Interview with Sam Million

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Interview # 1: October 28, 2009

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, October 28, 2009. My name is Mark DePue, and I'm the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in the presidential library today, talking to Sam Million. Good morning, Sam.

Million: Morning.

DePue: The reason we brought Sam here today is because he's got some memories about World War II and about things that happened in Sugamo Prison after World War II. It's one of those chapters of the Second World War that is too often forgotten and neglected, so I'm excited about doing it and excited about having you here, Sam. Welcome.

Million: Thank you.

DePue: We're going to start with the easy stuff first. When and where were you born?

Million: I was born in Auburn, Illinois, November 26, 1927.

DePue: And you grew up in both Auburn and Springfield?

Million: Left Auburn when I was about four or five years old and moved to Springfield in about 1933, '34, and lived there up until 1963, when I moved to Louisiana with a job.

DePue: First we're going to double way back and ask quite a bit about your father's story because that was fascinating when you told me in the pre-interview session. Tell me about your father. Do you know when he was born?

Million: He was born in 1876.

DePue: And where was he born?

Million: He was born in Palermo, Italy—in Sicily, I should say—and grew up there. He worked the fields as they did then pretty much until they immigrated to this country.

DePue: You say "they." Did he come over with his family?

Million: My father came over here and his then–to-be wife came over also, but they were not married yet. Then my mother went back.

DePue: Do you know what time this would have been, what year?

Million: This would have been very close to 1900. The exact year, I can't pinpoint, but it was close to 1900. My mother went back to Sicily and my father went back. They got married over there and then they both came back together. And that would have been anywhere between 1900 and 1910.

DePue: So they came, they went back, and they came again.

Million: Exactly.

DePue: In that timeframe, when people were coming to the United States, oftentimes it was because they had relatives in this country.

Million: They did. There were relatives. My mother's brother—my uncle lived in Brooklyn. He came over here actually before my mother did, and he worked in a factory where they made pants, shirts—a sweatshop is exactly what it was.

DePue: But did your father have any relatives here? I mean, he certainly couldn't say "Well, I'm coming here because my future wife has relatives here." That wouldn't have worked.

Million: No, my father did not have relatives here, none at all.

DePue: Did they go through Ellis Island?

Million: Yes, went through Ellis Island. Matter of fact, they're on the wall that they placed there for the people that came through Ellis Island.

DePue: Did he share any stories about what it was like going through Ellis Island?

Million: Well, from what I can remember and times that he had talked about this, which was not all that much, he said it was very crowded, but you didn't stay there very long—just enough time to get documented and the ship that you came over on, and from then on you were on your own.

DePue: Well, I know he had a medical screening there as well. Both your parents would have had that.

Million: Yes, they did. Matter of fact, on the trunk that they used when they came to this country—which I have at this time—it's marked on there, "fumigated." So everything that came into this country from a ship was fumigated—not because it was you, it was the standard procedure.

DePue: What was his name when he came through? I can't imagine it was Million.

Million: No. His name was Giuseppi Milione.

DePue: Okay, you're going to have to spell Giuseppi for me.

Million: G--i-u - s-e-p-p-i.

DePue: Milione.

Million: Yes. Then his name became Joseph, which is Giuseppi.

DePue: Okay. How about your mother?

Million: Her name was Katherine Giganti, G-i-g-a-n-t-i. Katherine with a K.

DePue: Do you know if she had her name changed as well when she came through?

Million: No, her name remained as Katherine, and then, of course, the name became Milione when they got married, and later on throughout the years my father changed his name to Million.

DePue: It was not changed at Ellis Island, then?

Million: No, it was not. It was changed after, when my father was in the ice cream business.

DePue: Well, that's a little bit ahead of our story, but we will definitely get there. Okay. Did they go through this Ellis Island experience together?

Million: No, they did not. Well, the second time, when they came here—when they got married, of course they both came through Ellis Island together.

DePue: But did they also come in—this would have been in the very early 1900s—they came that first time with the intent to be married here?

Million: Actually, they got married over there.

DePue: Well, I know, but were they intended to get—

Million: Oh, yes, yes.

DePue: They already knew each other, then.

Million: Yes. Well, I guess they might have been neighbors in the little town they lived in, which was actually called Montevago as Mama used to call it.

DePue: Okay, back in Sicily. What brought them to the United States?

Million: A better life.

DePue: It was simple as that?

Million: As simple as that. It was not all that good in Sicily. There wasn't work to speak of and so they had to do better, they wanted to do better. This was the land of plenty, and as they used to refer to it and all of the people there, this is a land with gold-lined streets.

DePue: Well, they obviously found out that wasn't quite the case when they got to the United States.

Million: Very much so.

DePue: What did they tell you about their first impressions coming to here?

Million: They liked it. They knew that it was going to be a better place, and found out the streets were not gold-lined. (laughter)

DePue: What did they do once they arrived in the country?

Million: The first thing my father did was work on the railroad, building the railroads from Louisiana to the present-day up all the way to the Chicago was the Illinois Central. But when he reached Virden, Illinois, this is where he stopped. He got off there.

DePue: I need to back up just a little bit here. How much money would they have had in their pockets when they got to Ellis Island, do you think?

Million: Probably didn't have two nickels to rub together. They had no money.

DePue: Did he have a job waiting for him?

Million: Did not have a job.

DePue: How did he end up working on the railroad in Louisiana?

Million: He'd heard that they were hiring and my father was not afraid of work, so he I guess found a ride from New York to Louisiana, and they were hiring. They needed people and they hired him. I don't know, it might have been fifty cents a day that they were making, but that was money and he had a family.

DePue: Did he speak any English at the time?

Million: Yes, he spoke English. He learned English, self-taught. Learned to read and write in Italian and English.

DePue: He learned all that while he was in the United States?

Million: Yes.

DePue: He was not literate in Italian when he came?

Million: He was literate in Italian, of course, being of Italian descent, but he learned the English language. Like I say, self-taught—he didn't go to school, so he taught himself and was able to write in English and Italian both. Quite an accomplishment.

DePue: Did your mother follow him to Louisiana?

Million: Only afterwards, when they reached the point where he stopped at Virden. Then she and my oldest sister, who was born in Brooklyn, New York, joined him in Virden. Because, you know, he'd made a little bit of money on the railroad, managed to save as much as he could, and sent them the money to come to Virden.

DePue: Okay, I'm confused now, here, Sam. I'm going to have to ask you some questions. I thought we had them here initially, and they were not yet married, and they had gone back to Sicily to get married.

Million: To get married, that's correct.

DePue: How long were they here before they both went back?

Million: That was in between the 1900 and 1910 time area.

DePue: So you're not real certain of the specifics of anything.

Million: No, I'm not.

DePue: Was he here for a couple years before he went back to Sicily?

Million: That might have been a year, or maybe two, but there was not too much time that passed before he came here and they went back and then came back again.

DePue: So from what you're telling me, it was after he had returned to the United States that he found this job in Louisiana.

Million: Yes.

DePue: The first experience was in New York City?

Million: Yes, because they lived in Brooklyn.

DePue: With relatives.

Million: Yes, yes.

DePue: Was he living with his fiancée's relatives?

Million: That's what it would have been, because he had no relatives here. He had a couple sisters—two sisters in Sicily—and that was all, because his parents had died at that point, young.

DePue: Well, I'm imagining the conventions of an Italian family at that time. I assume your parents were both raised as Catholics?

Million: Yes.

DePue: Then it would have been frowned upon for these two people even to be living in this same household. Is that why they went back to Sicily to get married?

Million: Yes.

DePue: Why didn't they get married in the United States?

Million: I don't know. I can't answer that for you.

DePue: They would have had to have enough money at least to get back to Sicily and then back to the States then.

Million: That's correct. Because, you know, it just wasn't going to happen. The people did not work. They all worked. They had to live; they had to eat; and they all had families, so you worked. It wasn't even thought of not working because you couldn't depend on or live off of other people. Times were tough.

DePue: So when they went back to Sicily, as far as you understand, did they have every intention to return back to the States?

Million: Yeah, they weren't going to stay in Sicily. There was nothing there for them.

DePue: Well, they must have gone back to be with family for the wedding. Is that your guess?

Million: I would say so, because my father had two sisters and my mother probably had relatives there, but… Yeah.

DePue: So let's go back now to your father getting this job that started in Louisiana working for the railroad. Did he tell you much about what it was like working for the railroad?

Million: It was tough work building the rail system from Louisiana all the way to Chicago, and of course, when he hit Virden, Illinois, that's where he stopped. That's where he got off. They had these work trains that they lived in and they were given their meals. They had to pay for their meals, even. It wasn't much, but they still had to pay for their meals. But they lived free for the rest of the other part of it, like sleeping and so on and so forth. But that's pretty much the situation. And the work was tough. The work was really hard. They had to dig by shovels. They didn't have machinery to level the ground and place the ties in place and put the rails on the crossties; that was all done by hand. Of course, they had big gangs, and that's the way they built the rail system.

DePue: Was your father one of the people on the gangs? Was he doing the manual labor?

Million: Oh, yes, absolutely. He carried the ties, they carried the rail, they put the spikes in, and the whole—everything. They had to do everything. That's the way it was. You learned that.

