

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ARTHUR MACMILLIN  
Pilot, Air Force, World War II

2004

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**MacMillin, Arthur F.** (b. 1925). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Approximate length: 20 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, MacMillin discusses his service as a pilot during World War II, his time as an instructor training pilots, and his time in the Air Force Reserves. MacMillin enlisted in Madison (Wisconsin), and had basic training at Jefferson Barracks (Missouri) before being sent to train as a pilot in Eagle Pass (Texas). He discusses graduating and getting his second lieutenant bars and becoming an instructor of his own squadron. He briefly talks about his time on leave and his life after being discharged in 1945.

**Biographical Sketch:**

MacMillin (b. 1925) served with the Air Force from 1942 to 1945. After being discharged he served with the Air Force Reserves for twenty years, retiring as a Major. He also owned his own sport's shop in Sturgeon Bay, WI for fifty five years.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2004.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2012.

Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

## Interview Transcript

MacDonald: --Arthur F. MacMillin, who served with the United States Army Air Forces during World War II. The interview is being conducted at 10:15 a.m. at the following address: [REDACTED], Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of October 27, 2004. The interviewer is Terry MacDonald. Art, can you tell us a little bit about your background, where you grew up and the year you were born and stuff?

MacMillin: I was born here.

MacDonald: In Sturgeon Bay.

MacMillin: 1925. Here in Sturgeon Bay, and I have two sisters. One lives in Bailey's Harbor, and one lives in Hartford, Wisconsin, right now.

MacDonald: Did you go to high school here in Sturgeon Bay?

MacMillin: I went to high school here in Sturgeon Bay and worked at the Post Office and an attire shop in Fort Dodge and Hawley's [sp??] Lunch. And every place I can think of, I was working.

MacDonald: What year did you graduate from high school?

MacMillin: 1942.

MacDonald: And what happened when you graduated?

MacMillin: Oh, I went to work at the shipyard. I was one of the youngest guys in the shipyard. They even called up Madison to get me a special permit.

MacDonald: In the shipyard, what were they building at that time?

MacMillin: Uh, let's see, we were building those cargo boats for the English. And my first job was grinding out the holes of the cable covers.

MacDonald: When did you get notified—did you get drafted into the military?

MacMillin: No. Dan O'Hearne [sp??] and I went to Madison, I think, to take a physical. And I think we were going to be pilots—no, we were mechanics, but somehow we both got into the pilot program. But he didn't make it through because he had a more than fifty percent obstruction on one side of his nose. And I didn't. So I happened to get in before him. I was in class of 42C.

MacDonald: Now, was this after boot camp or before boot camp?

MacMillin: This was before *and* after.

MacDonald: Okay. Where did you go for the training?

MacMillin: Well, let's see, I went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, first. And then we went to Eagle Pass, Texas. And from Eagle Pass, Texas, we went to the University of Cincinnati; and there back to Eagle Pass, Texas; and then to advanced training.

MacDonald: And they were training you at this time for--?

MacMillin: Pilot.

MacDonald: What type of planes, or was it just general?

MacMillin: Single engine. And, let's see, we did that. And then they shoved me in B-25s for awhile. I flew those for about ten hours, and I said, "That's enough of this. Get me back in single-engine where I belong."

MacDonald: Now, was a single-engine a fighter plane?

MacMillin: It was a fighter plane. And we had a squadron of our own called Satan's Angels Squadron. And when we left advanced training, after we graduated and got our wings and got our second lieutenant bars-- oh, let's see, then we went to Brooks Field, San Antonio [Texas]. And I became an instructor of my own men.

MacDonald: Your own squadron, then, huh?

MacMillin: Right.

MacDonald: And what were you instructor of?

MacMillin: Pilots.

MacDonald: Training the pilots, huh?

