

1 **Interview of Edna Emily Miller on her experience as a prisoner of war in Philippines**
2 **during WWII and teaching at U.S. Army schools in occupied Japan**

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4
5 Evelyn McHiggins: Overseas [inaudible 0:03] Washington unit, uh, how did you happen to go
6 oversees, Edna?

7
8 Edna Miller: Well in, uh, uh, around 1940 I, I had a series of personal tragedies and I
9 wanted to go to, uh, Paris and get my degree in French at [inaudible 0:25]
10 but Hitler was on the arise and so I couldn't get a passport to Europe. But
11 two of my friends were military, uh, doctors' wives and they were in the
12 Philippines and they said come on out to the Philippine. So I told'm to get
13 me a job and they happen to know the principle of Brent Episcopal private
14 school in Baguio and they got me a job. And so, I set sail in August for
15 Baguio and there I was teaching Jr. high math when on December the 7th,
16 1941 the Japanese dropped about 120 bombs around our campus on
17 Baguio. And, uh, 20 days later the Japanese in turned all the Americans
18 and British and the allies that people that were in Baguio and first we went
19 to, uh, camp John Hay which had been an R&R military, um, uh, camping
20 place and that was too good for us though, for, uh, we were stuck in a, a
21 barracks that was supposed to hold 125 but they had 500 of us there so
22 you can imagine, uh, how much space we had.

23
24 Then later on the Japanese wanted that camp for their own, uh, officers so
25 they moved us up to another camp farther up in the mountains that had
26 been a constabulary camp that General MacArthur had used to train the
27 Philippine soldiers. And there we stayed, uh, quite some time, I can't recall
28 on hand how long and we lived in very miserable head, uh, headquarters.
29 At first, uh, the Japanese wouldn't let the husbands and wives live
30 together, uh, and so, uh, we had nothing but, uh, uh, tennis court to walk
31 on and, uh, for many, many nights we had to stand up practically and we
32 only had a handful of dirty rice morning and night and that was it. After a
33 while when the Japanese had, uh, conquered Singapore and Hong Kong
34 and all of the rest of the places, uh, they became more solidified so then
35 they let us sort of, uh, more or less try to live our own lives. And we had
36 one good commander to [Tomaybeson 3:23] and he let us have school in
37 an old barn and he let us have our religious exercises. There was about
38 500, um, gold mining engineers and their families and, uh, a lot of
39 missionaries that had come from China and established their foreign
40 languages school in Baguio rather than go home.

41
42 So we were a mixture of hard biting, hard cussing, mining engineers and
43 religious people of all faith, practically everything – Jewish, Catholic,
44 Protestant and Mary [gnome 3:58] people and that sort of thing. But, uh,

1 we tried to – at first it was very, very much of a mess because nobody
2 knew what to do and they all expected to be rescued right away but, uh,
3 it's too bad that it happened at that time because if it had been later our
4 children would not have been caught with us, they would have been sent
5 home to their mothers and fathers in the various islands that they came
6 from. But school, see, was in session on December the 7th, so we were
7 caught with about a hundred children and we had to sort of look after
8 them. Well as I said, we had a pretty good man and he let us have, as I
9 said, the church and the school and let us go on carry on our own business
10 more or less and although, we had nothing to eat except what I told you
11 and only what we stood up in and, uh, and, and sometimes it didn't even
12 have, uh, well we didn't have beds for a long time. And we slept on the
13 floor and the first nights or so that we were captured we had to even stand
14 up all night and we just had a spoon full of water for about 2 days.