DePue: And certainly knowing a little bit about railroad history in the United States, so much of the rail lines in those days were built by crews of immigrants. Was he working largely with a crew that was Italian?

Million: Pardon? What was…?

DePue: Was he working with a crew of Italians?

Million: No, not entirely. There was Chinese, Lithuanians, Polish… There was a huge ethnic background there on the rail systems. They were all in the same situation that my father was in. They needed work and they worked. And it didn't matter who it was.

DePue: What do you think your father's attitude at that time was to become an American as quickly as possible or to hold onto that identity as being Italian?

Million: Yes, he got naturalized right away. He learned what he had to learn about that and studied the books and was told what to expect, and he got naturalized

right away. And he even went so far as to helping people of all backgrounds—what to do, what to expect—and taught them things that they had to do to become naturalized themselves. So he helped quite a few people with regards to that.

DePue: Did he share impressions with you of what it was like to work in the South? I mean, here you've got this Italian kid—he's still fairly young at that time, I would think—

Million: Yes.

DePue: —and now you're in the Deep South of the United States. Did he experience anything with the black culture at that time?

Million: Yes, he did. He worked in the cane fields with all the other people. He was a good worker, and the straw boss that saw how he worked made him kind of a straw boss—that's what they called them—and gave him a whip to carry. And he asked what the whip was for. He says, "That's to beat the people to make them work harder." And with this, after working in the cane fields for, oh, I don't know how long, when he was made the straw boss, he was told that he had to whip the people to make them work harder, and with this, he threw the whip down, says, "I don't beat people."

DePue: Well what people are we talking about here?

Million: The other people that would have been under him, regardless of who it was, but it was mainly the blacks that they were expected to whip, because that was the standard at one time. You didn't overlook things. You whipped them just because you had to whip them. My father wasn't going to do that because he wasn't that type of a person—didn't believe in it.

DePue: Was that his first job when he got to Louisiana?

Million: Yes. But it wasn't long for him to get out of it—wasn't going to do it.

DePue: So it was after that that he found work with the railroad down there?

Million: That's correct.

DePue: And then he works his way north.

Million: Yes.

DePue: Now, this question has been enticing for a long time: Why did he stop in Virden of all places?

Million: Well, there was a coal mine in Virden. He worked the coal mine, and that, of course, was very tough work. When you went down into the hole is what they

called it, you were down there for ten to twelve hours. You came up when the boss told you could come up, and that usually amounted to ten, twelve hours a day—most generally twelve.

DePue: I know that a lot of the coal mines here in Springfield were often worked with Italian immigrants; was that the case in Virden at the time as well?

Million: Yes, it was, but still here again, they had the Polish, Lithuanians, and I don't recall him saying there was any Chinese in the coal mines. There were Mexicans there as well. And the Mexicans worked on the rail system, too, that he became acquainted with during that time.

DePue: Well, this is the ultimate mixing pot that your father was thrown into.

Million: Exactly.

DePue: Or melting pot, I should say.

Million: It was a real melting pot, yeah. But he learned (laughs) in part their languages, and he even learned all the good cuss words (laughter) in their language.

DePue: Well, let's see, working on the railroad, working in the mine, I guess you would learn some colorful language, wouldn't you?

Million: Yeah, he certainly did, and I guess he could cuss with the best of them.

DePue: Do you know what year he settled into Virden?

Million: It would have been right before 1920, perhaps 1918, 1919.

DePue: This would have been after the First World War, then.

Million: Right.

DePue: Any idea what was going on with all the family for both your father and mother back in Sicily?

Million: They had their wars over there, too. My father did a very short stint in the Italian army.

DePue: He did?

Million: Yes.

DePue: But this would have been early 1900s or even earlier?

Million: Earlier. Earlier, as a young man.

DePue: Well, that's another reason to come to the United States, huh?

Million: Yes, exactly—the land of plenty.

DePue: (laughs) I know a lot of Germans were coming during that time to avoid the draft in Germany.

Million: Yes.

DePue: Okay. We're going to pause here for just a second.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very short break, and are back again. We got your father to Virden, working in the coal mines there, but we haven't talked a lot about your mother, and I am assuming that much of this time, while your father is working all the way from Louisiana on the railroad up to Illinois that she's in New York City. Is that correct?

Million: That's correct. She was in Brooklyn.

DePue: And what was she doing there?

Million: She went to work in the sweatshops. She sewed shirts and whatever needed to be done in the sweatshops. They made all types of clothing, suits and everything. My mother got very good at the job, and she was allowed to take work home. And taking work home and completing a shirt or whatever, she got an extra nickel on her paycheck—taking clothes home, sewing them, completing them, and bringing them back.

DePue: How often was she seeing your father?

Million: Well, until he finally came back and settled in again, I guess whenever possible. And these things, I'm not really familiar with, because—you know how they saw one another, when they saw one another.

DePue: The impression you're giving me, though, Sam, is that it was years that your father spent working on the railroad all the way from Louisiana north.

Million: It would have had to have all been before 1920, anywhere between 1900 and 1920 when he was working, and of course the final was stopping in Virden and then went to work in the coal mines there and made enough money to get his family to Virden.

DePue: And his family at that time would have included how many children?

Million: Just one, one sister.

DePue: When was she born, do you know?

Million: I think she was born between 1900 and1903, somewhere in there I'm not exactly the exact time, but that's about the time area.

DePue: In other words, she was quite old by the time that the family rejoined in Virden.

Million: Yeah, she was old enough that when they hit Virden she had to help raise the other members of the family as they were being born, help Mom do that, and took part in the housework and everything that had to be done. And, of course, going to school whenever she could.

DePue: Well, again, I think from what you've explained, she would have been a teenager at least by the time she got to Virden.

Million: Yes.

DePue: And what's her name?

Million: Lena.

DePue: L-e-n-a?

Million: L-e-n-a. She was the oldest sister.

DePue: By far, it sounds like.

Million: Yes.

DePue: But there were more children to come along.

Million: Yes.

DePue: How many?

Million: There's nine of us altogether. I am the last and I have a twin sister.

DePue: What's your twin sister's name?

Million: Betty Jo.

DePue: Well, this is a good all-American name.

Million: Yes, all of us.

DePue: That tells me something too: Betty Joe and Sam. You can't get much more American than those two names.

Million: That's correct.

DePue: Did they speak Italian when you were growing up at home?

Million: As children we used to speak Italian to our parents, for what we were able to do. It was good enough and, of course, I fully understood my parents speaking Italian. I could understand every word. I don't know how I learned that, but growing up with that, I guess you just do it, you just know what it is. That's the way it seemed to me.

DePue: Did they encourage you to become an American, to embrace the American culture?

Million: Yes, exactly.

DePue: Did they encourage you to also embrace certain aspects of the Italian culture?

Million: Yes, you were expected to remember, as it was.

DePue: What kind of things would they expressly want you to be cherishing about your Italian heritage?

Million: Well, of course the culture, the food, the ways of doing things, the way things were done, what you were expected to do—things that you had to learn growing up. And of course, I got both sides of it, the Italian end of it and the American end of it.

DePue: As a young kid growing up, what did you consider yourself?

Million: American, yes.

DePue: Not a hyphenated American?

Million: Nope. Nope, not really.

DePue: What kind of food did you have growing up then?

Million: Just about anything that a mother could cook. She was a very good cook. She cooked American dishes very well, and we also had the Italian dishes, which were very good. My mother was a very good cook.

DePue: Does Sicily have its own cuisine, then, as well?

Million: I'm sure that it does over there. Of course, that all stays with a person when they cook and you always had the Italian dishes—the spaghetti and meatballs, the veal parmesan—very good (laughter)—the breaded veal chops, and whether that's American or Italian—I guess it's mostly Italian. And, yeah, all the Italian dishes, we had them all.

DePue: How important was church to the family?

Million: Well, in a lot of cases there wasn't time for church all the time. They went when they were able to go, because when you're raising kids that takes a lot of time, and especially your mother. She was busy, had to cook, had to get lunch for my father when he went on the job. And at the same time, her brother that lived in Brooklyn came to live with them when they moved to Virden. And there was nieces and nephews of my father's that came over, and of course they lived with the family. My mother was busy.

DePue: In other words, you grew up in an extended family, with a lot of kids but a lot of other relatives as well.

Million: Right. And, of course, I don't remember. I was too little at that time to really remember those that stayed with us—a couple uncles that I knew of, and my mother's brother was one of them, and a couple nephews of my father that had come to this country. So those are the only ones I really knew of. But they worked too, so it wasn't, as we say, free-loaders. They were not. They went out and worked just like everybody else did because they didn't expect people to take care of them.

DePue: You were born in 1927, just two years before the bottom fell out of the economy, and you're growing up as a very young boy, then, in the depths of the Depression, which lasted for most of the thirties. Do you remember much about that? Were you conscious that these were hard economic times?

Million: Not really. It wasn't really put onto us. I won't say we were sheltered from it, but life went on. Found a way to make it, and we all ate, and I guess that was the important thing.

DePue: What was it your father was doing when you were growing up in the late thirties? Was he still in the coal mine at that time?

