

Transcription: Jim Miles

Today is Tuesday, August 27, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and today I'll be interviewing Colonel Jim Miles. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Colonel Miles is at his home in Marion, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for our program

Jim Miles: You're most welcome.

Sir, the first question I always start off these interviews with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your background before you went into the military.

Jim Miles: Well, I was born in Sunbury, Ohio. It's a little farming community. I grew up on a farm and that pretty much was it. We were actually old dirt farmers, didn't have two nickels to rub together, but had a good time overall. We ate well and we didn't have all the fancy stuff, but it was a good childhood for me. But I left when I was 17 to join the Army and never lived there since.

What was it that made you join the Army? Did you have any family members that had served in the military?

Jim Miles: Oh I did yes, had some uncles and friends, but I was 6 years old when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor. I was in the 1st grade. And I remembered that, I remembered the war years, World War II. But bad timing. Of course we didn't know how it was all gonna end, either, and I could see a lot of fear in peoples' faces, as a young kid in school. Then I watched, would catch the news. When we'd go to the theaters, they usually had the news on the war. I'd been seeing returning GI's. I just had an attraction to the military, and I made up my mind then that I was going to join the military and make it a career, which I did.

And so you signed up when you were 17.

Jim Miles: Yes.

So you had to I guess get your parent's permission to do so at that age, right?

Jim Miles: Yes I did, I had to get my parent's signature.

Did they have any qualms, or did they sign pretty quickly?

Jim Miles: Well, they pretty much, they knew that I was very interested in the military so they signed. I had some reluctance on the part of my mom, but that was about it.

What was it that attracted you to the Army out of all the branches?

Jim Miles: Well I guess I had a couple of uncles in the Army and there was a lot of the farmers around us that the sons went off, and most of them actually joined the Army. So it was sort of common. Plus I was very, I admired the paratroopers also. I had, were in the paratroops, and of course that was Army at that time, so that really got my attention.

So when was it that you shipped to boot camp? What year was it? Was it in the 50s?

Jim Miles: I joined up in October of '53. I got in right between the cease fire in July and the Armistice in March of '54, so I took 16 weeks of hefty training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Of course I had never been more than 50 miles from home. It was my first time to ride a bus was from Fort Hamilton at the induction center to Fort Knox, and following the 8 weeks of basic we got a break, and I hitchhiked home, and hitchhiked to Cincinnati and got my first train ride. Then when we completed the 16 weeks, I volunteered for the paratroops and they sent me to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

What was basic training like at that time? The peace time draft was still in place, right, so were there conscripts, draftees in your platoon with you?

Jim Miles: Well no, it wasn't peace time because the Korean War was still on.

OK, sure.

Jim Miles: And we were sending troops, whole companies were completing their basic in advanced infantry and shipping them right to Korea.

Yes sir, I thought you said you'd gone to boot camp right at the end, so I misunderstood.

Jim Miles: Well, it was between the cease fire and the Armistice. Of course at the cease fire we didn't know how it was gonna end, so we had to keep our personnel strength up.

What were most of the men like in your platoon? Were they from your geographical area or were they from all over the country?

Jim Miles: Well, probably from that geographical area because depending on where you were at you would be sent to either Fort Campbell. Some went to Fort Jackson where their basic training center was. But we had a lot of draftees. The draft was still on and people were being drafted. In my unit, we had a fair number of draftees. We had one interesting recruit had been a pilot in the German Air Force.

That is interesting.

Jim Miles: Yeah, he was a lieutenant, and was in my platoon as a matter of fact, a little older than the rest of us. I don't know the background how he got there or any of that, but that was kind of interesting.

That is, that's unique. When you were at your basic training did you know what your specialty was going to be? Did you know at that point you could go to paratrooper school?

Jim Miles: Well no, I didn't. I know I wanted to remain in the infantry, and so that's the reason I had advanced infantry, but during my second 8 weeks of basic, we had a first lieutenant and a sergeant team from the 82nd Airborne Division came looking for recruits, and of course, pretty sharp looking guys with their spit shine boots and uniforms and parachute wings on, and so that really encouraged me right there, so I volunteered for that. There was 70 out of our battalion that

volunteered. But out of that bunch, there was only 3 of us actually were selected and sent to Fort Campbell.

Why was it you think you got selected?

Jim Miles: Well you had to be in pretty good physical shape. You couldn't wear glasses back then to be in the paratroops, so I had near perfect vision and was in pretty good shape physically. I was a great runner and all of that. Of course they brought the volunteers in. It was really one of the worst winters at Fort Knox when we went out for our bivouac week. As a matter of fact they had to eventually curtail it. So I think a lot of guys volunteered just to get in out of the cold.

