn't what you would call "classified" because you know, it was . . . yeah. So, I just sat in Hawaii doing this most of the time.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

MILLER: In fact, I have a funny story about . . . I went to South . . . I went to these digs one time out there. You know, it was—actually twice, twice. But the first time I went out, I was going to go to Bangkok, Vientiane, and then Hanoi. So, I'm thinking I'm going to get some great oriental food; this is going to be terrific. So, I get to Bangkok, and I ran into two old friends of mine who were Vietnamese linguists, and we went out and had wiener schnitzel in Bangkok. I'm thinking "this isn't right." We got to Vientiane, and the host we had up there took us out for Italian. It's going downhill, bad, but I get to Hanoi. We're going to have some good—have you ever seen Vietnamese girls wearing sombreros at a Mexican restaurant? [Both laugh]

LAMBERSON: I have not.

MILLER: But uh, it was . . . it was fun going there. I've been to Ho's Mausoleum, or whatever they call it. That was kind of neat.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILER: And Sword Lake. You know the one where the B-52 is in there, sticking out of the water? Went to some of the, you know, like I said, some of the digs out there. There's . . . at the time, they were still looking for the last B-52 that we lost during the Christmas Bombing Raids. And we had a B-52 and they dug, and they dug, and they dug, and they dug, and it was a great crater. I mean . . . because when these things hit, it's surprising how deep into the ground they actually go. And down at the bottom of the hole, they got some parts out and it was the wrong B-52. It was one that the guys had successfully bailed out of. So, it wasn't that one, but it's crazy too. When you work with all three nations, their attitude about what you're trying to do and their willingness to help was . . . was different, was completely different. I'm convinced the Vietnamese gave us everything they knew they had, but that doesn't mean there isn't more information out there. It's just that they don't know where the heck it is, you know?

LAMBERSON: Right.

MILLER: The Cambodians—at that time, the leadership of the Cambodians were, in some cases, Americans because they were the bunch that headed out under the Khmer Rouge. They got out, plunked themselves down in California or wherever, and went about an American style of life. Then the Khmer Rouge fell and these guys all moved in again. So, they would let you do anything. I mean we . . . we had boats, okay. Are you familiar with the . . . the Mayaguez Incident?

LAMBERSON: I don't think so. Am I? Maybe. I don't think so.

MILLER: Oh, this was an interesting one. Okay, the war is over, right? Everybody's moving out. Things are . . . and we had a cargo ship, the Maya . . . the U.S.S. . . . the Mayaguez was going through there and was captured by the Khmer Rouge. Well, we had about a three or four-day war down there. You're not familiar with this?

LAMBERSON: I don't think so.

MILLER: Really? Okay, well it's on the computer. You can look it up.

LAMBERSON: I will.

MILLER: Look up "the Mayaguez Incident." So, it was after the war. Our command and control folks have pretty well scattered. They're trying to run this out of the one that was in Thailand and free these crews. The Khmer Rouge were nasty people, so we basically pounded them. You'll have to look it up or read it. I don't know why I got on . . . why did I get onto that point? This was—

LAMBERSON: You were telling me about their . . . their helpfulness during the search for the POWs.

MILLER: Oh, yeah. We lost some Marines down there. The helicopter crashed just off the beach. And of course, here we are with this POW and MIA effort. Well, there were some of those guys who hadn't made it back, so we had . . . they had to go down there and search for those guys. But the Khmer—excuse me—the government at the time was this mixed American thing we had going. We actually had a dredge ship that went in there; the U.S. dredge ship was allowed to go in there and do this kind of stuff. So . . . but the Laotians, on the other hand, are a hard people. They wanted something for their efforts; they want a lot for their efforts. And you know, it's their country. If you want to go in there, and you want to look for these aircraft that you lost in Laos, you're essentially stuck with what they're doing to you. So, they were the worst of the bunch. I thought the Vietnamese effort . . . I thought that they were as helpful as they could be. Because you know, nowadays with the hegemony from China, we're looking pretty good, you know. So, it's a funny relationship. This Gary Flannigan guy talked about it on occasion. They're becoming quite capitalistic in Vietnam, and that's good, up to a point. You start saying anything against the government, then you've got problems on your hands. So, there's a lot that people can do there if they just don't, you know, cross that . . . that barrier. And you know, as a result, I think . . . hell. look at all the shirts and tennis shoes and junk that we're buying off of them. And they are a hard-working people. If . . . if I could say anything about the people in Hanoi . . . it was really interesting. It looked like they hadn't put in a paint job since the French left in '54. Just everything was deteriorating. But, everything was energetic. Things were happy, people were doing things, little shops lined up, some guy has got a generator company, somebody's running batteries. You know, so, I found that interesting. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Yes, that's interesting. So, okay . . . so, let— What about your time between, right? So in '74, '75, you were back in Thailand, right?

