

INTERVIEW WITH SAM MILLER  
BY DAVE HALL, APRIL 18, 2001  
Others present, Sara Hall and Jonathon Schafler

[Tape begins without an introduction, and in the middle of an exchange]

MR. HALL: ... Leo Bagger,

MR. MILLER: No, I don't see him.

MR. HALL: You haven't seen him? Where does he live? Doesn't he live near here somewhere doesn't he?

MR. MILLER: He lives up above here somewhere. I kind of got a little sour about him.

MR. HALL: There are some others who did too.

MR. MILLER: He was on the [unintelligible] Refuge. He was afraid they were going to get after him because he was telling me how they were baiting things. [Unable to hear words properly due to background noise] Every Regional Director and Assistant Supervisor got after me. He asked me how he could into the Fish and Wildlife Service. So I had the Supervisor from over at Meade Ville, Pennsylvania interview Bagger. He got on. He knew the outcome of the examination. He missed the first one. He didn't pass. He did squeak past on the second one and they kept him on. I was out working in Wisconsin. Wisconsin decided to run the goose season their way, and a gang of us got sent out there.

MR. HALL: I was sent out there too. I worked in "Horrible Horrigan". [Sic?]

MR. MILLER: A whole bunch of us went out there. And when I was out there Leo brought Bob Halstead up to Pennsylvania, and they went out to some of the smaller Refuges up here, and then reported to Boston that they were baited. [Sic?] Boston called me and told me to come back to check it. I had the Supervisor go to those places before I went out and he said they were O.K. But while I was out this district he tried to [unintelligible] through some other route. I haven't been too friendly with him since.

MR. HALL: I can understand that very much. I know exactly what you are saying.

MR. MILLER: There was a lot of jealousy in the outfit.

MR. HALL: And let me tell you something, there were a few others who were the same way. But overall, most of the Agents that worked for this organization were together.

MR. MILLER: Bob Holley was an excellent one. Lee Brackett was good.

MR. HALL: And you were excellent.

MR. MILLER: What?

MR. HALL: You were excellent.

MR. MILLER: Oh well... Is there anything else that you want?

MR. HALL: Well, if you have any written records that you have kept, that we could copy?

MR. MILLER: No, not much, just taxes, that's there.

MR. SCHAFLER: [All laughing] No, don't want your taxes! We don't want to even know about your taxes!

MRS. HALL: Can you take a picture?

MR. SCHAFLER: Yeah, we need to get the camera.

MR. HALL: We're going to have to do it outside.

MR. SCHAFLER: What were the years that you wore the hat? Do you remember? [Mr. Miller has a hat with him that he wore while working for the FWS]

MR. MILLER: It was when I was working, but I don't know when it was.

MR. SCHAFLER: When you got the hat, was the patch on the hat?

MR. MILLER: Oh no, I put it on there.

MR. SCHAFLER: Oh, I see, you put it on, because I've never seen this patch before.

MR. MILLER: I cut it out [of something else].

MR. SCHAFLER: Oh, I know what you did. Yeah! Now I know. I thought that this was a special patch.

MR. HALL: It looks to me that it is a well-worn hat.

MR. SCHAFLER: Oh, absolutely.

MR. HALL: And for our Museum, we'd like to have this hat.

MR. SCHAFLER: We're going to have a display case with just your things in it. There will be pictures of you on the Eider, signed pictures, and the hats, and anything and everything that you have, associated with your career that you would want to loan, or give to the Fish and Wildlife Service. We are going to put that in the Museum, and everyone from here, to forever will see it.

MR. MILLER: That's down in the new buildings?

MR. SCHAFLER: Right.

MR. HALL: It's going to be there forever.

MR. MILLER: Where you out to the Kansas City meeting?

MR. HALL: No, I didn't go there because I had to come here. I brought a lot of stuff. She [referring to Mrs. Hall] and I drove a great big U-Haul truck. I am donating all of my artifacts, a whole truckload.

MR. SCHAFLER: He as donated boxes and boxes, all of the stuff that he has collected for years.

MR. HALL: I was lucky, like you, to be out there.

MR. MILLER: That's all game-load books.

MR. SCHAFLER: Where?

MR. MILLER: Those are Federal game-load books, in that box.

MR. SCHAFLER: In this box? Can I look?