Sir, tell us what jump school, paratrooper school was like.

Jim Miles: Well I was in the 508th Airborne Regimental Combat Team A Company, and with a separate regiment with 11th Airborne Division at Fort Campbell. So I went to the 11th Airborne Division jump school. Of course the 508th was a pretty rough outfit, too, great paratroop outfit, and they set up their own pre-jump school. So we took a week of pretty tough training, running and physical exercise, and actually jumped the 34-foot towers over at the jump school. So by the time, jump school is 3 weeks in duration, and from the 508th, we were in pretty good shape for that school. Of course it was very demanding and I went in in June. We started and the weather was very, as a matter of fact, they got us up at midnight and we had early chow, and so we got over to the jump school and had our run, they run you every day, and of course it was before the sun come up, so it helped a lot. But that sun was a killer. I mean it just would burn you out. It was a very tough school and a lot of people didn't make it through.

I've always heard that about any jump schools that it's physically very demanding and then I know there is a great deal of chance for injuries, too, when you are doing the jumps itself.

Jim Miles: Yeah, we lost quite a few from injuries. During the jump week you make five jumps and a lot of them were injured on the very first one. Then of course physically it was very demanding. Some people just weren't in shape, couldn't make it through. In my platoon, we had a chaplain, he was a major, and this guy was well I'm guessing, I suppose he was in his late 30's, maybe even early 40's, probably in his 40's, but that guy made it. We would be running and I'd look over at him and I said how is he ever gonna make it, but he did. And he always volunteered first for everything, jumping out of 34-foot towers, jumping out of the aircraft. Of course I had never been in an airplane until I joined the paratroops, so it was quite an experience.

That's great to have had a chaplain going through jump school and volunteering to do something like that.

Jim Miles: Yeah, well he was an encouragement to us, the younger ones especially. Hey, here's this old guy, and we looked like him like an old man. So if he can do it, we can do it sort of.

Tell us, sir, what it was like jumping off some of those towers and obviously you can't really be afraid of heights, but tell about your memories of that part of the training.

Jim Miles: Well, we didn't have the 250-foot towers like they had at Benning. All we had was the 34-foot towers. Now of course you say 34-foot, well that's not very high.

It's still pretty high when you get up there.

Jim Miles: Yeah it is, so half of the class sat in the bleachers while the other half jumped out of the towers, and we're watching them, and so we get ready to go up and the sergeant on the ground pulled me over and he says look, he says when you get up in that tower, you better holler "Geronimo" when you jump out or you owe me 50. I says "yes sergeant." So when we got up and started going up the tower and you get up on the first floor, this don't look too bad, and then you get up to the second and hey, you know what, this is getting pretty high. So by the time you actually get up in the tower, it looks a lot higher than 34 feet. So I get in the tower and we shuffle up and the sergeant in the jump tower got me and he put me in the door and he leaned down and he says if you holler Geronimo when you jump out of my tower, you owe me \$50. So I've had it, right? So when I jumped out I hollered "Geronimo" anyhow.

That's pretty good. Did he find you later or did you get away with it?

Jim Miles: Oh no, he was running along, he says or he hollers out, "that man, get him, get that trooper, he owes me 50 push-ups!"

That's a good story.

Jim Miles: Yeah, that was a good one.

What was it like the first time you did a jump from a plane, using a static line?

Jim Miles: Well all of the jumps are static line, deploys a parachute. Well, it was quite an experience. I had never been in an airplane and we were jumping C-119's, old flying boxcars they said they really shouldn't be able to fly, and they made a lot of noise, a lot of smoke, and we were sitting on the runway there getting ready to take off. I mean the engine's going, it's smoking, and backfiring, and I thought it was going to blow up on the runway. Of course I looked around, and I could see I wasn't the only guy that wasn't scared that day. So we made a pass over the drop zone and I was in the second pass, second ones that jump, so the first bunch went, and wow, out they go. It was like a giant hand grabbed – actually the first ones to jump was two of the jump school cadre and what they call wind dummies, so they would jump and let themselves drift, and then they could see what the wind drift was and what have you. So then the first stick went and then I was in the second and I happened to be right up at the door, the way it split the two sticks, with me at the front of the line. So I remember this old sergeant said you gonna jump? I said yes, sergeant. Shuffle and stand in the door, and so they have a red and a green light, and the red light did come on and of course we were all up and gone through making sure we're hooked up properly, and waiting for the green light. The green light comes on and he hollers "go" and he hit me on the rear end with his hand, and boy I went out of that plane like a wild guy.