MILLER: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Was your family with you then or—

MILLER: No.

LAMBERSON: They stayed in the U.S.?

MILLER: The kids were little. There were folks over there . . . it was what you would call a "remote tour," okay. There were people who brought their families over there, but you're essentially on the economy, you know. You're living with whatever they think is suitable housing. And this place Nakhon Phanom is—I've heard people refer to it as the armpit of Thailand, okay—it's pretty rough out there. I saw people living in refrigerator crates.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

MILLER: Yeah, so it gets pretty rough. So, I wouldn't have brought my family out there.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: And there was . . . there were folks over there that I . . . I'd never seen anybody get it, but I heard people got malaria over there and so on. So, you know, you're on your own. So, I didn't bring them over there; they stayed in San Angelo for one year. Then . . . again, I had a promise from someone about "Don't worry about it, Larry. When you get back . . . when you get out of that tour, we'll send you back to Goodfellow." Hey, the war's over with. We're not training Vietnamese linguists anymore. They don't need me at Goodfellow. So, I went to Fort Meade, Maryland. NSA.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay. And how long were you there?

MILLER: I was at NSA for four years.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: Yeah, I loved it. Had a great time. That was a good job.

LAMBERSON: Yeah? Why'd you love it?

MILLER: Well from the family standpoint, you're between Washington and Baltimore, but you're not in either. So, you can take advantage of both and enjoy both, but you're not living in . . . because that area, you didn't have to go very far to be in a cornfield or something—although people have a tendency to think of this megalopolis that goes all the way across. No. So, you know, we just loved the stuff . . . I would have to pry my kids out of the Air and Space Museum and, you know, we did as much as you could, reasonably. The kids were involved in this sport and that sport, and we went to the ethnic festivals in Baltimore and dragged them to Antietam. Yeah, you know, everything in the area. So, I was standing on the coldest day in D.C. at President Carter's inauguration parade. We . . . we just kind of enjoyed everything we did there. We saw the Christmas tree get lighted at Christmas; the kids remember that. They were in, you know, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, that kind of stuff. So, it was an excellent tour.

LAMBERSON: That's great. And what did you do while you were there?

MILLER: About the same thing I did every place else.

LAMBERSON: Sure. And then where did you go?

MILLER: That was when I got commissioned.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: I went back to San Antonio for that.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And then my . . . my in-laws lived in San Antonio, so when we moved from Ft. Meade, my wife and the two kids just stayed at their house while I was going through training.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And then we went to Okinawa together. But that was interesting, too because the first time we were in Okinawa, it was essentially under U.S. control. It was known as a "high commissioner." This is an antique from World War II. We were essentially in charge of Okinawa. We spent U.S. currency there and we drove on the correct side of the road. And then when I got back there, it was under Japanese control, which was different. So, we were using Yen downtown. There are a few interesting things about—I wasn't there when this happened—when Japanese control came in. So, they had to switch to the other side of the road because the Japanese drive on the same side of the road as the English. And it all happened in one night, okay. And they didn't change the buses.

LAMBERSON: Oh my gosh.

MILLER: So, people were having to get out into traffic, because we'd get out on the right-hand side of the bus.

LAMBERSON: Yeah, of course.