MR. HALL: It looks like you took good care of them.

MR. MILLER: They were more or less in order.

MR. SCHAFLER: Not any more! Oh look, that's Ding Darling right there. Do you know who the artist is there? Do you know who did that cartoon? Ding Darling made that. That's who I think it is.

MR. HALL: Oh yeah! We had a lot of heroes in this little organization.

MR. MILLER: He was quite a critic of our outfit before he was appointed.

MR. HALL: But then he came around.

MR. MILLER: Well, who was it, Roosevelt, who called him in and said, "Either shut up, or run the Fish and Wildlife"? He was initiated out there in St. Louis.

MR. HALL: He got initiated too, huh?

MR. MILLER: The press got him first, and then we dogs wore him through.

MR. SCHAFLER: You don't remember putting your credentials in any certain place, eh? Do you remember those credentials that we saw the slide of?

MR. MILLER: Oh, you mean the cards?

MR. SCHAFLER: Yeah, the wallet.

MR. MILLER: I'll have to look. I'm not sure where they are, or if I still have them.

MR. SCHAFLER: We don't have any of those.

MR. MILLER: I know that have the binder, but I don't know what's in it.

MR. SCHAFLER: Well, we can take a look.

MR. MILLER: Is there anything else you in the way of pictures? There are some of Alaska over there. [Referring to location in room]

MR. HALL: We would like to copy all of these slides and send them back to you.

MR. MILLER: Are you interested in Alaska?

MR. HALL: Yeah! We are interested in anything that you did, from day you went to work, because we are going to have a special place [In the Museum] for what you have done for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

MR. SCHAFLER: Are you interested in seeing that this stuff is preserved at the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. MILLER: Yeah!

MR. SCHAFLER: I think that it is a great tribute to your career. One hundred years from now, new Agents, young people, will see your stuff and say that that is where they want to go.

MR. MILLER: One hundred years from now, I'm not going to worry about it! [All laughing]

MR. HALL: I won't be worrying about it too much longer, but I can tell you one thing; you've got a record like nobody has!

MR. SCHAFLER: That's right!

MR. HALL: That's the thing. You did it with such; I always heard about you guys. I was down in Chincoteague and then over in Louisiana.

MR. MILLER: We went through the bumps.

MR. HALL: There was a lot of bumps for all of us. We weren't treated very well. But finally, some of the Directors came along and helped us. We had some good Directors. Al Day was a good one.

MR. MILLER: We were sort of outcasts for a while.

MR. HALL: You weren't up in Alaska with Jacobsen were you? [Group is preparing to look at a set of slides taken in Alaska]

MR. MILLER: No, I was up there with Van Carlton and Bill McClure.

MR. HALL: I know Van Carlton. We are like brothers.

MR. MILLER: There were the three of us. There was a couple of women onboard the boat going up. They short sheeted me a couple of times on the trip. You'd go to bed and the sheet would be doubled up.

MR. HALL: Van is in bad shape. He can hardly walk. He was my boss for many years. He was one of the greatest Agents that we ever had. I am sure that you enjoyed being with Van Carlton.

MR. MILLER: He was on the [U.S.S.] Indianapolis, when it was sunk.

MR. HALL: Yeah, I know. He was a war hero. Did you ever know Joe Peru?

MR. MILLER: Yeah.

MR. HALL: He is another one of my heroes.

MR. MILLER: He told me one time that a guy had him down on the ground and was going to shoot him. He thought he was a goner.

MR. HALL: He crashed a helicopter in the Mississippi River. They were upside down and they both survived.

MRS. HALL: They swam out. They swam the Mississippi River.

MR. MILLER: Did you say that Carlton could hardly walk?

MR. HALL: He is in bad shape. He was one of the greatest Agents we ever had. What you guys did was terrific. And most of the guys are war heroes.

MR. MILLER: Up in Alaska he was on what they called the...

MR. SCHAFLER: [Looking at slides] Oh man, OH MAN!

MR. HALL: We've got to have that! We'll send it back to you, or drive it back to you.

MR. SCHAFLER: Look at that badge!

MR. MILLER: I think that was a silver one wasn't it?

MR. SCHAFLER: I've never seen that.

MR. MILLER: I've got my gold badge someplace. They gave it to me when I retired.