Million: No. He got out of the coal mine because he was in on two cave-ins—survived them both. Carried the scars with the blue-black coal dust in a couple of scars—

DePue: Over his eyebrow?

Million: Over his eyebrow, yes. So with that, he got away from the coal mines. He said that wasn't for him, and went into the confectionary business, making ice cream and candy.

DePue: He opened up his own store?

Million: Yes.

DePue: In Virden or in Auburn?

Million: Auburn.

DePue: Okay, so it was Auburn at this time.

Million: Yes. They moved to Auburn after Virden.

DePue: Did he move at the time he left the mines?

Million: It was right after that.

DePue: Well, Auburn is another small farming town, generally.

Million: Yes, it is.

DePue: Were there a lot of Italians in Auburn at that time?

Million: Yes, there were, there were. They all migrated. The people followed one another, as they're doing today, even.

DePue: Where did he find the money, the capital, to open up his own confectionary and candy store?

Million: Probably in the time that he was working, they managed to save a couple dollars. It was hard, but they did. But when he went into the confectionary business he knew nothing of making ice cream or candy.

DePue: Well, (laughs) that was my question, Sam. How does a guy who's spent his life working on the railroad and the coal mines decide, I think I want to make candy and ice cream?

Million: Well, I've always looked at it this way, if you want to do something bad enough, you'll find a way. And he found a way. He bought a book. Matter of fact, I have his old ice cream book. It's called *Heller's Ice Cream Book*, and it had just about every flavor of ice cream that you would ever want to make in this book. *Heller's Ice Cream Book*.

DePue: Did he make good ice cream and good candy?

Million: The best. It was the best. I don't remember too much of it, but all of my sisters and my one brother all worked in the store. It was expected that they work in the store. It wasn't a thing they were asked, they just automatically went into the store and worked. My oldest sister always used to always say, "Well, I had to work in the ice cream store." Well, all of the members of the family that were old enough worked in the store. My brother used to have to chip the ice. When they'd make the ice cream, they had these insulated bags that you used to put the container in there, and they'd pack that with chipped ice, and my brother used to have to chip the ice. They shaved the ice and put it in this bag around the metal container, and when the ice cream was made, they would pour rock salt around the ice. That would help the ice melt faster and would freeze the ice cream.

DePue: And all of this sounds like they were making ice cream back before there was electricity in Auburn. Would that have been correct?

Million: Oh, there was electricity, yeah. Had to have it for the big ice cream machines.

DePue: But in the process of actually making it, they were still using ice, huh?

Million: Oh, yes. Yeah.

DePue: I imagine there was a matter of pride that he made it the old-fashioned way.

Million: Oh, yes, yes. And their store, the ice cream confectionary, was called the Auburn Candy Kitchen. And they were on the north side of the square in Auburn.

DePue: Was this one of the institutions of Auburn social life, then?

Million: Yes, it was, because every Saturday night, you know, they had the bands in the square, by what I'm told, and they had the bandstand, they had the bands that would play, and they would come into the store, by what my parents said, and eat ice cream because there were chairs and tables in the store. Just like you remember seeing old pictures of this—they would come in the store and eat their ice cream, and they had popcorn that they made and roasted peanuts. They had a peanut machine outside. They used to shock people because if it was damp, they would touch the machine and get shocked. (laughter)

DePue: Well, this couldn't have been too bad a life for you and your twin sister.

Million: It was a good life. Yes, it was. It was tough, but everybody had a tough life then, what I understand, Depression years.

DePue: What caused the family to move to Springfield, then?

Million: Well, the things kind of faded in Auburn. The Depression was getting a lot of people, and business of course suffers. And the end result was that my father closed the ice cream store down, the Candy Kitchen, and they came to Springfield. But he started up a restaurant at Eleventh and Ash in Springfield. Also had another store at Sixth and Madison, right by the train station, train depot.

DePue: What was that store, a restaurant as well?

Million: Yes, uh-huh. I think it was called the Sixth Street Restaurant or something to that effect, and the one on Eleventh and Ash, I'm not sure what the name of that was. But he had those two restaurants going. And of course, the family in part, some of them worked at one place—and of course my father was between both places—and then other members of the family worked at the other restaurant.

DePue: So he's living the life of the American entrepreneur.

Million: Oh, absolutely. He came to this country with the idea of being an American.

DePue: That explains why there wasn't much time for church, because I'm sure the restaurants were open on Sunday as well.

Million: Exactly. That's right. Right.

DePue: Do you remember family gatherings, especially holiday gatherings? What kind of things went on then?

Million: Well, of course the holidays was always a big time for us. It wasn't much in the way of gift-giving—the money wasn't there—but life was good, and the fact that when we had the holidays, that was a day of good eating, and we ate good on the holidays. It was a standard. Your family would gather on the holidays, all of us, because we were all there at that time, and Mama usually always—especially on Sunday—every Sunday, at least once a week, she always cooked spaghetti and meatballs. But by the same token, she also served maybe a roasted chicken as well. And there were days that she would cook the American meals like pork chops, and once in a while we were treated to the breaded veal, which was a biggie to us. We loved it. But the holidays was a gathering.

DePue: Do you remember what was on the menu for Thanksgiving?

Million: Usually a turkey or else baked chicken, which was just as good as turkey.

DePue: But that's pretty darn American traditional for the dinner.

Million: Yes, it was, but we were always served with spaghetti and meatballs on those days. We always had that. And that was good. I loved it.

DePue: Were you diving in on the spaghetti or on the turkey?

Million: Both. (laughter)

DePue: How about Christmas? Same kind of menu?

Million: Yes. Yes, it was, except Christmas we pretty much had the good pastries. There was always pie or cake, but then especially we had the cannoli, and we loved those dearly and to this day we still eat them.

DePue: Well, it looks like you put away one or two cannolis in your years.

Million: Yes, I did. And they were always stuffed with a cream that Mom made. Some stuff them with cottage cheese or ricotta cheese treated with spices and different things and chocolate chipped in there, you know, but she always

used the cream, and of course would always chip chocolate and nuts, and we'd dip the ends. And that was my job, to dip them when she'd make them. I used to help her when she fried the shells, and that was my job, to take care of the shells.

DePue: Did cannoli and some of these pies and cakes you're talking about make it onto the menu at the restaurants?

Million: There could have been some at the restaurants. I don't recall the menus of the restaurants, but there could have been the pies.

DePue: Do you know if your father stayed in the business of making ice cream for the restaurants?

Million: I don't think he did the ice cream bit when he had the restaurants in Springfield.

DePue: Okay. Well, this is all fascinating. I love hearing these stories about growing up, and you obviously enjoy sharing them as well. Any other memories that you have, really powerful memories of growing up in Springfield especially?

Million: Well…

DePue: What did you do with your free time, or did you have free time?

Million: When I was able to go to work or old enough to assume duties, I worked when we lived on North Fifth, the house that we lived in for… it was purchased in 1933. I had a neighbor, and I used to cut her grass in the summertime, and then in the wintertime, I used to have to go—she had a stoker, and I used to have to fill up the hopper with coal. And at the same, I always helped my father when it was time to get out and cut the grass. Whenever he headed for the garage to get the lawnmower and the clippers to trim the hedge—whenever he headed that way, I knew I had to go there, and I just followed and got my tools, went to work with him until we got the job done. And that was once a week we did that. And the jobs I did in the neighborhood, of course, I earned a few dollars there. That was when I was about thirteen, fourteen, in that area. And then I went to work at a meat market on Fifth Street, Tom Boehner's Meat Market.

DePue: Why didn't you go to work for the family restaurants?

Million: I wasn't old enough. (pause) I was just a young guy then, real young.

DePue: But you were old enough to work in a meat market?

Million: Well, at the age of fifteen. I was in grade school, the eighth grade, and then went to high school, and I still worked for Tom Boehner, and just decided it was time to branch out—went to work for the Lincoln Theater.

DePue: The Lincoln Theater. Where was that located?

Million: Downtown. I think it was south of Capitol. No, wait a minute. It was Adams, Monroe. It was south of Monroe Street, getting pretty close to the governor's mansion. Further on down was the Roxy Theater, but I went to work for the Lincoln Theater as an usher.

DePue: This was a movie theater?

Million: Yes, uh-huh.

DePue: Well, that gives you nighttime employment, at least, Saturdays' employment.

Million: Yeah. I did that, oh, maybe a couple of years and, of course when we would get off at ten o'clock at night from our jobs there as ushers, we would get passes and go to another theater to see a movie there. (laughter) And I would get home about 12:00, 12:30 at night. And of course I was going to high school at that point, and I was falling asleep in school, so something had to give, and I had to back off of that because it was affecting my grades at school.

DePue: Well, this would have been about the time that World War II is going on, and I know you have memories of Pearl Harbor. Can you share those with us?

Million: Pearl Harbor, when it happened, I was at a neighbor, a friend of mine who I still am in contact with. His name is Bill Keslick. And I was at his house that Sunday morning, and we were playing with the trains and planes and things of that nature, and the announcement came on the radio, "Pearl Harbor has been attacked." I'll never forget it.

DePue: Did that mean anything to you at the time?