What was it like the first time you were in the air like that?

Jim Miles: We were about 1,100 feet, so you got about 5 seconds if you don't have an opening, you're halfway down and of course you're supposed to count as you go, hup-1,000, hup-2,000 – and if you get to 5,000 and you don't feel a tug, you pull your reserve. But it went pretty well for me, and of course it's exhilarating. When you hit the ground, you've really got a feeling that you really accomplished something in your life, wow, I did it. So I was very thrilled. It was quite an experience for me to go through jump school.

That's great.

Jim Miles: Yeah, you make five jumps. Of course one of them is a night jump. Of course everybody is sitting there oh, night jumps, because you close your eyes, and then you have the fifth jump, you have all of your equipment which is quite a bit. You got your pack, your rifle, all of your gear and everything on, so it adds about 65-70 pounds to you once you get all that stuff on.

I would guess that a lot of the injuries would come on the landing from the troops landing incorrectly and breaking ankles and that sort of thing.

Jim Miles: Absolutely, and then of course sometimes a wind will come up and a lot of troops get dragged and they hit hard and break a leg, break an ankle, it can be bad. Sometimes you're light like a feather, and other times you hit like a bag of rocks.

Before you actually do any jumps, they have you practice just your falls, is that right?

Jim Miles: What they call last parachute landing falls, and normally you're jumping off of a raised platform or out of a mock-up of a C-119. You exit the doorway and then they watch you make what they call a parachute landing fall. Your feet together, down, your first point of contact, the balls of your feet and then your thighs and around on your muscles on your back so that you don't hit any bone to earth contact. If you do that, it makes a big difference. Sometimes it's hard when you see you're going to hit hard to not pull your feet up, and a lot of guys come in heels, butt, and head, and that old helmet hits the ground ker-wang and stuns the heck out of you.

Sure, I would bet. Did you have any hard landings during those first five jumps you did?

Jim Miles: A couple of them were pretty hard, yeah. Fortunately the night jump was pretty easy. I landed very softly that night I remember. But well, we had a few guys tangle also during our jump week.

Tangled up with each other?

Jim Miles: Yeah, when they came out. They tried to stagger the sticks one goes out the starboard, and port side, and try to stagger so they don't, but every once in a while someone will come together underneath the airplane. What they do, they teach you to reach out and grab one another if you don't, so your chutes don't rob the air out of one, and back and forth, your chute will collapse. So this wasn't during jump school, but one of the jumps I tangled with a guy, but we managed to make it down OK. He got a little banged up, but other than that we survived.

That's pretty rough. So after you finished your jump school, where did you head to next?

Jim Miles: Well, I went from the 508 Airborne Regimental Combat Team, they were scheduled to go to Japan, and the 11th Airborne Division was scheduled to go to Germany, so I decided I'd rather go to Germany, so I joined the 11th Airborne Division. I went overseas. We went over on a ship. I think it was the USS either the Buckner or the Mann, I can't remember exactly. It was an old transport ship. We sailed out of New York harbor. We got on a troop train right there at Fort Campbell and right up out on the dock, and we immediately got off the troop train onto the ship and within an hour or two we were underway. We crossed the North Atlantic in the winter

time. This was late January. So you can imagine the weather. It was really a miserable, cold trip. We sailed into Bremehaben and it was the coldest winter in 50 years in Germany. So that was quite a trip. But yeah, I joined the 11th Airborne Division and I'd made corporal by then, so I had a little bit of rank. I always say corporal was a good rank because they kept you off the KP roster.

That's right, something you want to avoid. What was it like being stationed over there during the Cold War?

Jim Miles: I had two tours there. I went there in '56 and I went back again in '64, but in '56 when we got there, they had just lifted the occupation I think in November of the previous year in '55, and of course our advance party had gone over earlier. They got over there about that time. But there was still a lot of war damage, and we were the first Airborne Division to enter Germany after World War II. But there was a lot of war damage and a lot of the Germans still riding bicycles. It was a tough time still even though the war had ended for 10-11 years, it was still a pretty rough time. Like I say you could still see a lot of damage, buildings bombed, and the concert at camp, they called them concerns there that we went in Eisenberg, it had been pretty heavily damaged by air raids, bombs, and they had just bulldozed the buildings. But there were still buildings left. We had what was like a barracks and there was a huge block building, but it was quite an experience. The very first jump that we made, of course we still had the air base at Newbyburg down at Munich, so they trucked us from Eisenberg to Munich. We had a battalion-size parachute jump, quite a thing.