15
16 But as I said, as they became solidified, uh, things became a little better
17 for us but later on we were moved another time and finally when
18 MacArthur was coming in, I'm cutting this very short, in the 1944 they
19 moved us from Baguio down to the low lands where, uh, 5,000 Americans
20 were in a camp that you probably know about Santo Tomas. But we were
21 put in a political prison called [Bellaben veayo 5:49] it was right outside
22 of Santo Tomas. Till finally when McArthur came in and it was very bad.
23 There was, uh, the Japanese were retreating in '44 and the Americans were
24 proceeding against them and, we were between the cross-artillery fire and
25 pin point bombing and MacArthur told us to leave our little political
26 prison and come and walk those of us who could, the sick and the old went
27 in trucks from, uh, Manila's Santo Tomas to his headquarters Balintawak,
28 which was the old brewery. That was very terrible and then later on after
29 things were a little bit, uh, better they brought us all back to Santo Tomas.
30 I'm going over this very fast; and then it was there that the, uh, I decided
31 to wait for my fiancé who had been on Bataan, so I didn't come home with
32 others when they were rehabilitated. I stayed there and I joined the Red
33 Cross and, uh, of course I had to buy my uniforms. They only gave me,
34 uh, uh, half the salary because I'd been hired oversees. I had to buy my
35 uniforms out of that but, uh, even so we had pretty good quarters as a Red
36 Cross person. We lived in, uh, some private houses for a while and then
37 we lived in, uh, – I was in, uh, a blown-out, uh, apartment house. It has
38 this roof blown off but, and it didn't have any water. We had to carry the
39 water from the fire faucet upstairs about 4 or 5 floors but, uh, in the Red
40 Cross, uh, we helped all we could.

41
42 Evelyn McHiggins: [7:55] Um, Edna what kind of work did you do with the Red Cross?
43

1Edna Miller: Oh, that's a good question. I was an administrative assistant. I was at
2 [Zurbaran 8:03] which was the headquarters and I acted as information
3 there to the soldiers that came through and wanted information.
4

5Evelyn McHiggins: That was right in Manila?
6

7Edna Miller: Right in Manila, uh, uh, I was administrative assistance right in the
8 headquarters and Edith Miller, I think who might still be alive was my
9 boss but then later on when the Red Cross went on to Japan they didn't
10 take me for some reason. Maybe because I was hired locally. So, then I
11 got a job with the, uh, government, the government, uh, the army needed
12 teachers. They had so many boys that were illiterate and, uh, so I got a job
13 with information and education. I didn't, uh, wear a uniform with that but
14 in the morning, I taught these illiterates and I had to in 6 weeks get those
15 soldiers up to a 5th grade education or they were going to be kicked out
16 and that was too bad because some of them were married and had
17 children. Then at night time I taught, uh, uh, blacks and whites and
18 Kernels and everybody that wanted a high school and college English and
19 college Shakespeare. I taught in a Quonset hut with rats and those geckos
20 dropping their tails all around but I had a wonderful time.
21

22Evelyn McHiggins: I wonder if everybody's gonna know about the gecko's what they are.
23

24Edna Miller: They're little, uh, like, uh, a tiny, tiny miniscule, uh, alligators who drop
25 their toes, their tails. [chuckle]
26

27Evelyn McHiggins: Are they something like a lizard?
28

29Edna Miller: Yeah tiny lizard, that's what they are yes, that's what...
30

31Evelyn McHiggins: [9:48] And did you stay in, uh, Manila then the whole time or were you
32 transferred in?
33

34Edna Miller: I was stayed in Manila from 1947 to 19 – oh I mean from 1945 the time I
35 was released to 1947. I came home, I thought it was about time if I, I had
36 been a teacher before the war, uh, 25 years or so at Fort Washington in
37 army [inaudible 10:14] in Prince George. Now I thought I better get back
38 to United States because my fiancé didn't come through 'till later. But
39 anyway, uh, I came back to United States and I taught 3 months in
40 Washington, D.C., then I had a hankering to go overseas and see what
41 made the Japanese tick and do that job honest. And so, I went down the
42 Pentagon again and got a job in information and education.
43

44Evelyn McHiggins: Is that a civilian job?