MR. HALL: You know Ralph Harris? They took his badge when he retired, and wouldn't let him keep it. He was in Arkansas then. You ought to see this letter. I have this letter, and I brought it with me. He said that the government would not allow him to keep his credentials.

MR. MILLER: They wouldn't allow him to have it?

MR. HALL: No. He had to turn it in. He wrote a terrible letter saying that he had worked all those years, and all he wanted out of it was that little badge, and they never would give it to him.

MR. MILLER: I've got my badge around here somewhere. We had this little silver badge first, and then they gave us the gold badge.

MR. HALL: He had the gold badge, his last one, and they made him turn it back in. He was very bitter after that. His health got bad too. If you worked with Van Carlton, you probably enjoyed it.

MR. MILLER: Yeah. He was on a boat they called the "Speed boat". It did twelve knots. They were two Agents on it.

MR. HALL: Were those on the slides?

MR. MILLER: I'm not sure. I took the big boat out, what was the name of it? It's been so long since I've been on it. Oh, it was the Grizzly Bear. The Captain, Van der Haute, he had to go some place. We were ready to go out to sea. And being the boat operator, I took the boat on a tour. We got way out some place, and Juneau called us on the radio and said that the Speed boat was at such and such a place and that they had thrown a clutch. They couldn't move. We had to go and get them. It took us twenty-four hours to get to them. We did seven knots per hour with the Grizzly Bear. It was a big old diesel. We towed them back to Juno. And the first thing they wanted to know when we got to them was if we had any food. We did.

MR. HALL: Was Jacobsen up there with you too?

MR. MILLER: No.

MR. HALL: I know that he was up there some. He has just written a book. He was involved in that deal out in Ohio where they had all of that trouble, and they went to the Supreme Court with the case. He tells about one of the Agents; the only Agent that we know of that was fired for being dishonest. He was fired for being involved with these big, rich, Duck Club owners. That's is when Al Day came in and he closed the whole duck season. He shut it down. They told him that he had no authority to do that. He told them that yes, he did. He shut the whole duck season down. They went all of the way to the Supreme Court, and they won.

MR. MILLER: Al Day was pretty good.

MR. HALL: Yeah, he was a good man.

MR. MILLER: I liked Dr. Gabrielson too.

MR. SCHAFER: [Showing a paper to Mr. Miller that he has just found] Sam, I just found this on top. This is the original document that signed you on!

MR. MILLER: Yeah.

MR. SCHAFLE: How come it's just sitting out like that?

MR. MILLER: Where did you find that?

MR. SCHAFLE: It was just sitting right there on the couch.

MR. HALL: I had some papers out. This was when I was first appointed.

MR. SCHAFLE: That's your initial document, from 1930!

MR. MILLER: It gave me the opportunity to take the examination.

MRS. HALL: What was the salary?

MR. SCHAFLE: Three dollars and fifty cents, per diem.

MR. MILLER: Is there anything else over there?

MR. SCHAFLE: I don't know, but I am looking. [Mr. And Mrs. Hall laugh, Mr. Schafler seems to feel as though he is searching through treasure]

MR. HALL: I'll tell you what, when we get this exhibit up; whatever we have to do, to come and pick you up and drive you up there. We want you to see what is there.

[Mr. Hall attempts to get slide projector working properly to view Alaska slides. Machine doesn't seem to be working properly. They are not successful. They find another way to view slides.]

MR. MILLER: Look, there is Van Carlton.

MR. HALL: He was my boss for a long time. He was one of the greatest men that ever lived. He was a war hero, and you name it. We called him "Big Van".

MRS. HALL: He was a big man. He had the biggest hands that I have ever seen.

MR. MILLER: That is a fisherman. And there is a picture of Juneau. And that is a Sea Owl, I guess.

MR. SCHAFLE: Who is that?

MR. MILLER: He was the skipper of the Grizzly Bear.



[Note from transcriber: Mr. Miller's interview tape seems to have been recorded on a visit to Mr. Miller's home, by the Halls, and Mr. Schafler. It seems evident that Mr. Miller is rather elderly, with some loss of memory. The Halls, and Mr. Schafler are visiting with him in order to glean information regarding his career and items for exhibit at FWS Museum. During interview permission is asked to take slides and documents to be copied and returned, and to take some items for display. Recorded interview ends when the group begins to view slides.]