That's a lot of troops.

Jim Miles: A lot of troops, yeah. So anyhow, we flew up to Eisenberg and the word had gotten out that the American paratroopers were going to make a jump, so the Germans showed up. I mean there was thousands of them around the drop zone.

Just to watch it.

Jim Miles: Just to watch it. I know one of the guys said oh my gosh, they're going to kill us. So we jumped. Of course the kids were rushing out and helping collapse the chutes, and a lot of old German soldiers there, and of course the Germans got a lot of respect for the paratroopers. They called them Faltzemyaeger. They were quite a respected and admired outfit in the German army, military. So we were well received especially by a lot of the Germans, former military. They were slapping us on the back. So we all felt pretty good that day that we made that first big jump.

That's great. How long did you end up spending in Germany on that tour? Were you there for two or three years?

Jim Miles: Oh, I got there in '56. I made sergeant that year, a sergeant E5, and staff sergeant. They had done away with the buck sergeant, so you went from PFC corporal to a sergeant. And then I left in '58, flew back to New York, and I re-enlisted there for I think it was four years, and I had a choice of the 82nd or the 101st. The 101st was at Fort Campbell, so I decided to go to the 101st. General Westborn was the division commander, youngest major general on active duty at the time. So I went there. I went to the NCO academy there at the 101st and General Westborn came down and presented our certificates.

That's great.

Jim Miles: Yeah, it was quite a good experience. And in March, I was on leave, and in March about the same month that I reported in to Fort Campbell, they had a tragedy there. They had 5 paratroopers drugged to death out on one of the drop zones. A freak wind had come up and a couple of them, their helmets came off and they hit, killed them, and another one tried to get out of his chute and it strangled him. It just was a terrible accident. But General Westborn had been the first one to jump that day, so and of course it was just one of those freak winds came up and that's what happened. But good for the general that he decided to be the first one to jump. That was quite an introduction back to Fort Campbell.

Yeah I bet. I had not heard of that situation. I know there's always training accidents, but I hadn't heard about that particular incident.

Jim Miles: Yeah, that was big news at the time.

So at that point did you think you were going to make the Army a career?

Jim Miles: Oh yeah, I had already decided. The day that I enlisted in Ohio at Fort ____ I decided I'm going to make a career out of the military. I was in for the duration.

That's great. Now were you married at this point?

Jim Miles: Well I was, yes. I married in 1956. As a matter of fact just before we shipped out I was married.

What did your family think of Germany? Did they get to go with you?

Jim Miles: They came later. It was quite an experience for the family, yeah. Two sons then.

Yes sir. Where did you go then after Fort Campbell? I know at some point you became commissioned, right?

Jim Miles: Yeah, I got on an overseas levy to Okinawa in 1960, got over there. As a matter of fact, that was my second time on a transport ship. I went over on a ship out of the west coast out of Oakland, and took us I think it was 14 days. The other trip was like 9 going to Germany, but I didn't get seasick on the first one. It was sort of surprising as rough as it was. I got a little seasick on the second one and it was pretty rough, too, rough trip. Then we pulled into Yokohama for 8 hours and the captain of the ship said we're going to give you a shore leave. Anybody gets off but you don't get back here, you're going to miss troop movement. So I decided, there was about three or four of us sergeants, we decided hey, we're just gonna stay on the ship. So we did. We volunteered for duty up in the mess hall and worked up there with one of the chiefs. So we spent our 8 hours onboard. We didn't bother to get off. Then we sailed on down to Okinawa. As we were starting to get underway, we saw, they call them kamikaze, a little cab pulls up on the dock and they get this guy out, he's in uniform, a GI, and he's unconscious, probably drunk, and they lower them into a smaller boat and they bring him out and they opened up the side places on the ship and winched him up. So I guess he woke up in the brig.

Yeah, that's not good.

Jim Miles: Yeah, the troop ship, it was loaded. We had a bunch of Marines were going to go on up to Korea, so we had quite a bunch of troops on that ship. Yeah, we sailed on down to Okinawa and that was the end of that trip.

When was it, sir, that you got commissioned? How did that come about?

Jim Miles: Well I joined the first special forces group on Okinawa, and then I went to, I was on an A team, I was on a weapons NCO on a 18-man B company, the first special forces group, Team A-22, and we were alerted for Vietnam. This was in late '61, so February the 2nd of 1962, we landed in Saigon, flew over, had the whole team and all of our equipment and everything. But before that I had decided, well I wanted to go to OCS when I was in the 11th Airborne Division but it just didn't work out, but I still was thinking about applying, so when I got to Okinawa I went ahead and put in my paperwork for OCS. So when I came back from Vietnam, it was a six-month TDY tour, I got back and went before the board. At OCS there was 12 of us went up and 4 of us were selected and I was one of the 4. So by September, I was on my way out of Okinawa. We flew through Guam and into Hawaii. Then I got down to, after OCS, Fort Benning in October of '62. I graduated in '63, second lieutenant.