MILLER: So, it was pandemonium. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: Wow. I would imagine. That's crazy. And did you like it there your second tour? And your family—

MILLER: The first time, it was more rustic. A lot of caliche roads in Okinawa, you know. It was—let me see—1945 to '69. So, you got that time, but then the Japanese stepped in and they poured a lot of infrastructure money in. So, the roads were now paved. It was a different way of looking at Okinawa than the way it was originally. I always thought the Okinawans weren't too crazy about the Japanese, and some of them may have preferred having the Americans back. In some ways, I'm not sure . . . some of the Okinawans don't have a lot of love lost with the Japanese because they're a different people. So . . . but we enjoyed it both times. Second time around, again, the kids got engaged in a lot of sports stuff. The first time around, the daughter was . . . my daughter was born in Okinawa, so we were just taking care of a baby for a while there.
So . . . but all in all, it was . . . it was fun. The kids still remember it with a lot of good memories and all. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Sure. And how long were you there the second time?

MILLER: Seemed like every time I was there for two years, I had to leave.

LAMBERSON: Okay, yeah.

MILLER; I don't know what it was. I got curtailed to go to Oklahoma. So . . . and then I served with the same folks. Remember I told you before I was going to be a scope dope on an AWACS?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Well, I got to serve with the AWACS people.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

MILLER: They're good people and I like them. Much more comfortable aircraft to fly in. So, anyhow . . .

LAMBERSON: Yeah, yeah.

MILLER: And then from there, we went to . . . we came down here to Goodfellow.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

MILLER: And then I left here to go to Crete. So, I did get my wife to the Parthenon, eventually. So, we had a good time in Crete.

LAMBERSON: Yeah?

MILLER: Little island. We never saw all of it. Okay, this is a story and you'd like this. Are you familiar with Santorini?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Okay, you know the explosion, tsunami—

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: —in 1450 B.C.?

LAMBERSON: Yes, vaguely. It's been a long time since I thought about the 1450s, but yes.

MILLER: I'll draw a picture.

LAMBERSON: Okay!

MILLER: [Shuffles paper] That must sound good. So, Crete, and Santorini is over here. Okay and the island goes kaboom, little island over here called "Dia." And we lived pretty much in the middle of it, okay. Well, Jacques Cousteau had been out to this little island of Dia about twenty years before. And the tsunami rolled across here and rolled across Crete. Probably didn't end the Minoan civilization, but it didn't help it much. Well, there's this little island out here and it's got

a little . . . little port in it. Awnd apparently there were a lot of merchant vessels in the port that day when the tsunami rolled over Dia island. So, it basically smashed all the boats down into the bottom. Well, he went out there and uncovered this thing that he calls "a reef of pottery," okay. Well, we got a zodiac, it's only a little way's off. "Let's go out and take a look." So, we went out there. The water was the most crystal clear I have ever seen in my life. And I could free dive at that time; I was much thinner. And all I wanted to do was go down there and touch a piece of pottery that had been there since 1450 B.C. It was cool.

LAMBERSON: That's amazing.

MILLER: Yeah. He basically covered it all up because as you can imagine with the Greek civilization, they have a lot of stuff they know where it is. But what's the sense of digging it up because we already have plenty in the museums? So, there are areas over there . . . there's one right in the middle. Apparently, it was the capital of the province that included Libya at the time. And there was evidence of basically every civilization that's ever passed through there, you know, from the paleolithic times right up to World War II. There are bullet holes in the side of this . . . this one building where they shot partisans during the war. But there's . . . there's something from the Greeks, the Minoans, the everybody in this one spot. I mean, you're standing there, surrounded by essentially . . . maybe 6 or 7,000 years of man's presence, which was cool.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

MILLER: Yeah. So, yeah, we . . . we had a great time. Been all over Kenosis and all the other things over there. We had a great time. And then we left there and went to Osawa, Japan; Northern Japan. Had an equally good time there. It's cold country up there, real cold. So, I learned how to ski.

LAMBERSON: That's fun.

MILLER: Yeah. We didn't short on good tours, you know. And when I tell people the last tour I had was Hawaii, and I just . . . they don't have a bit of sympathy for me at all.

LAMBERSON: Sure. I can't imagine that.