1
2Edna Miller: No, that's, that was a, I was a deck, a department of the army civilian. And
3 they sent me to Japan, uh, to the 1st Cavalry, the outfit that released me
4 from the prison camp.
5
6Evelyn McHiggins: That must have been interesting.
7
8Edna Miller: Oh, it was very.
9
10Evelyn McHiggins: Did you see anybody you knew? Did you meet any?
11
12Edna Miller: Oh, uh, yes, uh, well I was with, uh, uh, General Chase that outfit and I
13 lived on the base there in a Quonset hut and I taught in a Quonset hut
14 there.
15
16Evelyn McHiggins: That was in Japan?
17
18Edna Miller: Yeah.
19
20Evelyn McHiggins: Near Tokyo?
21
22Edna Miller: Uh, yes, right out, it's called Asakusa right side – outside of Tokyo and,
23 uh, then I also became a testing specialist. I gave the test for those boys
24 that wanted a high school education. It's called a, a, uh, high school
25 equivalency and then I gave tests for those that had more than 2 years –
26 that had 2 years college. So that was very interesting.
27
28Evelyn McHiggins: [11:46] And how long did you do that Edna?
29
30Edna Miller: Well I taught in Japan from 1940 – 2 years. My contract was 18 months I
31 stayed and I went all over Japan and I taught the, uh, the 11th airborne up
32 at Sendai and the, and the 7th [Infantry 12:06] just was moved into Korea
33 just before the war broke out and I had taught those boys.
34
35Evelyn McHiggins: Uh-huh. [12:12] Did you ever go back and do the Red Cross?
36
37Edna Miller: No. Only as a volunteer, uh, a couple of years ago I did about a thousand
38 hours on the blood mobile down here at the Washington headquarters.
39 And also, in the, uh, section giving the boys, uh, coffee, you know, and
40 donuts while they gave blood.
41
42Evelyn McHiggins: Well that, that was very interesting.
43
44Edna Miller: I love that.

1
2Evelyn McHiggins: Yes. You're not doing volunteer work right now?
3
4Edna Miller: Oh, I'm doing loads of it but not with the Red Cross.
5
6Evelyn McHiggins: Okay.
7
8Edna Miller: I am, uh, helping to feed 75 senior citizens 3 or 4 times a week down at
9 the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.
10
11Evelyn McHiggins: Oh, I understand. But tell me um, is there any...
12
13Edna Miller: That's one thing. That's only one thing I do.
14
15Evelyn McHiggins: Yeah you do several volunteer things, right?
16
17Edna Miller: I'm on several...
18
19Evelyn McHiggins: But getting back to your overseas.
20
21Edna Miller: Yes.
22
23Evelyn McHiggins: Um, [13:12] what would you think was your most memorable experience?
24
25Edna Miller: Well I think the most wonderful thing was of course, uh, before, uh, I
26 became a Red Cross it was when General MacArthur came in and saved
27 all of us. That of course...
28
29Evelyn McHiggins: Ca-, can you tell us what happened? I mean you – did you see him?
30
31Edna Miller: Oh, it was so wonderful. Yes as a matter of fact at one time after I was
32 released he – I think they wanted me to teach their boy but I didn't want to
33 be a governess and, uh, I was in the Red Cross then and I told a friend of
34 mine, an English women, Phyllis Gibbins that she had been a governess in
35 England and maybe she would do. So, she took over the job. She became
36 MacArthur's, uh, governess.
37
38Evelyn McHiggins: Well that's interesting. [14:04] Do you know where she is now?
39
40Edna Miller: Well I think Phyllis is dead. I, uh, uh, when I went through, uh, in 1950 to
41 Oberammergau I stopped in England and saw some of the English women
42 who had been in prison camp with me. Among them was Betty
43 [Rosewoodboyd 14:23] who was cousins of the queen and [inaudible]
44 [McMillin] whose husband was a cousin to a prime minister [McMillin]