In the Army, did they call that a Mustang, going from enlisted to officer?

Jim Miles: Yeah, they do.

I wasn't sure if it applied to all branches or not.

Jim Miles: Yeah, it does. And yeah, they call you a mustang. I made the E6 when I was on that tour, my first tour in Vietnam. When I got there I was an E6, but they couldn't change the rank. They had come out with the E8's and E9's, but in the Army, the Army was the only one not to give you any extra chevrons or rockers or whatever.

Yeah, I think it's still that way. I believe the Army doesn't treat the E6's as staff NCO's, right?

Jim Miles: Well we were, see I wanted to be a sergeant first class, but because I made it in '62, I couldn't sew on another rocker which always irritated me. So for a long time you couldn't tell whether a staff sergeant was E5 or E6. And master sergeants could be E7's, so it was very confusing. All the other services either added a chevron or a rocker or a top. Marines gave them an extra rocker. But not the ol' Army.

What was the transition like for you to go from being enlisted to being an officer? Was it easy for you?

Jim Miles: Well I had 9-1/2 years of enlisted service, and I had been a platoon sergeant, and quite a bit of experience and also I had a combat tour under my belt. But yeah, they sent a lot of us to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, so I got there and they assigned me to one of the rifle ranges, 25 meter range, and of course I like weapons, I'm a weapons man, so that was a good assignment. And I was out there I guess for about 6 months. So we got an old colonel in and this captain I worked for called me in, and he says well, colonel so and so, anyone that was a former sergeant and the lieutenants to command the company, so you're taking over CA2 Monday. I said oh, great.

A chance to command.

Jim Miles: Yeah, and also all the recruits that I had was Airborne volunteers, so I was supposed to give 'em a little extra PT and get 'em ready for jump school.

Sure, and by this time I guess this is the mid-60s?

Jim Miles: This was '63 when I graduated in March of '63, and then I was shipped out to Fort Jackson.

OK, so it was still kind of before the Vietnam War had really ramped up though that you took over as a commander there.

Jim Miles: Yeah, they were sending troops, but it was an advisory era in Vietnam and so a lot of people didn't, you know, we were beginning to hear about it, but yeah, it hadn't heated up yet, but we were fighting over there, my first tour. We had only been there two weeks when the Vietcong attacked our camp. So it was real war.

Sure, I just think maybe the media wasn't paying a lot of attention to it at that point.

Jim Miles: Well, it was the advisory group and it was only like less than 10,000 troops there, most of them advisory and rear area and what have you. Of course we had started sending special forces detachments there, and even in the late, in the 50s we had been sending special forces to Vietnam.

Sure. Did you get a chance to do another tour in Vietnam later?

Jim Miles: I had two other tours. One I had made captain, I was in the 10th Special Forces group out in Germany, and volunteered for 'Nam, and made captain that year, so I had my own A team when I got there, 84280 down on the delta region, and then the third tour, I was a senior advisor to a ranger unit down in the same general area, 4th coord., and then I was reassigned to Mack V-sol, a special mission advisory group up in the Trong, and of course SF was pulling out at the time. That was in '70 and '71.

What are your memories of Vietnam, what particularly stands out to you?

Jim Miles: It was just, the war itself, I saw a lot of bad things during my time there. I saw how vicious the Communists were, the Viet Cong, how they even killed their own people, cowardly, I think Way stood out. I wasn't in the battle, it was a Marine battle, but up in Way, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong murdered over 3,000 civilians up there – men, women, kids, some of them found buried alive. The treachery and the brutality of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong was just unspeakable.

Absolutely. So you left there for the last time in '71?

Jim Miles: I left, flew out in August, August the 19th. We were out on a CIA, called them a blackbird. It was a C130 with no markings, and flew up to what they call Monkey Mountain up in IKOR, and I'd been reassigned. I'd already been over in Thailand, so I was sent over to Thailand. My first desk job so to speak, general staff, so it kind of scared me. I hadn't had any staff duty, so I almost decided to stay another year in Vietnam to get out of it. But I got over

there on my second tour in '66, '67, I got there in June, and like I said I was assigned to an A team down in the delta. Of course we were up along the Cambodian border and pretty isolated also. There were no roads. We were right along the Mekong River, 2,500-mile Mekong River coming out of south China, and at one time there were never any bridges on the Mekong River. It's a huge river, it's got to be at least in some places a mile across. So it's a huge river, flows all the way down. Commercial shipping would come up the Mekong and go all the way up to Phnom Penh in Cambodia. We'd see ship masts going up. Our camp was like about a mile from the river. Of course every year the place is inundated. It floods. The Mighty Mekong comes out of its banks, I mean the whole area, the delta is flooded. It's quite a time.

