

INTERVIEW OF WALLACE E. MILLER

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Wallace E. Miller, a World War II veteran who served on Tinian, has kindly volunteered to assist us in our historical project with respect to the Northern Marianas. We are interviewing him in Venice, Florida where he makes his home. Wally, thank you very much for being available for this purpose. Let us begin by asking where you were born and educated.
- Miller: I was born in Johnson City, Tennessee, finished high school there, and joined the Marines.
- Willens: In what year were you born?
- Miller: In 1920, October 11, 1920.
- Willens: And you went into the Marines right after high school?
- Miller: Yes.
- Willens: What year was that?
- Miller: That was in 1938.
- Willens: Where were you trained?
- Miller: I was trained at Parris Island, South Carolina.
- Willens: Did you have any specialty within the Marine Corps?
- Miller: Yes. I was in administration.
- Willens: What assignments did you have once the war began in 1941?
- Miller: Well when the war started in 1941, I was on recruiting duty in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. So then I stayed and continued on that assignment in recruiting duty until September 1943, at which time I was transferred to Camp Lejune, North Carolina for preparations to go overseas and participate in the war actively. After a short period, probably in early December, we were transported to Norfolk by train, and we embarked by troop transport in Norfolk, transited through the Panama Canal and went to Pearl Harbor.
- Willens: When did you arrive there approximately?
- Miller: I would think it was about three weeks later. Then I was in a replacement center for a while awaiting reassignment. And during that time, I took a course as a jungle warfare instructor.
- Willens: So that would have been in late 1943 or early 1944?
- Miller: That was early 1944. After a while, I'm guessing April or May, I was selected for assignment to the staff of the Island Commander for Tinian in the Mariana Islands. We were at Pearl Harbor. We were there in the planning stages for the base development of Tinian.
- Willens: So this was before there was any invasion?
- Miller: Yes. So I was there involved in that for a couple of months. We were writing standard operating procedures for the development of a base at that point in time. We already had established a map and a layout of the island, including all of the roadways, camps, and all

the facilities that would be there when it was a completed base. That planning had been done in great detail. Also the logistics support of that operation required a 90-day advance ordering for anything that had to be used in the Marianas—Tinian, Guam, Saipan, etc.—so that that process was going forward.

Siemer: The actual ordering process was going on?

Miller: Yes. At least 90 days in advance. That was what was required to load anything on the West Coast and then transit it by ship and then unload it.

Siemer: What kind of information did you have about Tinian when you got involved in this planning process?

Miller: We had everything. We had aerial photographs. We knew everything about Tinian, all the facilities that were there. We knew what the Japanese personnel consisted of in general.

Willens: Did you have any people on the ground there, any intelligence sources from within the Japanese or that you had infiltrated?

Miller: I was not privy to that information. However, I know this, that prior to the invasion, there was a radio tower there, 1500 feet high, and we wanted that for our forward base in Manus, which was relatively near there. So Naval personnel went ashore there at night and measured dimensionally the layout for the anchor bolts for that so that they could build and prepare the foundation for that in Manus. Then before the combat operation was over, they had riggers in there dismantling that tower to take it down and ship it down to Manus.

Willens: Where is Manus?

Miller: That's southwest of the Marianas. A big naval base. That was a very large naval operation base that we had there.

Willens: Not in the Philippines?

Miller: No.

Siemer: In the Admiralties?

Miller: Yes, it is in the Admiralty Island group.

Willens: What did you understand to be the purpose of the base on Tinian?

Miller: The purpose of the base was to establish an airfield and supporting facilities for the B29s to bomb Japan. Our mission there was to set up the facilities to make that possible, to support the B29 operation bombing Japan. Our command was known as the Island Command of Tinian. Our mission was to develop that air base and facilities to support the bombing of Japan, and turn it over to the Army and the Air Force as soon as our mission was completed, which we did.

Willens: Was there also a plan to use Guam for the same purpose?

Miller: Yes (and also as an advance staging lease for further naval/military operations).

Willens: Was there another team that was engaged in doing comparable planning for Guam?

Miller: Yes. There was another team doing that, and when we finished our mission there (that was around December 1944), we turned that over to the Army and the Air Force. Prior to that turnover, the B29s were beginning to come in and assemble there and set up and become operational. When we turned that command over, they transferred me to Guam.

The Sergeant Major of the base development G-4 and logistics section, which I had been involved in in Tinian, he was due for a rotation, so I just stepped into that same role there.

Siemer: What was your rank at the time?