Million: Yes, it did. It meant war. It meant that we were going to go to war. And then, of course, right after that, the next day—I was in the eighth grade at that point, just about to finish the eighth grade—President Roosevelt came on. We were all taken and put in the auditorium at school in preparation of Roosevelt's speech, that he announced that we were going to go to war from this "dastardly attack" that the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor. I'll never forget the words.

DePue: The "dastardly attack."

Million: The "dastardly attack."

DePue: Well, this is his "day of infamy" speech.

Million: The "day of infamy," correct.

DePue: Even when you first heard the news, I would imagine that somebody like yourself, most Americans--Pearl Harbor—where's Pearl Harbor?

Million: Well, we didn't know, but we found out real quick—in the Hawaiian Islands. Of course, we did know the Hawaiian Islands because we had geography in school.

DePue: This is about the age when most people begin to have a clear understanding of the way the world works, if you will. Do you recall your parents, leading up to Pearl Harbor, ever talking about what was going on in Italy at the time?

Million: Well, they knew that the war was on, World War II, and that Germany, of course, was the biggie. And then, of course, Italy, Mussolini, joined Hitler, and my father and mother hated that, that Italy was being drug into this war. It hurt them, really, it did.

DePue: And they still had relatives back in the old country.

Million: They did, yes. Of course, they're all gone at this point.

DePue: Were they staying in touch with their relatives back in Italy?

Million: My father did. (coughs) Excuse me.

DePue: You had an older brother. What happened to your older brother once the war started?

Million: My older brother was a bacteriologist working in the South.

DePue: What was his name?

Million: John Million.

DePue: A bacteriologist? Did he have a college degree in this?

Million: Yes, he went to Gradwohl University in St. Louis.

DePue: Wow. (pause) Okay, go ahead and tell us a little more about your brother's experience.

Million: So he went down South. His first job in the South was at Mooresville, North Carolina. And he stayed there, and of course the Army was wanting people, so he had to go.

DePue: Was he drafted?

Million: He was drafted, but would have enlisted. And I'm not sure if he was drafted or if he did enlist. I'm not sure of that at this point, but it didn't really matter at that point. And he went in hoping that he would have been in his field of

work, working in hospitals, doing what he could there. (coughs) Excuse me. But instead, he ended up in the Army, carrying a club in the hospital.

DePue: A club?

Million: Yes, because they had some German prisoners that needed medical attention, and he carried a club in there to make sure they didn't escape.

DePue: That would suggest that he was deployed to Europe. Was that the case?

Million: Yes, he was. He went and started off in France and then went on with the medical trains that they had on to Germany as they went. As the places were secured, they followed with their medical trains.

DePue: Were you writing letters to your big brother?

Million: Yes, I did.

DePue: And you got the letters back from him?

Million: Oh, yes. Whenever he could write, he always answered the letters.

DePue: Do you still have some of those letters?

Million: No, I don't, unfortunately.

DePue: Yeah, I'm sure you're regretting that now.

Million: Yes.

DePue: What kind of things did he tell you about?

Million: Well, the things he learned from (laughs) the German prisoners. One of the incidents he had—it wasn't an incident, it was a story he had—he had a wristwatch that was needing repairs. The mainspring had broken. So one of the German prisoners says, "Oh, I can repair your watch," so with just a pair of pliers, a match, he took the mainspring out of this watch and with some fine tools that there was around in the medical part of this, took the main spring out, he heated it with this match, bent the spring back around to where it would go around the post that it was attached to, and annealed it afterwards—all doing this with the match—and fixed his watch for him. Now, how many people could you see doing that today? Forget it, it's impossible.

DePue: Do you know if he ever had to actually use the club to discipline any of the German soldiers?

Million: He never ever talked about it; apparently he didn't have to. But these guys in these medical trains, the prisoners or whoever, it was a good life. They weren't out there fighting, so naturally they didn't want to make trouble. They

were eating good, living good, more or less, even though they were wounded, so who wants to make trouble?

DePue: What was it like in the household then with your parents, and your mother especially I would think, with a son overseas. Was she always worried about that?

Million: Yes. She never quit worrying. It affected her in that sense. But kept her head up.

DePue: Was she showing any of those emotions to the rest of the kids?

Million: No, she wouldn't do it.

DePue: Okay. You're at an age now—you had to be following the war really closely.

Million: Yes I did. I had a sister Lena, my sister Lena, went into the WACs[1].

DePue: Now, this is the sister who is a lot older than the rest of the family?

Million: Yeah, she was the oldest.

DePue: She went into the WACs.

Million: Went into the WACs.

DePue: What did she do there?

Million: Whatever they did—probably administration work on the bases, and whatever these women did relieved the men from doing this work. Like, you know, at one time she was working in a control tower at one of the airports that the Army had.

DePue: She stayed in the United States, though?

Million: Yeah, she never went overseas.

DePue: Do you remember any of the things like the rubber drives or aluminum drives?

Million: Yes, yes.

DePue: Tell us about that.

Million: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, as kids, they had programs where you'd go out and collect aluminum—aluminum pots or whatever, or even the steel tin cans and old tires, anything rubber, inner tubes. We would go around collecting these

[1] Women's Army Corps

things because whatever you contributed, they would allow you to go to Memorial Swimming Pool and swim free by gathering these things and taking them where they had to go, and you would get a pass to go to Memorial Swimming Pool, free swimming.

DePue: Memorial Swimming Pool—where was that?

Million: North Grand, Ninth and North Grand was the Memorial Swimming Pool.

DePue: And that was all the enticement you needed, then.

Million: That's all. Yeah, yeah, we took advantage of it.

DePue: Did you go door to door to do this?

Million: Yes, door to door, whatever people could give up. Sometimes, in a lot of cases, people had given all they could—and still had to keep enough pots and pans to cook with (laughs)—but anything that was scrap, we gathered.

DePue: What was the spirit of the community like? Were people willing to give up these things?

Million: Yes. Everybody was doing the war effort—you didn't have to be asked to do this, you did it automatically.

DePue: Did your parents have a victory garden?

Million: Yes, yes, a big one. Well, one we could have within our area of the yard, and it was enough to grow things that were needed, things that could be canned.

DePue: Were they doing that before the war anyway?

Million: Oh, yes. My father always had a garden.

DePue: What was in the garden?

Million: Oh, gosh. Carrots, bell peppers of all colors, some corn, asparagus, radishes, and he also had a pear tree.

DePue: Pear tree?

Million: Yes, and we used to always have the pears from the pear tree, and, of course, what couldn't be eaten was always canned by my mother. It was my job to help peel, peel the pears. And whenever they could get other fruits, like cherries. My neighbor had a cherry tree, and they never picked the cherries and asked us if we wanted them, so it was my job to go pick cherries. And I don't know if you've ever picked cherries or not, but it's not the easiest job in the world. You had to climb the trees and how many cherries does it take to make a bucketful? And then, Mom would can these. It was my job and my

twin sister's job to take the pits out of the cherries to get ready for canning. Well, it was just expected of us to do. We did it; we didn't say anything about it.

DePue: Did they have a pitter?

Million: No, a pitter was a knife, a small knife (DePue laughs) that you had in your hand, and you'd dig into the cherry and dig the pit out. That was it.

DePue: This was labor-intensive, Sam.

Million: Yes. Yes, it is. (laughs) But that's the way things were. We didn't have machines, no.

DePue: You didn't mention tomatoes in the vegetable garden.

Million: Yes, I'm sorry, he did have tomatoes.

DePue: How does an Italian family not have tomatoes?

Million: Right, because that usually made the spaghetti sauce—fresh. Fresh tomatoes—couldn't have been any better. And of course, she canned tomatoes, too.

DePue: Your parents had been in the United States for a long time. Did they have much of an accent? Did they retain much of an Italian accent?

Million: Not really all that much. Very, very slight that I recall. Some people, you know, when they enunciated, the Italians, they kind of always had a word that had an *a* in it, and they carried that out, but they didn't.

DePue: But they were out in the public. I mean, your father had two restaurants, a very public business. I'm sure he was out in the community a lot. Did they encounter any prejudice because they were Italians in a time when the United States is at war with Italy?

Million: Not really, because my father wouldn't stand for it. Yeah. People got off onto, "well, you Italians are…" and some would try to use the ethnic slurs. He wouldn't stand for it.

DePue: What were the ethnic slurs?

Million: Well, they used the word "dago," "wop," "Guinea." Those were the words that were given to the Italians. And also, some of the Mexicans were given these terms, and then, of course, their slur was they used to call them "spics." I used to hate that. I hated it because my father hated it, and he just would not put up with it. In fact, one guy approached him, and he was of Irish descent—and my father never got along with Irishmen for that reason--that they used to

always come at him with these slurs. This guy kept at it and wouldn't leave my father alone. And so when my father had enough, he (laughs) popped him one and put him down. After that, this guy had the most respect for my father. So I guess if that's what you have to do to get respect, that's what he did. But my father was not a mean individual, wasn't any of these things, but he didn't like that, and of course a lot of people back then didn't like that. Today the words are used loosely, and it doesn't bother second and third generations, but it always bothered me. It always bothered him and my mother especially—she didn't like it.