Were you able to have much contact with your family back home while you were over there? Were you able to write letters and such?

Jim Miles: We could write letters yeah, but of course we didn't have cellphones back then. And we would, the Air America which was a CIA cover, they flew a lot of, bring in a lot of supplies and they would bring mail and beer and goodies and stuff, and we would always see them and we would land them inside the camp on top of a big ammo bunker, and get all the news, maybe a Stars and Stripes, what's going on. Have we lost the war and they haven't told us yet? So we were pretty well isolated. It was over 100 special forces camp strung out along the border, all the way up in IKOR all the way down to the delta.

I'm sure that had to have been an isolating feeling.

Jim Miles: Oh yeah, and you were working with mercenaries, they called them CIBG, civilian irregular defense group, and they were paid for, the CIA sponsored – of course it was top secret then. It's not now. It was paid for by the CIA and of course we were able to pay these mercenaries a lot more than the regular troop who made practically nothing. Well we should pay them well, they did OK. Of course there was a lot of VC spies in the ranks and stuff. It was a tough time.

How long did you stay on that particular assignment?

Jim Miles: I was there for a year.

A year. What was it like when you came back home then in '71? Had things changed at all for you in America?

Jim Miles: Well going back to when I left in '67, well one other little highlight, too. When I was there I met John Wayne on my second tour. He was flown into our headquarters. He was over there getting information on the Green Beret movie. So he was flown into my headquarters and landed, they had taken over an old hotel there. It was sort of like a _____ everything. So I walked through the doors and one of the sergeants says hey, John Wayne just landed. I thought they were spoofing me. I was getting ready to say hey listen up, so I turn around and who walks through the door but old John Wayne. A big guy about 6'3" I guess at least, and I said something like gee, Mr. Wayne, I'm pleased to meet you. And he says my pleasure, captain. So he spent quite a bit of time there. It was my boss, lieutenant colonel, and old John Wayne, they were like two old buddies sitting at this bar drinking beer and telling war stories. But he had chow with us and I was sitting pretty close. They had him on the end. They would cook big steaks and talk about a spread. So I remember old John Wayne saying boy you guys sure eat

well. And one of the sergeants said you know what Mr. Wayne, you should come here when they don't know you're coming.

That's right.

Jim Miles: I got some pictures and stuff so it was quite a time.

That's a good story. So what did you do then when they rotated you back to the U.S.?

Jim Miles: They sent me back to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, so back in basic training again. I was a company commander, a captain now, I was a senior captain in my battalion, so when the battalion commander went on leave or was absent, I moved up. I was the battalion commander. So I got a little bit of commander time. It was a pretty good assignment. I remember when the John Wayne movie come out, we made sure we got over to see that.

Yeah, that's good, that's great. And then when did you end up retiring from the Army?

Jim Miles: Well I retired out of the regular Army in November of 1973, and I retired as a major.

Then later though I understand you came to Texas and you joined the Texas State Guard, is that right?

Jim Miles: Yeah, we got here as a matter of fact August the 21st was our 20th anniversary coming to Texas.

What was it that brought you to Texas?

Jim Miles: I lived on Guam for 20 years, had a business out there and everything, and I had a couple of guys that worked for me. One was a sergeant, Germanian fellow, and him and his brother who was an Air Force chaplain lieutenant colonel, their families, they moved here. We kind of stayed in touch and we had kind of been talking about well maybe we'll go to the States. So I made a trip here in April of '93. As a matter of fact I was out in my hotel room, I had a layover in Hawaii, was watching the TV when the Branch Davidian compound up in Waco was burned down. But anyhow I made a trip back just to look around and spent about a week here, and I got a hop coming here and a hop going back, a flight back. Anyhow, decided to come here. So we moved here in '93, got here on August the 21st.

That's great. What was it that made you want to join the State Guard?