Miller: I was Acting Sergeant Major.

Willens: Can you recall for us your first participation in the invasion of Saipan or Tinian?

Miller: Oh yes. Well in Pearl Harbor we loaded out a transport ship. We were in charge of the ship loading plan and manifest, which I helped prepare. We loaded the headquarters staff at Pearl Harbor, all of our gear and personnel, and then we went to Eniwetok. That was the rear area rendezvous/anchorage for the naval task force. We went there and joined in certain elements of that task force and lay there at anchor for possibly about 30 days until the combat operation was started in the Northern Marianas at Saipan.

Willens: You were back in Eniwetok when it began at Saipan?

Miller: Yes. We were there. After that operation started and Saipan was secured, mopping up was probably occurring at Saipan, instead of unloading an assault operation on Tinian from the ships, in that particular case, they had the landing craft there, and they just transited the channel between Saipan and Tinian. They just moved limited (lesser) numbers of these troops who had captured Saipan to Tinian, across that channel. They flew us from Eniwetok, the Island Commander's advance staff. There were about a half a dozen or so of us, General Underhill and others. I thought I had a set of those orders, but I can't find them. Anyway, we went there and landed, and then they put us in an amphibian tractor, and we transited that channel and went to Tinian.

Willens: Had Tinian been invaded by that time?

Miller: Oh, yes.

Willens: Had Tinian been rendered secure?

Miller: No. The combat operation was continuing when we landed there. The control of the northern portion of the island was in our hands, but the combat was continuing in the south end.

Siemer: What had your planning efforts determined was there at the time on Tinian?

Miller: Well there was a power station; there was a radio transmitter; there was an animal husbandry station; there were agricultural activities; there were airfields; there was a crude unloading arrangement, no formal dockage except for very small craft; and there may have been a sugar mill there. The principal use of the airfields was transiting aircraft.

Siemer: The Japanese had a big airfield there?

Miller: Yes. During the combat fleet operations in the Marianas, prior to that attack and during the operation, the Japanese Navy responded aggressively, and they were engaged in carrier combat operations. The Japanese were sending planes beyond the point of no return in order to be able to strike at our waterborne forces. So they would land there (while they had control) and refuel and then go back to their own fleet. There were many aircraft that our Navy had shot down and destroyed on the ground when they landed there to refuel. That operation became known in the fleet as a Marianas Turkey Shoot. They destroyed gross numbers of aircraft during that operation in fleet engagements—most of the Marianas, at sea, and at Guam as well. I mean it was in fact a turkey shoot.

Willens: This was before the amphibious invasion landed on Tinian? Or while that was going on?

Miller: It was both. Interestingly, the power station had reinforced concrete walls two feet thick, and it had a parapet around the top, and it had six or seven feet of dirt in there. We bombed that, and all we did was just stir up the dirt with the bombing. However, when the Navy came in there with their ship-borne naval artillery, 16" guns on the battleships and 8" guns on the heavy cruisers, they shot at that power station. I went in there after it was secure and looked at it. They had reinforcing steel in the walls, including rails from the railroad. Where the 8" shells hit that wall, there was an 8" hole on the penetrating side, but on the inside of that, spalled out a circle three to six feet in diameter where that impact knocked these chunks out. In a couple of places, I saw where an 8" penetrated a rail. It didn't go through, but it penetrated the rail and spalled that out, stripped it out of that concrete wall, broke it out and stretched it out three or four feet, and the spalling back in either opposite directions went back as far as 20 feet in each direction.

Willens: Did you reconstruct the power plant?

Miller: No, we never used that. The electrical power was provided by mobile generators during the time I was there, and probably forever.

Siemer: What was the size of the airfield that the Japanese had on Tinian?

Miller: It was medium sized. The Japanese used this to shuttle planes from Japan to their other bases in the Central and South Pacific (like "island stepping stones").

Siemer: Did you use any of it?

Miller: No. We never used it. Our aircraft combat defense was at As Lito Field at Saipan.

Willens: Do you remember approximately the date when you first put foot on Tinian?

Miller: I think it was in August.

Willens: Had you spent any time on the ground in Saipan before you went over to Tinian?

Miller: Just that day, whatever time was required to make travel arrangements. We landed at the airport, then we were transported to a dock or a beach where we got in this amphibious tractor and transited the channel across to Tinian.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of what Saipan looked like a few weeks after the invasion had taken place?

Miller: Yes. There was evidence of bombing and gunfire and heavy traffic around the beach. The airfield there was known as As Lito Field, and I think the one on Tinian was Tinker Field.