MILLER: Yeah, so we went from Greece, to Northern Japan, to Hawaii.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

MILLER: So, the service was good to me.

LAMBERSON: That's good. And so how . . . let's just—to kind of think of about your service holistically, so to speak. Were there any things that sort of stuck you as to how the military changed over the time that you were a part of it? Or anything that's particularly striking about military culture that changed over time?

MILLER: Yeah, there's been an enormous change. I don't think I'd enjoy it nowadays. A lot of us veterans kind of regard it as a one-mistake Air Force now. When . . . you know, we knew people who made mistakes or we made mistakes ourselves and survived them. Classic example, I know one NCO, he made it to Chief Master Sergeant. but in his younger days he took out a section of a perimeter fence when he was driving drunk. So . . . you wouldn't survive that nowadays; it wouldn't happen. You know, and I don't mean to say that we should be driving drunk or anything, but we saw people who made mistakes and we kind of knocked them back in line and got them going again. Nowadays I think it's a far crueler service to be involved in, you know. I think there has been a philosophic change. I see it in a lot of ways; one of them is just absolutely stupid to me. Not everybody who gets trained in a language can hear anything, okay. There are some people who have got an ear like a piece of steel, and they never make it. Well we . . . during my time, we had people like that and we'd find another job. We just spent a ton of money on them to teach them something about intel and we did a clearance on them. So, let's put them to something else. They're intelligent people and they tried. It wasn't as though they were gold-bricking their way through. But there's been a—I hear it's stopping but it started for a while, and I couldn't figure out why it was happening. They were taking people and they put them through thirty-seven weeks of language school out there and—they started going through Goodfellow—and they weren't successful, so they booted them out of the service. And you sit there and say . . . I mean, that's a complete utter waste of money. And some of those people could have done another skill very well. And, and they would have, you know, made us proud. But now we're booting . . . I heard it changed because it's just dumb, you know.

Of course, one of the good things that's happened is a lot more women in, okay, and I think that's been a very good benefit to everyone. Took us a while to get used to it, but . . . you know. I come from the days when guys have their desk decorated with pinups, you know, and that was going to go. And I saw some cases . . . you know, women cry, you know. And I . . . I'll never forget when I was teaching out here, they were putting through some of the first Russian classes. And this person I knew—I won't call him a friend—but he was counseling this young Airman, a lady, in front of everybody, okay. And she starts crying, mascara is flowing. We're talking about . . . and you know, there's a better way to do that. There's a whole lot better way to do that, you know. I was taught that you praise in public and you counsel in private, and he violated that rule. But we all had to learn how to work with women. And I'll say I'm in that band too, because there was a natural tendency to circle the wagons around the women-folk. You know what I mean? And . . . and sometimes we got stupid in doing that because if you can't carry the toolbox, you have no business in doing that. And you should be treated, you know, equally with everyone else. But it . . . but there were those moments where we were dumb. I mean, just absolutely dumb. We would . . . we would treat a woman differently than we would a guy. And the worst case I saw was when I was at Fort Meade with NSA and we were . . . we had a thing going there. It was a swing to mid work, no days. And a young lady comes in; she was a Vietnamese linguist. So, I'm going to train her. And then I find out that her husband's a Russian linguist and he's got a day job. And she's going to have a swing to mid job. Okay, well, this is not going to be conducive to a happy home life for her, right? Well, low and behold, I turn around and she's not working for me anymore. She got a day job; she's answering a phone. Okay? She's not doing anything related to what she was trained for. You know, that was somebody else's bad. That was somebody that, you know, "Oh, well we can't treat the women this way." But I think that's been adjusted. I think maybe that's the best thing about it is we've made that philosophical leap from

treating women differently to treating them pretty much as an equal out there, you know. There's a four-button Air Force General now that's a woman.

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: Did you see that there's a female guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns?

LAMBERSON: I did not see that.

MILLER: Now, I don't know if she made it through the training, but she was selected for it.

LAMBERSON: I did not know that.

MILLER: And I was kind of wondering because I didn't look at it thoroughly. I just bumped into it, but I wondered if she had to meet the height requirements.