Jim Miles: Well we had 911, and I remember I used to wear my old cowboy hat around. I'd put my rank on there, my jump wings, my master parachutist wings, and my major's leaf, and I ran across a retired special forces sergeant major over at Wilford Hall saw me and said hey, and he was working there. He says hey sir, I belong to Texas State Guard. You may be interested in joining. I said why? He told me a little bit about it and I didn't pay too much attention. I sort of thought about it some, and then when 911 come along, I got a hold of the guard and got a hold of one of the majors out at the Army there on IH-35 just outside of Samsey, and got the low down, met him, talked to him, and so I decided to join which I did, and I was appointed as a lieutenant colonel by Governor Perry, assigned to the 1st Brigade here in San Antonio, and further assigned as the battalion commander for the 1st Battalion out at Camp Bullas.

And that would be something you'd do I guess one weekend a month, that sort of thing?

Jim Miles: Yeah, we had a drill one weekend a month, and then every year we had a long weekend usually up at Camp Swift. It's an old World War II camp up there for our annual training.

That's great. And so you were able to do that and then finally retire from that and they promoted you to colonel, is that right?

Jim Miles: Yeah, they promoted me to colonel in 2007.

That's great.

Jim Miles: So it was quite a time. I enjoyed my time with the Texas State Guard.

With the State Guard you don't get paid at all for that, right?

Jim Miles: Oh, for deployed, and everybody gets the same, the general all the way down to the low private gets \$122 a day, or at least they did. I don't know what they -

I think you're right. I think it's remained the same.

Jim Miles: We had a little deal so we could get some gas allowances and what have you.

And then in your case, having been a major and retired from the Army, you had a lot of I'm sure experience that they valued because I know a lot of guys go into the Guard with no background.

Jim Miles: Oh yeah, you don't need any, as long as you got a clean record and everything they'll take you. And I got in right under the age thing. I was 64 when I volunteered, so the cutoff is 65, but they make exceptions.

Well that's good you were able to kind of continue to serve that way.

Jim Miles: Yeah, it was a good experience. I'm glad I did. I wanted to tell you another story.

Sure, please do.

Jim Miles: Out of my Vietnam time, this was sort of an unusual story. I was like I said I was a senior advisor to an Arvin ranger group. We had some pretty tough fights, they called it the Seven Mounds area battle, and of course lost a lot of troops. But the rangers, Arvin rangers, and the American advisors, we took three of the major mountains that the NVA and the VC had occupied along the Cambodian border, so it was quite, my last big battle as a matter of fact. But one night, oh I don't know what time in the middle of the night, I heard gunfire. I think we were under attack. I used to just, I usually wore sneakers inside the camp because a lot of people get hurt running around and stubbing their toes and stuff, so I would sack out on my cot and wore my sneakers and had my gear and had my weapon right there ready, and so I rolled out of my cot and I just eased the door open, and I was right along the perimeter, and I looked out there and I saw this guy standing there, a guy by the name of Koza, Spec 4, and I said Koza, what's going on? And he wheels around and he points this 9 mm right at my face. I mean he was like 10 feet away. Of course I had a little grease gun, a 45 caliber grease gun that I carried around with me

quite a bit, especially inside the camp. So I could've pulled the trigger and shot him. I said what's going on? He said I know you sir, I like you, but I'll kill you. And then a couple of captains was coming up and he says I got to go now, sir, and he fired his weapon at him, and of course they took off. This guy had just, he just flipped out, and he thought that the Vietnamese had stolen his M16 rifle which started this, so he climbs into the mortar pit, and I'm watching him, so I almost shot him then, watching him, so he gets the mortar out and he fires illumination rounds. Well that didn't really hurt anything. So then he decided, the next round, he says if they don't bring my rifle, I'm gonna blow up the building. So he gets the mortar tube, it's an 81, up and he lays the barrel across the rim of the pit, and I thought well, if he tries to do this I'm going to have to shoot him. Well the next thing I know, he drops it and disappears into the darkness. So he shows up. Somehow he got inside the building. He got a hold of one of the Vietnamese clerks. The Vietnamese had some women in there. He got a hold of one of these young clerks. He had her in his room. So by this time I got a whole bunch of people walking along behind me and of course I got my grease gun, so I walk up and I look through the window where he's at and I can see he's got this girl and he's got her and he's got a knife out and he already cut her a little bit on the neck because it was bleeding. He said if they don't bring my rifle, I'm gonna kill this girl. I said well he's gonna kill this girl. So I took very careful aim through the window and just as I squeezed the trigger he moved, but fortunately he moved and I hit him in the side and this 45 slug went right through him and I kicked the door in, grabbed this hysterical girl, threw her out of there, and of course it knocked him down. He was up against the wall but he come up and boy, he was, I hit him as hard as I ever hit anybody and it hardly stunned him. One of the other majors, we shared command, apparently they had been having some bad time together, he comes in and he hits this guy in the face. I got him around the neck. He hits him in the face with the butt of his rifle. Well the guy gets a hold of a rifle and the major's arm is caught in the sling and he is making his way towards, he was gonna shoot him. Got a hold of the trigger, he would've killed this guy. So this guy turned absolutely pale, and I kept hitting this guy as hard as I could, and finally to subdue him, and a medic came in and gave him a shot and knocked him out. So we got him down to the dispensary and so it turned out it was like a flesh wound, the round went all the way through him. He was lucky. The point is, he's the only person I ever shot and didn't intend to kill.