Willens: Did you have any friends who participated in the invasion of Saipan who told you about it?

Miller: No. All I knew about that was what I saw and later read.

Siemer: Where did you set up camp on Tinian?

Miller: Generally in the south end near the location where we unloaded ships. It was at the south end. We had a four-lane highway going all the way north and south from that so-called port area, all the way to the north end where the airfield was and where the other military installations were, like anti-aircraft, defense protection, etc.

Willens: How long were you on the island of Tinian?

Miller: I was there through Christmas and I think into I believe it was January when I left.

- Willens: What do you recall about the construction process? Did it proceed according to plan?
- Miller: Yes. Commodore Pete Halloran of the U.S. Navy was a Commander of the Seabees Brigade. There were also Army and Marine engineers there, engineer battalions working. The construction proceeded night and day, even under lights.
- Willens: Approximately how many men and women were engaged in that effort?
- Miller: Overall I would estimate that there were 5,000.
- Siemer: Were there any civilians on the island when you arrived?
- Miller: Colonel William Capers James was the governor of a colony of Korean nationals that the Japs had utilized as their (I would term) slave labor. There were several thousands. He later became the Director of Personnel in the Marine Corps, and he was a good friend of mine. An older gentleman. I was 25, and he was 50. He was in charge of that. We had a lot of input together. He depended on us for logistics support, and I saw him daily while I was there.
- Willens: Where there any difficulties that he encountered with the civilian population, the Okinawans and the Koreans?
- Miller: No. They had a compound. It was fenced. They subsisted on rice and navy and/or great northern beans. They made these balls every day, and they cooked down and made a soy sauce that they ate. They were farmers, a lot of them. There were a lot of sweet potatoes raised there and some sugar cane. They were no problem at all.
- Siemer: Were there any Japanese POWs there at the time?
- Miller: Yes. We had a stockade including a Japanese colonel there. Johnny Seeger, a gunnery sergeant, was the so-called brig warden. There were some interesting things going on. For example, a friend of mine, Calloway, a sergeant major of an MP battalion, was capturing Japanese booty including saki in five-gallon glass jugs, and some of it was poison. A lot of the combat kids drank that and died, hari-kari'd on it. So Calloway captured some of that, and we wanted to imbibe, so they came up with this scheme. They held this colonel and poured him full of this saki, and a couple of other guys, and they lived, so we drank it.
- Willens: Did you have a timetable for completing the base?
- Miller: Oh, yes, we did have, because it was coordinated with the delivery of the B29s.
- Willens: Is it your recollection that you accomplished the whole job within that time frame?
- Miller: Oh, yes. Because one of the things that I did, every week the construction people submitted a report to our office, and I consolidated that, and our general dispatched that report to Admiral Nimitz, a weekly construction progress report.
- Siemer: What did they start on first?
- Miller: First of all were these marginal facilities for unloading ships and this main highway, and the defense mechanisms, like setting up the defense battalions, combat readiness, in that regard. Plus some temporary airfields. You asked me the question, did we use the Japanese facilities, and yes we did, marginally and initially. But most of the aircraft defense in the early days was carrier-borne.
- Siemer: Then what did they do after they got the highway in?
- Miller: Well, we just began to work on the airfield and domicile camps, Quonset huts, things like that.

Willens: Who decided to name the streets after the streets in Manhattan?

Miller: Oh I think they were named before we left, as I recall, in Pearl Harbor.

Siemer: As a part of the plan?

Miller: Yes, I think they were. That was known as the Tattersalls Operation (top secret code name).

Willens: That was the code name?

Miller: Yes.

Willens: What is it again?

Miller: Tinian was Tattersalls.

Willens: How long were the runways that were ultimately constructed?

Miller: They were known as VLR—very long range—and they were 7800 feet long. There were four parallel strips there so that four planes could take off simultaneously or land. And interestingly, that was not paved.

Willens: The runways?

Miller: No. They weren't paved. They were coral. The surface was coral, and it had to be kept at an optimum moisture level by watering and by road grader, smoothing it, and rollers. That went on virtually around the clock. Otherwise, if it dehydrated, the wind would blow it away. But as long as it was kept at this optimum moisture, it had the density. There was some scuffing when these aircraft landed on it, of course.

Willens: Why was coral used?

Miller: It was there. That was the native material.

Siemer: And you could do it quickly?

Miller: Yes.

Siemer: What kind of tower facility or landing control facility was there?

Miller: I don't remember that really. I suppose it was just a normal standard aircraft tower, but I can't remember.