MacMillin: Uh-huh. And I remember one incident in that. They wanted me to sign for a bunch of—we had to go on the line and take our turn at gassing the aircraft. And he wanted me to sign for a bunch of toolboxes. I says, "No way! Where are the toolboxes?" "We don't know, but the empty boxes are over there." So, then they had bed checks and they found tools all *over* the place.

MacDonald: The guys were ripping them off?

MacMillin: Just using them, yeah, and forgetting to bring them back.

MacDonald: So did you stay there, then, stay as an instructor at that base?

MacMillin: I stayed at Victoria, Texas—no, that was at Brooks Field. Victoria, Texas, was where I graduated. And I wasn't supposed to graduate that year, either. I was a squadron commander, and I took all my men into the theater and pronounced them present and accounted for. And somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and they said, "The colonel wants to see you." [*I thought*] "What does he want now?" And he chewed me up and down--my body was like a squirrel--because I had woke him up the night before. I was the last one flying, so he had nobody to blame it onto but me.

MacDonald: He didn't like that. You disturbed his sleep.

MacMillin: Right. And not only that, but then after I had to go through all that, the next day they said, "Oh, by the way, you're in."

MacDonald: And what did that mean?

MacMillin: You can go ahead and get your orders. So I had to go through all these places, and where I was redlined and signed, "Oh, *you're* the guy! Oh, *you're* the guy! Oh, *you're* the guy!" [Laughs] So, we went back to San Antonio, and then we came, we were going to party. So then I come home and we got married.

MacDonald: Did you meet her in Texas, or she was from town, here? What year was that, you got married?

MacMillin: What year did we get married, '43?

Woman's Voice: We were married in '45.

MacMillin: '45. We went together [unintelligible]. And then we got married, and then we took a house trailer and were heading back for Texas, because I got called back early. I had to go down to Eagle Pass.

MacDonald: Now, at this time you were still training pilots?

MacMillin: Right.

MacDonald: Okay, and your squadron, where did they end up going?

MacMillin: They went the same place I did. Where the heck were we? Oh, we were, uh—. Better stop it.

[Break in recording][00:09:49]

MacDonald: Your crew is a group of pilots, and you're doing advanced training with your pilots. So you're the instructor, correct?

MacMillin: Right. That was really something. And those guys that were ahead of me, that had the ships on the line, I think they got dishonorably discharged. My fault. And then down in Victoria, Texas--where we eventually ended--they had a flight up to Victoria, and they asked me if I wanted to come along. I said, "No." For some reason I didn't go. And somebody pyloned [??] the tower that day. And right away they called up Brooks after me, that I wasn't on the flight.

MacDonald: Huh.

MacMillin: Where the heck did we go then? We were a second lieutenant making seven hundred and—no, two hundred and seventy-five dollars a month, I think. And we spent every penny of it. We lived in a little house in front of the supply officer of the base. And one night we played cards all night long. The girls drank up a quart of gin, and the guys drank up a case of beer. Then we stopped. You know, we were getting towards the end of the war. And some of these people were coming back from overseas that needed flight time. So we go give them flight time. I remember giving one guy four hours, and I dropped my watch, and I says, "Take over. I'm going to go down and look for it." So I went and looked for it. And I got back up; I said, "Okay, I got it." And he says, "Thank you. First time I ever flew; I'm a bombardier." [Laughs]

MacDonald: Wow! You were flying B-25 at that time?

MacMillin: No, we were flying the AT-6s. And one time I had, oh, maybe ten or fifteen of them in a squadron doing loops. And we got above ten thousand feet or eleven thousand feet, and you're supposed to have oxygen there. And we didn't have it. And we lost one of ours. All I could see was the cowling come off. It went back through the cockpit, and hit the guy in the head. And he went right, smack dab into the ground.

MacDonald: So, coming towards the end of the war, then, when the war ended, what happened with you?

MacMillin: Oh, I came home and went duck hunting for a couple of days, because I didn't have to be in Madison for, say, like, day after tomorrow, or something like that. So I stayed home here and went duck hunting for a couple of days. When I got down to Madison, they gave me hell. But I says, "It's perfectly legal. I didn't have to travel only so much by car."