1 and [Daphne Bird] whose husband had been a famous architect and they
2 had to – their husbands had all been in prison in, uh, Hong Kong during
3 the war. So, I stopped to see them.
4
5Evelyn McHiggins: Did you know they had been in prison to?
6
7Edna Miller: Yes, yes.
8
9Evelyn McHiggins: You knew, were they prisoners in Manila you mean?
10
11Edna Miller: Yes, they were. That's where I...
12
13Evelyn McHiggins: Before they went to Hong Kong? I suppose.
14
15Edna Miller: Uh, no, no.
16
17Evelyn McHiggins: Oh, well maybe I misunderstood you.
18
19Edna Miller: No, their husbands were captured in Hong Kong and, uh, yes, they were
20 from Hong Kong to but...
21
22Evelyn McHiggins: Oh, and the wives were in prison?
23
24Edna Miller: Well the wives came to, uh, Manila because they thought that they would,
25 you know, get out of the way of the Japanese. They didn't know they
26 could be interned again.
27
28Evelyn McHiggins: Yeah. [chuckle] Well that's interesting. Um, d-, do you think of anything
29 that was particularly, oh I don't know what to say, humorous or, uh,
30 something that you'd like everybody to know?
31
32Edna Miller: Uh, well there at one time I would go down to the, uh, Japanese
33 headquarters and try to act as a fool and, uh, so that, uh, um, uh, one of the
34 men that went along a Jimmy [Heltma 15:42] who was intern who finally
35 finished with USIA as a big official but he would go down and listen to
36 the Japanese radio well I tried to divert the attention of the, uh, Japanese
37 officers.
38
39Evelyn McHiggins: How did you do that?
40
41Edna Miller: Well I prete-, pre – did some crazy actions. [laughter]
42
43Evelyn McHiggins: You mean you played like a jester?
44

1Edna Miller: I played footsies, yes, yes just like a fool. Like a jester. To divert their
2 attention.
3

4Evelyn McHiggins: And you played footsies with'm?
5

6Edna Miller: Yes, that's it.
7

8Evelyn McHiggins: Oh, my goodness. That must have been shocking. [chuckle] Did they fall
9 for that?
10

11Edna Miller: For a bit. He was able to listen to quite a bit while I was acting as a fool.
12 [chuckle] And in the prison camp on, uh, on Saturday night we put on
13 some, uh, different things to, uh, keep peoples mind occupied. We would
14 tell – I told all about the state of Maryland things and then we put on
15 plays. I was on, in a play or two. And at one time the Japanese said can we
16 take part too? So, they put on a sword dance for us can you imagine that?
17

18Evelyn McHiggins: Well how 'bout that. They were quite cooperative, weren't they? [chuckle]
19 This was when you were a pris-, a POW?
20

21Edna Miller: That's right, that's right.
22

23Evelyn McHiggins: Or a intern, uh, is there anything special you would like to say about going
24 overseas? How do you feel about it? Did you regret going or you glad you
25 went?
26

27Edna Miller: No, no I never regretted it one minute. As I said, while in this prison camp
28 I became – I had a lot of bad experiences but I looked after a little boy
29 who was half British and half American for a long time and that helped it
30 keep my mind off myself. But, uh, in, in the camp I listened to all the
31 different religions and I fell in love with a, the Episcopal book of common
32 prayer and I become the Episcopalian I will be till the day I die. I said I
33 wouldn't take anything for this experience. I wouldn't wish it on my worst
34 enemy but I wouldn't take anything for it because that's where I became as
35 much as a Christian as I ever will be and I learned my sense of value. The
36 best things in life are free.
37

38Evelyn McHiggins: Well that's great, that really is.
39

40Edna Miller: Your country, your friends, your relatives, beautiful nature and books. The
41 Japanese finally did let us go over and ransack the library out of the camp
42 John Hay, so we had some books for a while.
43

44Evelyn McHiggins: And the Philippines was beautiful wasn't it?