Siemer: The visibility certainly is quite good there.

Miller: Oh yes, of course.

Willens: Was the base operational when you left?

Miller: Yes.

Willens: Were planes flying in and out?

Miller: Oh, yes. There were B29s there when I left.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of when the first B29 landed on Tinian?

Miller: It would be a guess. I would think probably December.

Siemer: How many of your team who were in Hawaii actually went to Tinian and worked on the project there?

Miller: Well all of the Headquarters staff.

Siemer: How many people?

- Miller: There were approximately 400 in the Island Commander's staff.
- Siemer: Where did all those people live?
- Miller: Our headquarters was around that Japanese animal husbandry station.
- Siemer: As you came down the four-lane highway from the airfield, where was your camp in relation to the highway?
- Miller: On the right side, on the west side. That was later when we had Quonset huts and tents. Initially we were in that animal husbandry station.
- Siemer: So you took over the Japanese facility and moved in there?
- Miller: That was initially. We were in small tents then. The building we were in was one room, and the walls were louvered, and they were hinged, and it was just a little wooden hut. (This was the office for Col. Roman, Lt. Col. Bennett and me. Later our offices were in Quonset huts.)
- Siemer: Were there any animals left by the time you got there?
- Miller: Yes. There were some cattle and chickens that had gone wild.
- Siemer: Where were the stockade and the Korean internment camps in terms of that four-lane highway?
- Miller: They were on the north end on the east side, up in that region.
- Willens: Did most of your team then go over to Guam?
- Miller: No. I don't know where they went, really. The Assistant Chief of Staff at Tinian, Colonel George Reilly Rowan was going to a lend-lease military operation in Australia, and he talked about taking me with him, but that never developed. Colonel James went back to Washington and became a Major General, the Director of Marine Corps Personnel. He was the one who headed up the Korean encampment, as military governor. And Lt. Colonel Charles Bennett, who I worked with directly (he was in our staff section), went back to the States and was in the Marine Barracks Naval Base in New Orleans.
- Siemer: What kind of training or experience had you had in construction projects?
- Miller: My father was a contractor, a small contractor, and I worked in that business from when I was a teenager until I joined the Marines.
- Siemer: Had you done any construction projects before Tinian?
- Miller: I had some participation in facility construction in this camp in Pearl Harbor. It was very marginal. It was involved with some electrical wiring and supervising. Nothing certainly of any significance. But what I did principally was administration.
- Siemer: How did you organize the people who worked with you to make sure that everything was where it was supposed to be and that you'd gotten all your supplies and so on?
- Miller: The requisitions for that were developed from the users and processed through us. What we had to do was determine the levels of the requisitions and verify that the time of delivery coincided with the time of usage so as to avoid storage, etc.
- Siemer: Where was all this stuff coming from?
- Miller: West Coast ports generally. Terminal Island, the harbor facilities, Long Beach, San Pedro and a great portion would be through Oakland and San Francisco. Then the facilities up in Washington, Bremerton, the Naval establishments.

- Siemer: Once it was on ship, how long would it take to get to you in Tinian?
- Miller: If it was direct without any further unloading, it would take about three weeks I guess.
- Willens: Did you do any ordering of the basic construction materials from Hawaii before you headed off to Eniwetok?
- Miller: Well there would be some stockpiling that occurred, yes. One interesting thing: in the use of anti-aircraft defense—ordnance, shells, artillery for anti-aircraft defense—I remember once we were processing requisitions or taking steps to ensure that the level of ammunition was kept at the required level, and there was some argument that occurred about that. Our records showed that there wasn't enough ammunition in storage and available, but the anti-aircraft defense battalion wasn't ordering any, so we became suspicious of that. They fired back "What, you don't trust us?" or something like that. Colonel Mixson told me, "Order them to transfer so many rounds of ammunition from this facility to that facility." Well that smoked it out. They didn't have enough ammunition there in case of an attack. They were going to run out. Because they didn't want to handle it. In December 1944 at Christmas time, the Japs came down with Betty Bombers, that was a twin-engine medium bomber, their principal attack bombing operation. They came down from the Bonans and Iwo Jima. It was on Christmas Eve, everybody was partying. They came down and they bombed us.
- Siemer: On Tinian?
- Miller: Yes. I was in a foxhole, deep.
- Willens: Was that the first time they had tried to interrupt the construction operation?
- Miller: No. There was another time earlier when they came at noon. They came down over As Lito Field on Saipan with these Betty Bombers, and we could see the Lockheed Lightnings taking off. (I think there were 25 or so of these bombers.) We could see them taking off, and they were actually taking off and shooting these bombers down before they retracted their landing gear. They chased them back toward the Bonans, and they shot them all down. None of them ever got back to Iwo. But they came in low, and we were in this camp where we had tents and Quonset huts. I was in this foxhole, and these Betty Bombers, they were following the four-lane highway. They were going south. We saw this Betty coming, and they were low, you know, like 200 or 300 feet. We had an anti-aircraft gun there. We were watching and he was tracking. We were all hollering "Shoot, dammit, shoot, shoot, shoot!" He waited until the last moment of his ability to track, and he went boom, boom, and it exploded.
- Siemer: Right over you.
- Miller: Yes. It was virtually right over us. It exploded. The engines broke loose from the wings. They were blazing, and they tumbled for 200 or 300 yards.
- Willens: Did they do any damage to the runways?
- Miller: No. Most of the bombing that they were doing was at the harbor where the ships were anchored. But they had these little anti-personnel bombs. They were about 12" long and about 1-1/2" diameter. They were fins on the tail to give them stability instead of tumbling so that they would land nose down. There was an impact trigger on the nose that would explode them. There was a propeller arming device on the nose. When it unwound and fell off, then this thing was armed. Well they were dumping those out of the side of these aircraft.
- Siemer: So they're like anti-personnel bombs.