DePue: Were these people who were customers or people in the community or both?

Million: Community people. They were not customers. And, of course, when he shut the restaurants down my father would do odd jobs here and there, but for the most part he was idled because, well, he did a lot of hard work in his lifetime. And, of course, all my sisters and my brother all worked. They all went to jobs—Sangamo Electric, the shoe factory. A couple of them went to business school, Brown's Business College, in town, and so we all worked.

DePue: When did your father close up the restaurants?

Million: I don't know. It was before we moved to North Fifth Street. It was before 1933, because I don't remember—

DePue: Now, wait a minute, now. That would have been the ice cream factory in 1933, when you moved…

Million: No, no, no, the ice cream stores was around 1920s.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Million: Yes, yeah. I'm sorry, I might have misled you.

DePue: Yeah, I thought he was—okay, let's take a quick break so we can kind of track down the specifics here.

Million: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We are back again after a very brief break. Talked a little bit about the timeline here. Sam, you're born in 1927 in Auburn. Your father would have been—well, he was born in 1876, so he's got a lot of years on him already when you and your twin sister came along. You moved just a few years later to Springfield, the family did, and then this would have been in the early thirties. Was that when your father was in the restaurant business in Springfield?

Million: It was prior to that. He was in the restaurant business around 1919 to 1920, ’21, in that time area there.

DePue: And that would have been in Virden.

Million: Yes. Exactly, yes.

DePue: And you said when the family moved to Springfield, he purchased two restaurants there as well.

Million: Yes. He had two restaurants. In that time area, he had the two restaurants in Springfield, one on Ash Street and one on Sixth and Madison.

DePue: During the late twenties and early thirties?

Million: It would have been perhaps the later twenties, because in ’33 we moved to North Fifth Street, and my father then was not working.

DePue: Okay, okay. So all of this conversation I was having I was thinking—and this is my fault—I was thinking that your father was running the restaurants during the Depression era. What was he doing during that time period?

Million: Other than the restaurants, or after the restaurants?

DePue: After the restaurants.

Million: He pretty much settled to home life. When we were on North Fifth, that was the extent. And of course he would do things for people or if things needed to be done, he did it. But to have a job that he went to every day, no, he didn’t do that until later on he decided he wanted to go back to work. And when he did, he got a job through a friend of his at the sanitary district. He was a watchman there. That’s what his job was.

DePue: Do you know roughly when he got the job at the sanitary district?

Million: No, I don’t, but it might have been…it could have been maybe near or at the war years.

DePue: Well, I know that makes sense in terms of the unemployment rates. When you moved to Fifth Street, would have been at the very bottom of the Depression years; the 1932–33 was the pits of the Depression—the depths, I should say—and there was tough times for a lot of years after that still.

Million: Oh, there sure was. Yeah. Up until the war was declared and we went into it.

DePue: Okay. But all the other stories—you’d been talking about the war—are certainly very relevant; it was just my own confusion that I needed to get

beyond that stuff, so thank you for clarifying that. How closely did you follow the war, then? You're in your teen years; you're in high school.

Million: Well, we caught everything we could on the news about what was happening in Europe, and the Pacific wasn't talked very much about. I don't know why, but it wasn't. But we followed the war in the newspapers, announcements on the radio, and whatever pictures we would see in the newspaper, or the newsreels at the movies. When they'd have the newsreels, we followed it there as much as possible. So that was our way of following the war.

DePue: If you'd have been three or four years older, would you have been eager to get into the war yourself?

Million: Well, I enlisted, but when I was going to high school, our high school class was deferred from going to the service because at that point, that was in the middle, about '44, and the war was starting to wind down just a little bit. So for that reason, the government said all the men in high schools at this point could be deferred from going to the service, because prior to that, a lot of my high school friends that were a little bit older than me, you know, they went to the service. They either enlisted or were drafted because they were not deferred from going, but our class was, as was classes in other high schools.

DePue: Your high school graduation year—what year was that?

Million: June of 1946.

DePue: So even the classes, '45 would have been pretty much swept up in the draft or enlisted.

Million: Yes, yes, absolutely.

DePue: As you were getting towards the end of your high school career, what was it that you thought you wanted to do with your life?

Million: I really didn't know. I thought about college, but college would have been kind of tough on my parents, and I would have worked if I would have went to college. There's no two ways about it; that's the way it was. But I didn't go to college, because right after I graduated—I graduated June of '46, and October of '46--I enlisted in the Army.

DePue: Why?

Million: I wanted to go. I had to be there.

DePue: You had to be there. Where's "there" in your mind?

Million: Well, it was a matter of, here again, was I going to be drafted—which I could have been because the draft was still on—and I didn't want to be drafted.

They had eighteen-month enlistments that they had in the service, so with this, I took advantage of that and I joined the service.

DePue: Joined the Army, though. Why not the Air Corps—I guess it would have been the Army Air Force at that time—or the Navy or the Marines?

Million: I didn't want the Navy. I didn't want to be on the ocean.

DePue: That's a good reason.

Million: (laughs) As it was, when we did go overseas, which is getting ahead of the story here, I got sicker than a dog, as did a lot of guys on the transports.

DePue: So confirmed your decision not to do the Navy.

Million: So they had these enlistments, and it was the Army for me. I didn't want to go the Marines, not that I dislike—one of my high school friends was a Marine, one that was in the Navy, and we all met when I was home on furlough at Coutrakon's on North Grand Avenue, when that place was in business. Everybody gathered there from school.

DePue: What was the name of it?

Million: Coutrakon's. It was an ice cream store, and you could get food there as well. It was a confectionary-type place. Of course, that was the popular spot when I was going to high school. Right next to the Pantheon Theater. Next door to the Pantheon.

DePue: It sounds like there were a lot of theaters in Springfield at that time.

Million: There was. There was, and I knew them all. (laughter)

DePue: Okay, well, that was on your side of town anyway.

Million: Sure.

DePue: Heck, where was I here? Why you had joined the Army instead… Were you hoping you would go on occupation duty, either in Germany or Japan?

Million: Well, that was probably an automatic. It would have been occupation duty in either country. I enlisted in Chicago, and we were taken to get our physicals and inducted, I should say, into the service. And from that point we were put on a troop train and went to Fort Bliss, Texas.

DePue: How long were you in Fort Bliss?

Million: I was in Fort Bliss in basic training for five weeks—very short time. And when we finished or completed our basic we were given a ten-day delay en

route—same as a furlough, but they called it a delay en route to a given time to report to the port of embarkation, which was Camp Stoneman, California.

DePue: Did you head back home?

Million: Yes. I went home for the ten days and after my ten days, I packed up and got on the train and we went to Camp Stoneman. That's where we had to report. When we got there, being a replacement depot or a repo depot, as they called them, within three to four days at the most, most guys were there and gone. I got stuck there for sixty-six days. I don't know why, but I found out why eventually. There was about fifty of us that were held back, and finally when we got our orders to ship, we went to Japan by troop transport. It took us thirty-five days to get to Japan from San Francisco.

DePue: Okay, we're going to spend some time about being on the ship, but I want to go back because you enticed me with saying you didn't know why at the time but you found out why you were sixty-six days at Camp Stoneman. Why were you stuck there?

Million: Well, apparently they had pulled orders when they had our material, our—

DePue: Two-oh-one files?

Million: Yeah, our files, and apparently someone had either—from Japan—had been given orders to select fifty men and hold them. Now, this is the only thing that we could come up with, because we weren't allowed to go to headquarters, although I did. And after I was there for two weeks, I went to headquarters to ask them, you know, "Why wasn't I put on orders?" "Well," he says, "You'll be put on orders," and they didn't go into detail. So I still didn't get orders to go over, or any of the men that I was there with that got held back. And I went back to headquarters again, and I was begging them to put me on orders (DePue laughs) to send me overseas. You know, they said, "Well, don't worry about it. You're going to go, we'll just let you know when."

DePue: What does a GI do with sixty-six days stuck at Camp Stoneman with not much to do?

Million: Nothing except go to the PX and try to get some decent food if you could or go there and get a chocolate shake and a Coke. We could do that at the PX. Or just sit around, read if you had something to read.

DePue: You weren't going through any kind of training at all?

Million: Well, not at first. At first, for about thirty days, we more or less laid around and did what we wanted to do. And it was getting on toward Christmas at that point, and I was able to get a pass, and I went to San Francisco. My sister, who was living in Los Angeles, met me there Christmas Day, so we were able to have Christmas dinner together. And then of course the next day I went

back to Camp Stoneman. Then they decided to put us on some kind of a program where we had to do exercises and do duty as a watchman type of thing and things of that nature, and kind of a program for—like you would get in basic, just marching, things of that nature, but not handling any weapons, just drilling to occupy our time.

Or there was a movie there; we could go to a movie at Stoneman, but that wasn't too often because you didn't want to be gone too long in case they come there looking for you.

DePue: But from your comments, I'm assuming that you think now that they were holding you there until they were ready to ship the entire group out to Japan?