LAMBERSON: I don't know, yeah.

MILLER: I bet she did.

LAMBERSON: Presumably.

MILLER: So, she probably was a very tall person. But you know . . . you know, it sounds cliché but we have come a long way, you know. You've talked with other vets too, and I think it's . . . it's done a lot to dampen our bigotry. When I went through basic training, there was a group of us out of Florida, stuck in training with a group of Mormons from Utah and a bunch of black guys from New York City. Now this . . . this had all the elements to be ugly, and we all got along. We all served together, you know. And I think . . . I think better than a lot of people who just stuck around home. Those of us who were essentially forced into working with other people benefitted from it, you know. My brother still lives in Tampa, Florida. He drops the N-word far too often for me. I can't stand it, and we've had some rows over it. But I see the difference between him and me, and I see that with a lot of other people. I don't know if you've noticed that with vets or not, but I think we kind of get past that in a lot of ways. That doesn't mean that it isn't there. It just means that we've learned a lot along the way and we may have our prejudice, but I'm not sure we have our bigotry and racism. A lot of our prejudices we pick up when we're younger and we're affected by our parents. That kind of thing. And we kind of carry them around with us, but we don't act upon them. That's . . . that's one of the better things about the military life, too is you damn well better get along with people, you know. You damn well better treat people with respect. So, I think that's been good.

LAMBERSON: When you were in the military, throughout the whole swath, was there ever any sort of training or discussion of, like, race relations and actually overtly talking about that kind of thing?

MILLER: Well, I think they went overboard sometimes. You know, in the early 1970s they made a push on that. And I'm sure they do it nowadays with women's issues, where they try and

jam something down your throat and everybody just kind of feels forced into it. They kind of did that with us. Plus—you probably noticed this, too, from the era of the ’60s—with the ’60s and ’70s, the military . . . some things just got out of whack. An awful lot of drug usage out there. And it wasn’t limited to, you know, guys that were in the field in Vietnam, but it was happening elsewhere. And it was just . . . the command structure didn’t seem to want to deal with it in most cases; they just wanted to ignore it as much as possible. It was out there. The same thing with, I don’t know, standards in general. Some people were afraid to ask some people to get a haircut, you know. It was the era of the afros, and they were out there, you know. You couldn’t hardly put a hat on people. So, that was a strange era. And you know, that’s part and parcel with the Vietnam War when you think about it. It’s just kind of like my discussion with this general about close air support, you know. There were innumerable things that were going wrong simultaneously with society. And that doesn’t mean we haven’t made some gains, you know. I lived in segregated Florida. I graduated from high school in ’64 with no black people in the school, okay. I walked by the black school every day. It was the world that was delivered to us, so we must be right. You know what I mean?

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: But I had also gone to school—to a parochial school in Buffalo—with black kids. So, in the back of my mind I knew there was some weird thing going on here. My wife really suffered from it because she lived in the Azores, and it was just everybody in there, you know. Truman went ahead and integrated the military in ’47 or whatever. I saw . . . she had everybody. It was essentially a rainbow classroom. Everybody was there and the head cheerleader was black, you know. But I saw chain gangs in Georgia when we drove down there, which was nothing but institutionalized slavery. So . . . and I . . . but I have to admit, I am very happy that I moved out of there and I did become part of this bigger thing, you know. Which . . . you know, that’s another reason why people join the service, too is they want to be part of something larger than themselves, no matter what it is. So, you get the opportunity to travel, excitement and adventure, being part of something bigger, a degree of patriotism, perhaps. I had a . . . a weak moment when I was younger; I was going to join the Marine Corps. And I thought, “Oh my goodness” when I think of what I wanted to do.

LAMBERSON: And why did you join? Why did you enlist?

MILLER: I think it was I needed to get away from home.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

MILLER: I’d been through . . . I was going to college there. I was hanging in but, you know, we weren’t getting along. We just weren’t getting along.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: So, it was one of those things. It was bound to happen, you know. I . . . I . . . I enjoyed the service. I would have stayed longer if I could have, but I couldn’t. You know, it’s one of those things; I had to leave. So . . . and I . . . and I think the way I finished it up—with that tour,

doing the POW and MIA effort—was probably one of the best things that happened to me. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it kind of tied up things at the end, so to speak. So, that was good.