- Miller: Yes. That's what they were. They were anti-personnel. They were dumping them out of boxes. They were just throwing them out like this. Around our camp, they fell but they didn't have enough altitude to arm themselves. So we were out picking them up like Easter eggs the next day. Some of them did arm, but not many. Most of them just fell fallow.
- Siemer: Did the Japanese have surveillance flights that came over the island?
- Miller: Yes they did, and they were at very high altitude. We had a good program for that too. We had what was known as a Black Widow night fighter. That was a Northrop twin-engine, high-speed radar-managed aircraft. They would come in, and usually they had a bomb or two they'd toss at us. We would track them with the searchlights, and they would be at an altitude that wasn't too comfortable for the anti-aircraft, but we had the Black Widows up there too, so we didn't want to shoot them. But we would hold them and track them in this searchlight, and the Black Widows would be higher than the Japanese and they'd just swoop down and shoot them right out of the sky. So it was just a suicidal thing for the Japanese to try that. They did little more than be a nuisance.
- Siemer: Did they ever try to land any personnel—any infiltrators or anything like that?
- Miller: No, but there were stragglers there, and they were damaging. Lt. George Walz was an inspecting coordinator of facilities. He had to go afield, and one day he was in his jeep, and this Japanese ran across his trail. He had a rifle and he shot Lt. Walz right through his shoulders. So George got out and chased him. George had a cavalry revolver, some kind of a relic that he liked, and he chased this guy. He was going to shoot him, but then he was bleeding profusely and he was afraid that he'd bleed to death so he got back in his Jeep and came and got medical treatment. They patched him up and put him in a cast and shipped him out of there back to the States because he had some structural damage. But there would be evidence of these stragglers, so we'd send out a combat patrol, like a half a dozen, a dozen guys, with a sergeant. We'd capture some, and they'd bring them into intelligence. They were always hungry, and they wanted water. So we'd give them a can of C-rations, and they didn't understand the key, so they'd pull that tab and hold it in their teeth and unroll this strip on the can, and they would break a couple of twigs out of the shrub and use those for chopsticks. But they were dangerous because some of these combat patrols got shot up. They were in the bushes, and they were devastating.
- Siemer: Was it mostly in the northwest quadrant of the island where the Japanese were hiding? You were in the southwest.
- Miller: They were in the west mostly. But there were a few of them initially where there was the best cover.
- Willens: Did you ever get back to Saipan while you were stationed on Tinian?
- Miller: No, never went back over there.
- Siemer: What were some of the kinds of problems that the construction faced as you got the airfield going?
- Miller: I don't think there were any problems. This whole thing was based on critical mass. That's the way it proceeded.
- Willens: What does that mean?
- Miller: That means we had a plethora of equipment and manpower and people skilled to do whatever we were going to do.
- Willens: This was one of the biggest air bases that was ever built at the time, was it not?