1
2Edna Miller: Yeah, we were on the top of the high mountains a mile high among the
3 head hunters in the Baguio.
4
5Evelyn McHiggins: And did you find them too?
6
7Edna Miller: Oh, we saw...
8
9Evelyn McHiggins: The head hunters?
10
11Edna Miller: Oh, there were lots of'm there.
12
13Evelyn McHiggins: They weren't as bad as the Japanese I guess.
14
15Edna Miller: Uh, no. The Japanese were never to bad to us. We had one of'm was pretty
16 bad because they found 2 of our military men as [gramilias 18:32] out in
17 the mountain and they put'm in with us because they didn't know what to
18 do with'm but theoretically military and civilian not supposed to be
19 together so, and theoretically the military's supposed to try and escape and
20 they did try to escape and that was very bad for us because if we'd been in
21 the hands of the Nazi's they would have decimated every 10th woman and
22 child.
23
24Evelyn McHiggins: Mm-hm.
25
26Edna Miller: But instead of that the Japanese took our good commander away and, uh,
27 gave us a terrible one that was real bad to us.
28
29Evelyn McHiggins: Mm-hm.
30
31Edna Miller: But uh...
32
33Evelyn McHiggins: And you didn't have much to eat all that time?
34
35Edna Miller: Nothing but a handful of dirty rice. We got one package of Red Cross food
36 in 1943 and among them was, uh, even some, uh, woolen underwear
37 which we couldn't use in the Philippines.
38
39Evelyn McHiggins: That was not where you needed it.
40
41Edna Miller: But we, uh, used them to make doll babies and stuffed teddy bears for
42 Christmas for the kids. And we had for Christmas we had a brown paper
43 turkey. [chuckle] But the Christmas in '43 was a nice one because that was
44 the only time a Red Cross package got up the mountains to us and we, uh,

1 really had a wonderful time with that, that saved our lives. We ate, uh, one
2 table-, teaspoon of Spam a day for a year till the – almost to the end of the
3 war. And I want to say that the Japanese saw that every civilian and
4 soldier got his package of food wherever they were, highest in the
5 mountains, they saw that they got it.
6
7Evelyn McHiggins: That was mailed, you mean, to them?
8
9Edna Miller: No, they carried them there in their Jeeps.
10
11Evelyn McHiggins: Uh, how did the packages get there?
12
13Edna Miller: Oh, they came by ship to Manila.
14
15Evelyn McHiggins: Uh-huh.
16
17Edna Miller: And then they came up the mountain to us.
18
19Evelyn McHiggins: Well.
20
21Edna Miller: The people in Manila I had 3 cousins there and by the way I had 3 cousins
22 that came in as military engineers and helped to rescue me and I had a, a
23 nephew that was a little navy gob out on a ship in Manila, but he didn't
24 know I was there.
25
26Evelyn McHiggins: [20:34] Could you write any letters while you were in camp?
27
28Edna Miller: Well I wrote one and it was a one [mint 20:41] you know money talks so
29 the standard oil and, uh, General [Leptic 20:47] 2 representatives in the far
30 east, they were allowed to go home on that uh...
31
32Evelyn McHiggins: [Kungsong 20:54]?
33
34Edna Miller: That one ship that came back and they carried little notes or, to our
35 relatives in the states to tell them that we were alive and, uh, that's the only
36 thing that, uh...
37
38Evelyn McHiggins: Did you get any mail? Did you receive any mail from home?
39
40Edna Miller: No mail, people never heard from me for almost 4 years.
41
42Evelyn McHiggins: And you didn't hear from them?
43
44Edna Miller: No, of course not.

1
2Evelyn McHiggins: Mm-hm.
3
4Edna Miller: No.
5
6Evelyn McHiggins: I bet they were glad when you could write them.
7
8Edna Miller: Well, I didn't come home, as I say, till '47.
9
10Evelyn McHiggins: No, but you could write, I suppose, afterwards.
11
12Edna Miller: Yes.
13
14Evelyn McHiggins: Where were you actually, uh, on V-J day? The end of the war. I know it
15 went on for several days, but where were you? In Manila?
16
17Edna Miller: Uh, oh yes. Uh-huh.
18
19Evelyn McHiggins: Mm-hm. Would you do it all again?
20
21Edna Miller: Yes, I would.
22
23Evelyn McHiggins: You think of anything else special you'd like to add to this?
24
25Edna Miller: Oh, there's so many things, uh, but, uh, I don't know where to begin or
26 end. There's just so many things.
27
28Evelyn McHiggins: Well thank you very much, Edna.
29
30Edna Miller: Oh, yeah.
31
32Evelyn McHiggins: I think that was most interesting.
33
34
35/hm