Million: Yes. We were then given orders, placed on the transport at Stoneman, and we left for Japan—it was, oh, about seven or eight o'clock in the morning, as I recall, and the minute we passed the Golden Gate Bridge or went under the bridge—there's a heavy undertow there in that water area—I got sicker than a dog and I stayed sick until almost the time that—well, we stopped at Hawaii. We didn't know we were going to stop. We stopped at Hawaii for seven days. I had twenty-five dollars in my pocket, and when I got back on the ship, I had a dime left.

DePue: (laughs) Well, I'm guessing the kinds of things you were spending your money on there, but maybe we shouldn't go into too much detail in that.

Million: No, I spent my money on eating at the PX. One thing we wanted to do was eat good, and we did. Other than that, everything else was off-limits.

DePue: Were you returning to the ship at night?

Million: Yes, we had to go back to the ship at night to be accounted for, but during the day we would wander around Hawaii and take in the eating places or anything that was free. And they had a good USO club for the servicemen, and we'd always go there every day because there was good eating there, and we learned the ways.

DePue: You learned the ways?

Million: We learned the ways of how to get around and eat good. (DePue laughs) And I'll tell you this story—not the best story in the world, but it wasn't too mischievous, I guess. The restaurant they had was kind of like two horseshoes. When you walk in to the left, you had this horseshoe counter, to the right you had another horseshoe counter, and in the center was the cashier you would pay after you got your check for your meal. And what we would do—because we didn't have any money—we'd go on the one side and order a Coke or a cup of coffee, which was a nickel, then we would sneak over to the other side, where nobody knew who was on this side, and order hamburgers with French fries (DePue laughs) and things of that nature and chocolate

shakes and would eat, and then as we went out to pay the cashier, we would come up with this nickel check that we had from the other side and pay the nickel check and leave with a full stomach. Now, (laughs) it may not have been the nicest thing in the world, but for some reason or another—I didn't know to do this. I was told by the guy I was there with. He says, "I'll tell you how we're going to do this," and he says, "We'll eat good." And we did eat good. So we got by with it—how, I'll never know, but apparently someone wasn't watching.

DePue: Was this a Navy exchange or is this Army?

Million: This was a USO club—

DePue: Oh, okay.

Million: All the service could go there. And they had a swimming pool there; you could play ping-pong; they had a game room. Oh, they had everything there. Yeah.

DePue: So (laughs) here you go, Sam, you leave Camp Stoneman on this troop ship. How many people on this troop ship?

Million: About seventeen hundred of us.

DePue: It was crowded, then.

Million: It was crowded.

DePue: And you were sick almost the entire time, from Stoneman—

Million: Just about to where we got to smoother waters as we were getting closer to Hawaii. And I was all the way forward in the ship, where the ship comes to a point, and we were stacked five high in the rooms there, the below decks. Whenever the ship would pitch, and immediately after they left San Francisco, the ship started pitching up and down. It didn't roll, but it pitched all the way forward. We were laying there in our bunks, and when the ship would go up, it'd slam down in the front, the back end would raise up, and the propellers would come out of the water and just shake the whole ship, because between the water and the air, there was no balance there, and the ship just pitched and bounced. And we did that for several days till the ship finally calmed down; we got in better waters. But I was sick all that time—well, until we got to smooth waters, and then we went outside and got some fresh air, which was badly needed at that point.

DePue: Well, I would assume some of the time, though, that you at least had to use the facilities and go through the chow line.

Million: Yes. It was by the hardest.

DePue: Pardon me?

Million: It was by the hardest that we did that. I mean, when you're sick, you don't feel like eating. And same way if you had to go to the restroom: you kind of weaved your way through, and sick on the way, and it just wasn't very pleasant at all. There's nothing worse than being seasick. Nothing worse. I would rather take a beating with a club than be seasick. That's the way I felt.

DePue: And you got to be seasick for days on end.

Million: Oh, yes. Yeah. Finally, as we got closer to Hawaii and the waters really smoothed down—almost like glass. And we'd plow through the waters, and you'd look at the front and see the flying fish jumping out in front of us. Pretty. Real nice.

DePue: Spent a few days in Hawaii, then straight to Japan after that?

Million: Seven days in Hawaii, went on, and we stopped at Guam for seven days. And there was nothing there, so we would either eat on the ship if we had to or try to find places in Guam, which really didn't exist. Guam was pretty badly bombed out from the action there.

DePue: Any idea why you were stopping in Hawaii and Guam?

Million: Had no idea, unless they had supplies or were taking on supplies to go on or take on fuel. We were never told why we were stopping.

DePue: Where did you make land in Japan, then?

Million: We got at the docks at Yokohama. That's where we landed.

DePue: I'd like to have you, if you could, paint us a picture of your initial impressions of Japan. And Yokohama is just south of Tokyo itself? I know it's in the harbor area there, maybe twenty miles or so south of metropolitan Tokyo.

Million: It was further than that from Tokyo. Exactly how far, I don't remember, but it might have been maybe let's say sixty to seventy miles as a rough guess, and—

DePue: And all of this area would have been very heavily bombed during World War II itself.

Million: Yes. We were placed on a train, one of the Japanese trains, that took us from Yokohama to Tokyo. And in looking out at the windows as we were traveling, you could see the bombed-out areas and the people out there waiting for us to give them any money or chocolate bars or anything we had to give them—which a lot of guys did. Well, you know, you felt sorry for the civilians. They were caught up.

DePue: What time of the year would this be?

Million: It would have been in February.

DePue: Of 1947 now.

Million: Yes, February of '47. And we could see the bombed-out areas and the little kids walking around half-starved and things of this type and nature. And then we finally got to Tokyo and were put on trucks that took us to Sugamo Prison from Tokyo.

DePue: Was that the first time that you found out that that's where you were headed?

Million: Yes.

DePue: So before that time—

Million: Up until that time, we didn't know where we were going. But fortunate enough, we didn't go to northern Japan in the infantry, and we were designated to go to Sugamo prison as replacements for men that were leaving there, had done their time and was going to be out of there.

DePue: Was it this group of fifty people that were kind of hanging back at Camp Stoneman?

Million: Yes, yes. Mostly of that group. And when we got to Sugamo, well, we were a scraggly bunch of guys. We needed haircuts, but we shaved every day. That was a requirement. But we couldn't get to a barber. And, you know, we needed to get better clothes. Our clothes were not all that great at that point, and they were not cleaned at that point because we had no facilities to get clean clothes. We did have facilities to wash our clothes that needed to be washed, but outside of that, our uniforms, they had to be dry cleaned. So we had no facilities. We were a real scraggly bunch when we got there. (laughs)

DePue: Did the Army put you through some training once you arrived there for the specific duties you're going to have?

Million: Well, when we got there, the commander of Sugamo Prison was a colonel, Colonel Crary, and he greeted us and said, "Welcome to Sugamo Prison. You men have been selected for Sugamo Prison. You weren't just anybody that just came here; you have been selected."

DePue: That would have been nice to know two months before, wouldn't it? (laughs)

Million: Yeah, it really would have been. So they put us through our paces and got us clean clothes, and we could get our uniforms fitted a little better and tailored as we needed, and we began to shape up. Not knowing what we were going to be doing at that point, that group was divided between jailers and guards. The

guards stayed at one end of the prison camp, and the jailers at the other end, and we were pretty much put together by what shifts we were on, so we wouldn't be getting up at nighttime, waking other men up. So our Quonset hut was men that went on duty all at the same time.

DePue: Okay. I want you to explain the difference between jailers and guards, but first I want to go back to this colonel's comments about you guys being selected. What were they looking for? Why was this group of people set aside and not sent to other places?

Million: Well, to be honest with you, I guess they went through our records, and the only thing I can say is maybe they liked what they saw in the records—which couldn't have been anything extraordinary that I can recall.

DePue: I know that MacArthur's—some of the people who had served close to MacArthur and those kind of specific duties, they were expected to be a little taller, thin, good-looking, very disciplined, looking sharp. Was any of that part of the equation for this group of jailers and guards?

Million: I think it was. Most of the guys that I was there with at that time were just as you have described.

DePue: But Sam, how tall were you?

Million: Ooh, I was five-seven, and (laughs) I wasn't very tall at all, but I guess I fit the bill. And after we got shaped up a little bit, we were a different group. We looked a little bit better.

DePue: That was the expectation they had.

Million: Apparently. Apparently. So with that, then, they quartered us with jailers and guards and put us in our proper Quonset huts. Then the jailers and guards were giving additional training for what they were doing specifically.

DePue: Okay, let's be clear, because I don't think we've explained this on record yet. What was Sugamo Prison?

Million: Sugamo Prison housed all of the Japanese war crimes prisoners, men that were brought in from the islands, some that were still in Japan at that time and had been shipped out directly before the war had ended. And these guys were in prison because they had committed atrocities to the Americans, to the English, to the Australians, to the Chinese, and whoever they committed atrocities to, going all the way back to 1936 and '37 when they (clears throat) were responsible for the rape of Nanking, China, and killed a lot of people there, wantonly.

DePue: So atrocities against the Dutch, against the Koreans, the Chinese, the Australians, you name it.

Million: Correct, anything that happened in World War II where atrocities were committed. There were thousands of Japanese prisoners that did these things. They were pretty tough. Some were vicious.