- Miller: It was the largest airfield in the world when it was built, yes.
- Willens: But did the fact that it was going to be so large create any particular problems, or did it simply mean more people and more material?
- Miller: That's it. There were no problems. I mean the business of leveling this area, grading it and getting it to density was very elementary as a construction activity.
- Willens: When you got to Guam, was there a construction effort that was comparable to what there had been on Tinian?
- Miller: Yes, but the airfield was not as large. I think there were two strips. But Agana Harbor, when our people built this harbor, it consisted of driving two rows of piling to encompass a protected area from the sea, the open sea. And then taking a clam and digging coral and filling that with rocks and gravel between the sheet piling and then piling up a berm on either side of the sheet piling for protection against the sea, closing that area off to make it placid for the ships to come in and anchor. More discharged cargo was received in Agana Harbor during World War II than any other port in the world except Antwerp, Belgium. The magnitude of that was astounding.
- Siemer: When was Agana finished?
- Miller: That was finished in late 1944 or early 1945.
- Willens: That construction was going on simultaneously with Tinian?
- Miller: Yes. Well the actual capture of Guam was a few weeks later, within 30 days.
- Siemer: Did you ever get to Rota while you were out there?
- Miller: No, but General Underhill had a young lieutenant as an aide, and his pilot. They had a Piper Cub. They would go over there and shoot at Japanese stragglers with a pistol.
- Siemer: From the plane?
- Miller: Yes. And one day one of the Japanese shot this aide in the arm, and he put in for a purple heart. The general was outraged about that. You asked me about cattle. I'll give you a little vignette about that if you're interested. We had a lister bag in our camp hanging from a tree. Do you know what that is? Well that's a cylindrical container for water. It's canvas but it's rubberized. It's bulb-shaped at the bottom and around it there are four little spigots for drinking water. So that hung out there under a tree. There were cattle straggling around there. And a lieutenant in the intelligence, G-2 section, one day shot this bull. There was an order out not to molest the cattle, so that was investigated. He said he shot this bull in self-defense. Then somebody came up with the idea that yes, the bull thought that he was playing with Elsie, the cow's, udder. So anyway, there's this question about well, the bull is dead, can we eat the meat. So they were scouting around, and they wanted to know who could butcher this meat, and I said I could butcher the meat. But I'm not going to butcher it until we can get a veterinarian over here from the medical people and check this out to see if it's safe to eat. Then if it is I'll hang it and butcher it. So I called the mess sergeant, Pardillo, and I said "Pardillo, you got a butcher down there? I need some help." So it was determined safe to eat, and I got a truck that had a rail and a boom and a hoist on it. So I went over and loaded "Ferdinand the bull," pulled him up, then I had to start driving around to look for a shell crater, where I could skin him and dump the entrails out. Pardillo sent this little kid, Toby Goldstein Private, to me to help me butcher the bull. We did some skinning, and I got ready to dump his entrails, and when I opened up the cavity, Toby vomited. So I trashed him; he was no good after that. Had to get rid of Toby. He didn't have the stomach for butchering, that kind of butchering. But then Pardillo

wasn't much of a mess sergeant anyway. He came and he wanted me to cut all steaks. "You dummy, there are only about 20 steaks possible. That won't work, and you've got all these people to feed, so what it comes down to is hamburger, that's it, I said." Anyway the several steaks are going up to the General's mess.

Willens: What was your next assignment then after you left Guam?

Miller: General Larson and Colonel Mixson sent me back to the states to go to OCS in Quantico.

Willens: Did you do that?

Miller: Yes, I went there and then the war ended. I left Guam in May and then I had 30 days leave. Around the first of July I think I reported there in Quantico to the school. The war ended, and they closed that down. They had probably 5,000 second lieutenants they had to discharge. They weren't going to make any more, so they just closed that down.

Siemer: Then where did you go after that?

Miller: I went back to recruiting duty. From there I went to the New York City recruiting office. We had a branch recruiting office in Newark, and I went over there.

Willens: Well did you have the option to leave the service after the war was over?

Miller: Yes. My enlistment expired in 1946, and I had the option to be discharged. But I was kind of unsettled, and I thought I might stay for a career and retirement, and I re-enlisted. Then the Korean War started, and I didn't want to go back out there. I had escaped bullets, and didn't want to participate in that mess in Korea. So it was a kind of a fluke. They had an Act of Congress, a bill increasing the pay of the members of the Armed Forces, and at the end of that bill, there was a footnote. If it resulted in any member not having an improvement in his remuneration or if it resulted in lesser remuneration, it could be adjusted or that person could opt to take a discharge. Otherwise, all the discharges were frozen. It was a national emergency. I was disenchanted with the Service, and I requested discharge and they honored that.

Willens: Because your pay was not in fact increased?