MacDonald: So at Madison what were you doing--at the airfield in Madison?

MacMillin: Yeah, we were getting discharged.

MacDonald: So then you got out, and you came back to Sturgeon Bay.

MacMillin: Yep.

MacDonald: And what did you do in Sturgeon Bay, then?

MacMillin: We opened up Mac's Sport Shop.

MacDonald: Yeah, it was a very successful business. How many years were you in there?

MacMillin: Fifty-five.

MacDonald: And you had two boys that helped you out in the store?

MacMillin: Tom and Jerry.

MacDonald: Yeah, it was a very successful business on the west side of Sturgeon Bay.

MacMillin: Yup.

MacDonald: Now, did you also stay in the Reserves?

MacMillin: I stayed in the Reserves for twenty years. So I actually gave them twenty-two and a half years of service. Every week on Wednesday night, Richie Boston [sp??] and I, and Chester Burdock [sp??] and Judas Knoll, would head for Green Bay Reserve meeting. The Air Force never got paid. We could never figure it out. The Air Force never got paid, but everybody else did. The Air Force didn't. But now they're paying me.

MacDonald: And what was your rank when you got discharged in '45, then?

MacMillin: In '45? Second lieutenant.

MacDonald: And then you went up. When you retired from the Air Force Reserves at what rank?

MacMillin: Major.

MacDonald: You mentioned that you didn't get paid. But did you take any benefits—any veterans' benefits that you had?

MacMillin: No. All we wanted to do was to get out. See, we were married at the time. And so we came home and bought a house and started a business.

MacDonald: Did you join any veterans' organizations when you got out?

MacMillin: Nope, not a one.

MacDonald: When you were in, did you make any close friendships?

MacMillin: Oh, lots of them.

MacDonald: Do you have reunions or anything like that now?

MacMillin: No, but I see them every once in a while. Kelvin McQuarrie [sp??] from Walla Walla, Washington—the city and lake so well, they named it twice--and little Leroy Martin from down in Indiana, those are my closest friends, I guess.

MacDonald: What are your thoughts about the war effort and the role that you played in it? What kind of impact did it have on you?

MacMillin: Well, after we got out for awhile, we wished we would have stayed in. Because right now, instead of being--[*Thumping sound in background*] You okay?

MacDonald: Are there any comments that you recall about your experiences during your service time?

MacMillin: Oh, I thought it was the greatest, the greatest time you could possibly have. Met a lot of people--a lot of nice people and a lot of stinkers—but, more and more, they were nice people. Uh, let's see, to take it back a little bit. Daniel O'Hearne [sp??] and I, and Bud [inaudible], all used to sub together. And we all used to go to proms together. Now they're both dead.

MacDonald: But they didn't die during the war.



MacMillin: No.

MacDonald: Did you have any friends that did die during the war?

MacMillin: Nope, not a one. But they had one guy in college that was in Hawaii when the Japs bombed. And he was in a pile of dead bodies, and he wiggled a little bit, and somebody pulled him out.

MacDonald: Did he survive the war?

MacMillin: Yeah, and he went to college with us.

MacDonald: What year did you go to college, then, Art?

MacMillin: Forty-three, forty-four.

MacDonald: Oh, was that when you—Cincinnati, University of Cincinnati?

MacMillin: Yeah. That was a good school, too. We had a very good time there. We went to Cincinnati a couple of years ago to a national square dance convention. And, in fact, the only thing that reminded us of it was the railroad station, and it was now a museum. Other than that, we have no idea.

MacDonald: Right, they changed it a lot.

MacMillin: Oh, they sure did.

MacDonald: Any other things you want to make a comment about during your service time, Art?

MacMillin: No, I think it was the best time of my life. It took up a lot of my time, but I'm getting the best out of it now that you could possibly get.

MacDonald: Okay.

[End of interview]