DePue: I know by this time, the war crimes trials were already going for what they considered the Class A criminals, which was the very top, the senior leadership.

Million: Right.

DePue: So you were there during the time when these war crimes trials were going on.

Million: Yes, I was.

DePue: And the thing I found curious, that the Nuremberg Trials lasted for just short of a year, but that the trials that were going on in Japan lasted for thirty months, so a lot longer.

Million: Yes, they did.

DePue: And you were there for the entire time for that. Okay, let's go back to jailers versus guards, then. What the heck is the difference between those two?

Million: Okay, the difference was that if you were a guard, you didn't go into the cell block with the prisoners. If you were a guard, you were stationed at different areas when your duty came on that particular day. Some stayed with the sergeant of the guard in a room if they were needed. (clears throat) The other guards walked the halls of the prison, where we were locked behind doors with the prisoners as a jailer, but the guards walked. There were six cell blocks, and in the six cell blocks, one, two, and three was called Red West. A guard was stationed there that walked the halls, strictly, in front of those cell blocks. That's all he did. He carried a carbine that was loaded. There was a guard that walked the hall between four, five, and six cell blocks, and all he did was walk those three cell blocks, up and down in the hall. Now, that was the guards. And, of course, there were backup guards to them, and there were men in with the sergeant of the guard stationed in a room at all times for more backup if we needed it.

DePue: But essentially the guards had no direct contact with the prisoners.

Million: None at all, none at all.

DePue: And can you describe in some detail what a cell block consisted of?

Million: Yes. The cell block—well, we'll say cell block six, which is where I started—cell block six had three tiers, A, B, and C levels.

DePue: So three stories.

Million: Three stories, and there was cells on both sides of this room. There was approximately twenty cells on one wall. There was a heavy grating on the floor that you could look down to the other or look up to the other cells—A, B, and C level. Then on this side of that metal dividing area, there were cells on the other side. In other words, you had a room; that wall had cells, this wall had cells, with the dividing steel rails on the floor between those cells.

DePue: And how large were the cells themselves?

Million: Cells were about, I would say, ten by twelve, perhaps, and there was twenty on each wall. Held four prisoners in each cell, both walls. One jailer on each level in the cell. There was a jailer on C Level, jailer on B level, jailer on A level. Of course, we could see them, and our job was to walk all the time, never stop—only if you had to answer a phone or if the staff officer would sneak in on you, which they did.

DePue: So you're walking past a series of these cells, each with four men in each cell.

Million: Correct, but their door—we had a key, and we had a club, so we could lock them in their cells.

DePue: But you had no weapons beyond the clubs.

Million: No weapons other than the club. So if you had to defend yourself, you had to know what you were doing with the club.

DePue: I'm envisioning that you've got metal bars between you and the cellmates, then.

Million: Yes. There was a door that we had the key to, and on each side of the door, there were windows, but there was no glass in the windows, and the windows were maybe about six inches wide where the glass would have been in layers, you know.

DePue: And then metal bars in there?

Million: They were metal bars.

DePue: But six inches wide, that was—

Million: They were metal bars, heavy metal bars, but they were windows without glass.

DePue: So the windows sound like they're very small. These—

Million: They were. Could have been maybe eight inches tall and maybe six inches or less wide.

DePue: Was there a window in the door itself?

Million: No, no glass in the door. It was solid. It was solid.

DePue: Okay. What happens when it's time to eat?

Million: Well, they were brought their food to them by the cooks in big pots and whatever, and they would be brought out and lined up with a guard present, with a guard present, inside, and that was the only time, but he had a backup as well. So—DePue: Were they letting them out only one cell at a time, then?

Million: They would let them out one cell at a time, get their food and go back, then the next—so we had to be standing by.

DePue: So they ate their food in the cell, then?

Million: They ate their food in the cell, and then one cell at a time returned their utensils to the front, which was only a spoon and a tray.

DePue: (laughs) That limits the diet, then, doesn't it?

Million: Yes, it does, but they ate good. They ate good.

DePue: Were they eating Japanese food?

Million: Yes. A lot of it was soups with fish, and rice, of course—always rice—and pretty much that was about it. But they ate Japanese food, and it was good food. It was prepared by Japanese and tested before it ever went to them.

DePue: Did they have toilet facilities in these rooms?

Million: In the cell, they had a toilet that was built onto the floor. Not a toilet to sit on, like we do—

DePue: But that was the tradition for Japanese anyway, right?

Million: Yeah, right. And each one of them had a grass mat or straw mat that they slept on, and that was it.

DePue: Was there a sink?

Million: There was a sink, yes, and—yeah, a sink and a toilet, and that was it.

DePue: Were they allowed to shave?

Million: They were allowed to shave, but they had to come out of their cells to shave. Couldn't shave in there because we didn't want them to have or retain anything from the razor.

DePue: What kind of razors?

Million: Well, it was given to them at the time of shaving and handed back to the person responsible that brought this shaving stuff in.

DePue: What kind of razor did they use?

Million: Well, like the old Gillettes that we used to use before they got these fancy ones we have today. But yeah, two-bladed Gillette. When one finished, it was given to the next guy. It was cleaned and handed to the next guy.

DePue: Were they allowed to have any exercise?

Million: The main prisoners, other than the major Class A prisoners, did not get exercise. Only the Class A or the Japanese war cabinet men, which were twenty-five of them, were the only ones that got out and got exercise.

DePue: Do you know if there were any women who were stored in the prison?

Million: Yes, there was one.

DePue: Just one.

Million: One. Tokyo Rose. She was in our prison.

DePue: She was an American-born Japanese, correct?

Million: Yes, she was. Her name was Aquino—that's her last name. Rose—I cannot remember her name. I've forgotten. But yes, she was in our prison.

DePue: We can get that into the transcript when we fix that part of it, because I've recently seen her name. I've seen a picture of her, so I knew that she was there.

Million: Well, in the end, when she came back to this country, she was pardoned. After she spent twenty years in jail, she was pardoned by General Eisenhower.

DePue: Who was President Eisenhower by that time, I would guess.

Million: Yes, he was president, and he gave her a pardon.

DePue: Okay, we're still talking about your time when you were in cell block six, which is kind of the second tier of war criminals, not the elites.

Million: Yes, they were—oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

DePue: I was going to ask your impressions of those people.

Million: Well, very disciplined men. There was the average soldier.

DePue: All military people?

Million: All military people. And in each cell level we had an interpreter who had been educated in the United States—either Washington, California—mostly out in the West Coast.

DePue: Were these prisoners?

Million: Yes, they were prisoners. The Japanese didn't like them, and the Americans didn't like them, because they were neither-nor. (laughs) I mean, the Japanese didn't like them because they had learned the American language, and they didn't know what side they'd really be on when they were in the Japanese army. Well, we didn't know what their loyalties were either, being Japanese but could fluently speak the English language.

DePue: But I'm assuming that somewhere along the line, somebody had determined that they were guilty of war crimes.

Million: Oh, yes, absolutely.

DePue: Okay. Any other impressions? A little bit more in terms of your impressions of these people.

Million: Well, I did on occasion ask the interpreters why they were there, and of course, well, you know, they would say, my parents were getting old, they were running a business, and they needed us or me to come back and help them with that because they were getting older and needed help. Most of them used that excuse as to why they went back to Japan, because they were in America. And they thought Japan was going to win this war, and they wanted to be on the winning side. Well, of course that didn't happen.

DePue: Any other impressions in general? I guess one of the questions I have was what the prisoners' morale was like.

Million: Well, of course, being a prisoner, I guess you could say you might be in a state of depression, but they didn't show this. No, they knew that they were prisoners, and (laughs) they couldn't go anywhere, so I guess they resolved the fact that that's where they were going to be until they went to trial and were sentenced or released, one of the two.

DePue: Did they show any distain or anger or other emotions towards the jailers?

Million: Not that I could see. They didn't show any of this that I ever remember. Maybe after we'd got out of there or left or someone else came on duty, I'd say, but we didn't do anything to aggravate them or cause them to be a problem because we were there to teach them democracy.

DePue: What were you told in terms of how you were supposed to treat these prisoners, then?

Million: Keep your hands off of them. That's what we were told. Not allowed to manhandle them or anything like that.

DePue: Were you discouraged to talk to them as well?

Million: No, not at all.

DePue: So you could talk to them if you wanted.

Million: Oh, yeah, we could talk to them, those that could speak English. Not all of them could. I would say very few of them.

DePue: Were you inspected or checked to make sure that you weren't trying to smuggle anything in to the prisoners?

Million: Every time we went on duty.

DePue: Were the guards the one who were doing those inspections?

Million: No. We were expected not to have anything, and, of course, if they suspected, you would be searched. But we had nothing that we could bring in, really. Oh, maybe a pocketknife, but nobody thought of doing that. I didn't. And more or less, you as a disciplined soldier followed orders.

DePue: Well, maybe that's part of what they were screening for to begin with.

Million: Yeah, yeah. You had to be disciplined.

DePue: Because you're dealing with these people day in and day out, and that's your existence, and I would think that somewhere along the line there would be concerns about fraternization or becoming too friendly or identifying with these.