LAMBERSON: So, do you have . . . as I was telling you before, we started . . . one of the ideas behind the funding that does this project is to kind of make some connections and to be thinking about the military today for . . . you know, through history. And so, do you have any sort of thing . . . advice that you would give to young men and women who are joining the military now? Any sort of thoughts on new enlistees, so to speak?

MILLER: Well, a lot of promises have been broken, unfortunately. You know, my retirement is different from the retirement these kids are getting. The medical care I'm getting is entirely different from what a new kid could get. In some respect, I'd be a little bit reluctant . . . I . . . I am not a fan of the all-volunteer force. I don't know what your feeling is. You're just going to sit there and listen to me, right?

LAMBERSON: I am. [Laughs] Yes!

MILLER: You've got to figure out how you feel about it. It bothers me that everybody lauds Carter for this effort. But you know there are people in this country who can go years without thinking about that poor sucker who's sleeping in a hole in the ground someplace over there. One of the . . . you know, one of the best things about the World War II effort is everybody was in it. You even got the little rascals that were hunting out the steel and aluminum cans, and you've got folks putting a gold star or a blue star in their window you know. And some elements of that came back. I had a friend of mine who—she had a son who was serving, and I guess the blue star is the one for serving and the gold star is if they were lost in combat. But essentially, we are running a mercenary force of sorts. It's not everybody is doing their part, it's a very select few are doing it, and "Oh I can have a real life because I don't have to go." That troubles me. We haven't been faced with a more general war than we've had. And I don't know how it's going to . . . it's going to go down if they have to start running the tumblers together and pulling numbers out. And now they're thinking about drafting . . . potentially drafting women. So, I think the American public was sold on a very poor deal with the all-volunteer force. Now, tell me how you feel about it. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: Well, I will be happy to tell you that. Do you have anything else you want to add, though, before we go to that?

MILLER: I think I would be somewhat reluctant because folks keep getting put in harm's way, and I don't know that anybody seriously cares about them. Don't have that many people in Congress who served. Do have a small number of them whose children have served, like Biden's served over there and a few others. But I . . . I just don't know that they're totally caring about putting people into harm's way. If you go to war, you're going to lose people; we all recognize that as a fact. But to . . . to waste people is a terrible thing. You know, this whole Iraq thing—and I'm a very conservative person. I imagine you've figured that out to a degree. To walk away from that, the way the current administration has walked away from it, I think it's a bitter pill for the military. You know, it's a question of "Why did we do this?" We lost lives and treasure because of this and we simply walked away from it. And not to say it should fall in the realm of

what we did with Japan and Germany after the war, where we're still there and Korea, too. I don't know that that would have worked out. But I think there was . . . there was . . . there was a period there they could have perhaps—I only say perhaps because dealing with Islamic nations is entirely different from working with everybody else—but perhaps there was a window where we could have stabilized things to a degree, and we walked away from what could have been. So . . . and as a result, I think people question, "Why did we get all those people killed for?" You know . . .

LAMBERSON: Sure, yes. Okay. Well, thank you.

MILLER: Well, how do you feel?

LAMBERSON: I . . . I'm going to tell you that, but I'm going to turn off the tape if that's okay.

MILLER: Oh, okay.

LAMBERSON: Okay. I'll cut it out. [Laughs]

[Recording paused and resumed]

MILLER: How do I feel now about all those people?

LAMBERSON: Yes.