Miller: Was not increased.

Willens: How did that happen?

Miller: Well it occurred through allowances mostly. That aspect of the pay was changed, and it was very marginal, but it was a fact. So I just opted to get out.

Siemer: Did you have any typhoons while you were out in Tinian?

Miller: No.

Siemer: The weather didn't cause the construction project any problems?

Miller: No. Well I mean maybe for a day or something like that.

Willens: What was your reaction when you read that planes carrying atomic bombs had taken off from Tinian and played a role in ending the war? Were you surprised by that?

Miller: Yes. I didn't have any knowledge of the bomb, although I was authorized to handle top-secret material. But none of that material was ever available to me. Yes, I was surprised.

Willens: But you anticipated that Tinian was going to play a role in bombing Japan?

- Miller: In Guam, while I was there, we were operational in bombing Japan. There was an officer in our staff who dealt with tires for the B29. He was from the rubber industry in Akron, Ohio. That was a big thing with those bombers, because tires were not as refined as they are today. If those B29s had to land when they were laden on those tires, they could only land once or twice, and then they recapped the tires. That was so critical, they were trying to get a tire plant set up there in the Marianas so that they could retread the tires there. In fact they had shipped tire facilities from Akron, but it was never successful during the time I was there. This officer was under some extensive ridicule in the staff. But he was a pretty nice guy, and he and I used to go up to the Officers Club, where the B29 outfits were, these guys who were flying and bombing Japan. We used to go up there to the Officers Club and hoist a few together. They were all encouraging me to go fly up with them to Tokyo. I said no, no, hold the phone, I've been out here, I've escaped bullets. I'd love to do that, but it's not worth the risk. Because they were losing guys up there all the time, you know.
- Siemer: How long were you there after the B29s got there?
- Miller: Well I think they got there in December, January up at Tinian, and then I was there until May when I left to go back to the States to go to OCS.
- Siemer: So by that time they had all the quarters for the crews for the B29s.
- Miller: Oh, yes. It was all Quonset hut type. Some tents, but mostly Quonset huts. These Airedales, we called them. They were really bizarre for us, these pilots, these flyers. They had lizards there on leashes, for pets. Well you know, they lived, they were on the edge. They were being shot at every time they went up there.
- Willens: There are some reports that bombers before returning to Guam after a mission would unload their bombs on Rota or other islands. Was that in part because of the concern of landing with ammunition?
- Miller: Oh, yes. There was a lot of danger in that. There were times like, not often, but sometimes when a B29 would be making their run for takeoff, and something would happen to the plane mechanically. It couldn't take off, and they were beyond the point of being able to abort, and they would explode. Run off of the runway, strip the gear, and curtains. Yes, there was that sort of thing. And then of course after we took Iwo Jima and got an airfield there, the sole purpose of that was so that the B29s that were damaged could get down there, 500 or 600 miles from Tokyo.
- Siemer: Were there any instances when you were in Tinian in which Admiral Nimitz sent messages saying hurry up, or were you generally on schedule?
- Miller: Well we were on schedule.
- Siemer: Did he ever come and visit the facility?
- Miller: Yes. Well in Guam he had a forward headquarters up on the hill above our headquarters in Guam. I mean that's where he was. When I was at Guam, he was there. He wasn't back in Pearl Harbor. His primary administrative staff were back there.
- Siemer: Was he in Guam while you were building Tinian?
- Miller: Yes, I think he was there, or had just arrived after I got there. It was right at that time. I can't remember that for sure.
- Willens: Do you have any other recollections of that experience that you can share with us?
- Miller: Well let's see. These are the people that I dealt with, the officers.