That's bizarre. Did you ever figure out what caused him to flip out?

Jim Miles: Well we went back and he had been showing some, you know, by himself, and we found out he would take a patrol of Vietnamese out. Then he ___ by himself, which he isn't supposed to do. It's supposed to be at least two Americans. And he wouldn't let 'em come back until they killed someone. So we figured they probably killed some poor old villager down there. And they said he never slept, couldn't, never saw him asleep, that he stayed by himself, never said anything to anybody, and he kept an arsenal of weapons and ammo, grenades and stuff in his room. So he just flipped out and nobody, and probably took a little time to do it or some time. Nobody ever knew. I walked down to the dispensary and they had him strapped down on a thing. He was conscious and I went up and I said well, you're going to be OK, you just got a flesh wound so you're gonna heal up. I just wanted you to know I'm the one that shot you. He says I'm glad it was you, sir. You're the only son of a bitch with a pair of balls around here. So that was sort of a little -

What happened after that? Did he get put in the brig?

Jim Miles: They shipped him out so we sent him down, he was in the stockade for a month or so and they finally dropped all the charges, and returned him to duty.

That's pretty alarming. I would've thought they would have sent him to Leavenworth or something after a trial.

Jim Miles: No, he didn't, wasn't tried, I mean because he was in special forces. So anyhow I'm setting up in the ____ in the airport one day, and who walks in but Koza.

How long was this?

Jim Miles: I started reaching for my 45. And it turns out he flew down to Saigon with me. So we talked about what went on. Well, they had determined he just went nuts.

Yeah, sounds like it.

Jim Miles: Too much combat. And we did. We went through, we lost a lot of troops there in that battle for the Seven Mountains. So he's just one of the troops that it happens, battle fatigue.

Did you ever find out what happened to him later on in life?

Jim Miles: Never did, never heard from him again. The last time I saw him is when we flew down to Saigon on that plane that day. That was probably in '67.

Sounds like he definitely had some issues.

Jim Miles: He seemed pretty coherent that day. I mean to talk to him he seemed pretty level-headed, and we even talked about it.

He's lucky to have lived through that I think.

Jim Miles: He's lucky I didn't kill him.

Sure, absolutely, or somebody else.

Jim Miles: Which I could've done.

Well sir, the hour is almost up, but I wanted to thank you again for letting us do this interview with you and we record these and save these interviews in our archives, and we have archives that go back to the 1700s here. We have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received when he was killed at the Alamo, so our goal is to take these interviews and save them for posterity.

Jim Miles: Well my fifth great grandfather was Sergeant William Wright in the Revolutionary War, and my great grandfather, also William Wright, I had his original discharge papers from the Civil War.

Oh, that's something else when you have something like that. Well sir, with posterity in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to anyone listening to this interview years and decades, potentially hundreds of years from now?

Jim Miles: America is a great country, 237 years, and although we are suffering from some pretty bad times, I'll be 78 in a couple of months, and this, with the exception of World War II which I lived through as a child, this is the worst mess that our country has been in in my lifetime, but I think America will recover from this and like Ronald Reagan used to say, our best days are ahead. I believe that. So if someone is listening to this now, I mean I still have great faith in our country and the American people, and our military I might add.

Absolutely, well sir, again, I just want to thank you and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson who also was a Vietnam veteran like yourself and everybody else here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation, and like I mentioned before we started recording, in about a week or two we'll be sending you copies of this interview on CDs and then it'll also include a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson as well. So it's just a small token of our appreciation.

Jim Miles: Well I appreciate that, James, and also I'm going to mail you, I've got it all ready to go, I've got a copy of my book, *Pay Any Price*. I'll be sending it to you.

Oh yes sir, I look forward to that. I really appreciate that. All right sir, well we'll be in touch.

Jim Miles: Yeah, especially the opportunity, I appreciate you letting me do this.

Oh yes sir, it's our honor.

Jim Miles: I feel honored myself.

[End of recording]