MILLER: And that's something that . . . you know, there are still folks who, if you had lit off to Canada, you were the lowest scum of the earth. One of my personal heroes is . . . isn't most everybody's, but it's Mohammad Ali. He stuck around; he went to jail for his convictions. That tells me something. But I . . . I don't fault anybody for how or what they did during the Vietnam War, because we were thrown into a totally untenable situation. You had to do something. You know, there are people who shot their finger off to avoid service, you know. I knew people that, you know, put something under your armpit that creates a feverish condition, folks that would put something in their eardrum. There were people who did that. Folks who got married to avoid things. Imagine the millions who stayed in college for no other reason than to avoid serving. It was just a totally . . . there was nothing wrong with the draft, except for the fact that there were so many exemptions, and reasons, and ways people could skirt or not skirt. So, it just made a horrible mess for everybody, you know. And you know, I think that some people, they could state—not meaning to be sarcastic—abut the real suckers in the game were the ones that went over there and died. You know, here's that guy who, he lit out to Sweden and he came back home when they basically said, "you're forgiven." So, I can't fault anybody no matter what they did. You know, there are folks I knew that joined the Air National Guard and never went anywhere. You know, and nowadays you join the National Guard, you are going somewhere because we just changed the rule book, you know. But I think it would be interesting to tap into your other veterans of this time frame to see what their feelings are. And you know, I don't watch Jane Fonda movies, okay.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

MILLER: And I . . . and . . . and there are some degrees of bitterness that are there. But on the individual American and what they did or didn't do, I think we're all equally guilty and we're all equally innocent in the whole drill, you know.

LAMBERSON: Sure. Did you spend much time—well, I mean it sounds like maybe this wasn't at the forefront of you mind, but—thinking about the war in terms of, you know, this is a good thing that we're here or not a good thing? Or just thinking about it in terms of "We're here and we need to follow through"?

MILLER: Well, I think there's an evolution. Of course, during that time this concept of monolithic communism, you know.

LAMBERSON: Right.

MILER: When we . . . we don't know enough about people to make sometimes accurate decisions. We were always worried about the Chinese coming into the war like they did in North Korea. Last thing in any Vietnamese mind is having any Chinese on their doorstep or in their country. I mean, that's . . . that's worse than having the Americans for a short period of time.

LAMBERSON: Right, sure.

MILLER: But yet we lived in absolute fear that the Chinese were going to somehow become involved. And then what happens in 1978? Vietnam and China went to war with each other, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yes, that's right.

MILLER: So, we don't read history well. And the people who are the shakers and movers in D.C., they often don't know anything more than some dummy on the street. It's just he's in a position to make something happen, but he doesn't know enough about the . . . the area. And well, you know, you could say that too about the . . . the whole mess we've created in the Middle East, you know. Mubarak was not a fun guy, but he was our dirty rotten bastard. And you know, we fed him to the wolves and lots of things happened. And Saddam Hussein wasn't a particularly nice character either, but undoing that—you know they guy I give credit to? Tito. Now, this sounds funny.

LAMBERSON: [Laughing] I think it's fair.

MILLER: How in the world did Tito hold that thing together? He dies, and now we've got countries that don't look like countries over there anymore. And you just sit there and say, "How did . . . how did he keep from having this bloodbath that came on later on?" That's extraordinary to me. And you can say the same thing about Saddam Hussein who, you know . . . he was a dirty, rotten son of a gun. He was rotten, but somehow he held that together. Terror can be a wonderful thing to keep, you know, what happened over there, happening. You know, and now we've got it. So, we did it with Vietnam. We kind of did it with this one, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

MILLER: So, anyhow. All righty.

LAMBERSON: Thank you.

MILLER: Any other . . . any other questions?

LAMBERSON: No, unless there's anything else you want to share . . . or say . . . tell us.

MILLER: I had a wonderful life. I . . . you know, I hate to say I didn't enjoy the war, but I loved the people I was working with. I loved the mission we had. I loved doing that. I loved serving in the United States Air Force. I don't have one complaint about not being allowed to serve more than thirty years, you know. Sometimes I think you ought to quit while you're ahead. You know, and I think I was at that time. And the service was changing too; there were things I don't particularly like about the service nowadays, as we—

LAMBERSON: Right.

MILLER: And we've only barely touched the surface on that. I think the worst thing that's happened in there service nowadays is it's everybody out there for themselves more so than ever before. There used to be a good sense of mentoring, of people watching out for folks. I don't get that sense anymore. I think to people, that if you're not watching out for yourself, there's nobody else there, and that's a tragedy. But that's probably a failure of our society as a whole rather than just the Air Force. So, anyhow . . .