- Siemer: Who were some of them?
- Miller: At Tinian, Major General James L. Underhill. He was a Cal Tech graduate, an engineer. I think that's why he was assigned as the Island Commander for Base Development. But he had been in combat too. He was shot up at Tarawa, laced with bullets across the abdomen, during the combat operation. I don't write shorthand, but I took dictation and typed it. He was in a pair of cut-offs, and the mosquitos were bugging us, and while I was typing his field orders, he went over and cut a branch off and shooed the mosquitos off of me. And then George Reilly Rowan was the Assistant Chief of Staff. And Colonel William Capers James, later Major General, he was the military governor. And Lt. Colonel Charles Bennett was the guy that I worked with most closely and personally.
- Siemer: James was the person who was in charge of the civilians?
- Miller: His sole purpose there was the military governor for those Koreans. Then at Guam Major General Henry L. Larson was the Commander. And Brigadier General Robert Blake was the Chief of Staff. And at Tinian, Commander Pete Halloran was the Seabees commander, and Colonel James Arthur was the Chief of Staff. Colonel James A. Mixson was the officer that I worked for directly in Guam in that setup. One other thing. During the combat operation on Tinian, these Korean people were stragglers. They were crossing the combat lines coming into the territory that we had secured. They were going along the roadways and trails, and many of them were suffering from tetanus. They were shaking. There were young women there who had a child on their back, one hanging to their skirt, or two, and pregnant, and with tetanus, suffering from tetanus. I saw that agony.
- Willens: Who carried the burden of the actual construction effort? Was it the Seabees?
- Miller: Yes.
- Willens: Was it a joint service exercise? Principally a Navy exercise?
- Miller: It was Seabees. The airfield construction was Seabees. The other services did what was unique to their activities.
- Willens: What did the Army do?
- Miller: Well this is hypothetical. If they had a defense battalion, then they would build their own base with their engineers and people. And port and beach facilities relating to their own mission. The air force, of course, took over their base and its operation.
- Siemer: Was Underhill with your planning group in Hawaii?
- Miller: Yes, he was the Commanding General (Tinian Island Commander).
- Willens: Did he actually plan the amphibious effort?
- Miller: That was done in conjunction with and under the auspices of Admiral Nimitz' staff including Air Force input as to Air Base requirements.
- Willens: There is some quote that I've seen that I think was attributed to Underhill, but I'm not sure, that this was the most successful amphibious invasion in the Pacific War Zone, that there was some deception involved in invading Tinian.
- Miller: Well it was. There was a deception. They had defended the Tinian town beaches, whereas we elected to come across that channel from Saipan. These same forces or elements of the same forces who were involved at Saipan did the Tinian combat.
- Siemer: The Japanese did not anticipate nor conclude a "cross channel" attack, so they didn't prepare any defense for this approach.

Miller: Well they obviously didn't expect it, because they were caught with their pants down. They were set up to defend in a different location. I don't think that (this is my personal opinion) General Underhill had anything to do with that, because that was directed by General Holland M. Smith, the Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and the Navy. Admiral Spruance and Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith. Admiral Spruance was the fleet commander of the whole deal out there. Admiral Hoover was a forward area commander, and Henry Fonda was on his staff. One night, I was at the animal husbandry station, and this Naval lieutenant came in, and he says, "Sergeant, do you know where Colonel Rowan is?" I said, "Yes." And I'm looking at this guy. I know him, but I don't know him. So I said, "Yes, his tent's down here, and it's dark, I'll show you." So I took him there. In a while Colonel Rowan came over to work. And I said, "Who was that lieutenant?" And he said, "Don't you know who that is?" And I said, "Well I've seen him. I can't think of his name." He says, "That's Henry Fonda."

Siemer: Fill us in on where you went after you got out of the service and what you did.

Miller: When I got out of the service, my father and brother had a contracting business. I joined their business, a small contracting business. Later, I left that and I went into a brokerage sales arrangement in the southern coal fields area in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia. This friend when I was a kid, a buddy, he had established this business. He was not available for the draft due to physical problems. He had established this business, and I worked in that after I left my father's construction business. Then I went to the Detroit area and worked for construction businesses there for about 30 years.

Siemer: What kind of construction?

Miller: Commercial, institutional and industrial. I worked for a large Detroit contracting business known as Cunningham Limp out of Detroit and Birmingham, Michigan. We did a lot of automotive manufacturing projects for Ford and General Motors.

Siemer: Constructing the manufacturing facilities?

Miller: Yes. Then I later went to work for Barton Malow Company. At that time they were the largest building construction business in the Midwest. I was General Superintendent for them. Then I moved to Palm Beach and worked for General Development Corporation as Construction Manager.

Siemer: What year was that?

Miller: I came down in 1973, and I worked for them through 1975. Then I went back north and went to work for the Douglas Company, where I retired. I was Operations Manager of that business for 12 years.

Willens: The California-based Douglas Company?

Miller: Not that, no. This was a construction business. Bruce Douglas. That's a Toledo-based company. I opened an office for them in Orlando in 1983 and worked out of that office until I retired, in 1988. But I still had projects up north also.

Willens: And you still keep your hand in, I gather.

Miller: Well I worked consulting for the Douglas Company five months this year.

Willens: Thank you very much, Wally. We appreciate your time, and it's been very valuable for us getting this first-hand experience of someone who was on Tinian during the war.