Million: Well, we were not allowed to fraternize. We weren't even allowed to fraternize with the civilians when we went into town. There was a lot of places that was off-limits to us, still.

DePue: To your particular group.

Million: No, to any GI that, say, went to Tokyo. Couldn't fraternize with the people.

DePue: I want to talk a little bit more about your experiences in Tokyo and off-duty time as well, but just kind of finish up with your experience in cell block six, and then maybe it's time for us to take a break for lunch.

Million: Okay. What time is it getting to be, by the way?

DePue: Well, it's getting close to eleven o'clock here.

Million: Okay. Okay, I stayed in cell block six for about two months. With that, you pick up what you need to know, because basically what you're doing in there is walking, had to learn a routine about their lunch, their dinners, their bathing time, and what job you had to do. And, of course, from that time, you were just walking the cell, checking on the prisoners. That was constant. If you had any problems, we had two telephones of the Army type that you had to turn the magneto, crank them. We had one at the door where we came in; we had one mid-cell in the corridor of the cell block. So if we had a panic situation, well, we could get hopefully to either one of them.

DePue: In other words, you're locked into this cell block as well.

Million: We were locked by the guard who was walking the cells outside the cell block. He had the key to let us in or out and by getting himself in there if he had to get in for any reason. But he always called for backup. He'd call the sergeant of the guard, and that would bring you name it, many people to come in and see what was going on. So you weren't there alone for enough time to make any difference.

DePue: Do you recall any incidents during the two months or so that you were in cell block six?

Million: Yes. I brushed up against the panic button. We had a panic button as well as the phone. It was very sensitive, and one morning when I got on duty, I happened to, in error, in opening the door, the cell that was next to this, I touched this panic button, and before I knew it, I had the staff officer, the officer of the guard, the officer of the day, the sergeant of the guard, and six GIs with carbines coming to the door, coming in and wanting to know what was going on. I says, "There isn't anything going on." (laughter) He says, "Well, somebody hit this panic button." I says, "Well, it had to have been me," I says, "because I opened the cell, and," I says, "I happened to get right next to it." I says, "I didn't know if I touched it or not, but," I says, "apparently I did," I says, "because you're here." So I really didn't know that I had hit that thing hard enough, but it was very sensitive, come to find out.

DePue: Did you get in any trouble for that?

Million: No, they were satisfied with what I had told them. Of course, don't let it happen again.

DePue: What was your opinion of the prisoners that you were guarding. Did you have—I don't know how to phrase this other than to say, did you have any sympathy for their situation at all?

Million: No, I didn't. They were there because they did what they did. Not very nice. They were highly disciplined, because discipline in the Japanese army was

pretty tough. At any time by the officer's orders, if you didn't do what you were told to do, you got a rifle butt in your teeth. That was discipline in the Japanese army, because some of the prisoners who could speak American who were walking around with no teeth in their mouth for that reason told me these stories. Or the officer himself, if he didn't like what their soldiers were doing, he'd go up and slap them across the face a half a dozen times to where he could put them down, and that was other discipline in a Japanese army.

DePue: Do you know of any stories of some of the jailers who were angry or antagonistic towards the prisoners, of things that they would do?

Million: Well, I had an incident where after the first month, we received some prisoners from the Philippines, and they were the Japanese imperial marines. And to be a Japanese imperial marine, you had to be at least six feet tall, which was unusual for Japanese. These sixty men that they brought in from the Philippines thought they were all going to be bunched together and had this idea that they were going to give the jailer or the guards a hard time. Well, that was taken care of the minute they walked into the cell blocks. They split these guys up through six cell blocks in three tiers each, that there wasn't more than maybe one or two men, or three or four, but they were so scattered in the cell blocks and at the different levels they never ever saw one another. So therefore there was no trouble with the imperial marines who were going to come in and give us, the jailers, a hard time.

Well, I had one in cell block six, and he told me from the very beginning, he says, "Jailer-san"—and he could speak English pretty well. He says, "I am a Japanese imperial marine, therefore," he says, "when you pass out cigarettes to the men"—twice a week, which was Tuesdays and Thursdays—he says, "I want more cigarettes than the other men get because I am an imperial marine." And I says, "Okay, we'll see about this. I'll give you my answer later." So with this, I went to one of the cells where there was a general, and through the interpreter, I had him explain to the general that we have a Japanese imperial marine here who is demanding more cigarettes than you are going to get as a general. Everybody was given five cigarettes, period, no exceptions. And I says, "This man wants more cigarettes than you're going to get." So I says, "I want you to take care of this." So with this, I put the interpreter back in his cell, got the general, walked him around to where the other cell was that had the marine, opened the door. The general walked into the cell. All four men got up and bowed and saluted him, and he went to the marine and proceeded to talk to him in this guttural talk that the Japanese used to use in talking to their troops or whoever. Walked up to him, give him this little speech that he'd given, that I know that the marine didn't like, and he proceeded to take this guy and slap him across the face back and forth five times with enough force that it should have put an ordinary man down on his knees. But the marine stood there, and he took it, but it was hurting him. After the general was done, he spoke to him again in his guttural voice that he had, the marine saluted him, he bowed to him. I took the general out of the cell, locked the

cell, took him back to his cell, and the general told me in broken English, he says, "This man will not give you any trouble." I says, "I didn't think there was any trouble to begin with." So then as I passed the cigarettes out that particular day—I had to give them to them through these windows that they had, and they could reach out and get them—was just enough that they could get their hand out. Give them each their cigarettes, and he said, "Jailer-san," he says, "I want to thank you." He says, "I want you to know that five cigarettes," he says, "is very good." And he says, "I will give you no trouble." And I told him, I says, "Well, I didn't think we had any trouble to begin with." So with this, he smiled, and that was the end.

DePue: Well, that's just the kind of story that illustrates what life was like in these cell blocks.

Million: Yes, yes, exactly.

DePue: And I think that's probably a good way to kind of finish off this morning's session, and we'll pick up this afternoon with the story of your movement to a different cell block and a different scenario.

Million: Yes. Yes, all right. Very good.

DePue: Thank you very much, Sam.

Million: Thank you.

(end of interview #1 - #2 continues)

Interview with Sam Million

VR2-A-L-2009-031.02

Interview # 2: October 28, 2009

Interviewer: Mark DePue

A Note to the Reader

DePue: Today is Wednesday, October 28, 2009. And this is Mark DePue, director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. It's my second session with Sam Miller—*Miller?*—Million.

Million: Million. (laughs)

DePue: Man. I'm trying to start too quick here, Sam. Sorry about that. We had a lunch break and are now back to finishing your experiences of working at the Sugamo Prison. Am I saying that correctly?

Million: Yes.

DePue: Okay, very good. Well, at least I got that part right. (Million laughs) When we had left off right before lunch, we were talking about your experiences working in cell block six, I believe.

Million: Yes.

DePue: And you said that you'd been there only two months and then you got moved. What happened after those two months?

Million: Okay, I was transferred or moved over to cell block five. Cell block five consisted of A level, then going to trial or preparing to go to trial, to Yokohama. They had trials there as well as Tokyo. B level had the Class A, Class 1, prisoners, which consisted of the Japanese war cabinet, which would have been all the players of us being in war with Japan—Hideki Tōjō[2] and the rest of the cabinet. C level consisted of men who had been to trial that had been condemned to hang. That was their sentence, and that's where they were, in cell block five, on C level, and there was thirty-three of the men when I was assigned to cell block five.

[2] Japanese General and Premier Hideki Tojo served as Prime Minister from October 1941 to July 1944. A few weeks after Japan's surrender in August 1945, Tojo was arrested by American occupation forces and then put on trial for alleged war crimes.

DePue: Okay. The official records show that there were only seven that were eventually executed, that were hung. Were some of these people on C level, they had finished their trial and they were finishing up the rest—

Million: Sitting there waiting for the sentence to be carried out.

DePue: Okay, okay. And which level were you assigned to?

Million: I was assigned to B level, where the major war crimes prisoners were, which was the Japanese war cabinet. There were twenty-five of them.

DePue: Okay. How did conditions in C level of cell block five differ from your experience in cell block six?

Million: Well, those men, of course they had nothing to do but just wait until the day that they were going to be hanged. So they weren't allowed out, and they just stayed in their cells all this time.

DePue: Were they in single cells, or are they still in these four-man?

Million: Single cells. No two men or four men to one cell; it was single cells for each of them.

DePue: Were they smaller cells than the other cell blocks?

Million: Yes, they were. I don't know why, but they were. And just having one man—and I don't know why they made those cells smaller, I really don't.

DePue: What was in the cell with them? The same thing?

Million: Same thing. They had a toilet and a sink, and they didn't have anything that could be used to commit suicide with, which, chances are they would have or could have done while they were there waiting.

DePue: Okay. Did they sleep on a cot, or did they sleep on the floor?

Million: Slept on a grass mat, dried grass mat about, oh, a couple inches thick.

DePue: These are Spartan conditions, then.

Million: Yes, they are.

DePue: Were they allowed to have books to read, or magazines?

Million: Nothing.

DePue: They were allowed nothing to read.

Million: Nothing that I could ever see.

DePue: So they're locked up for twenty-four hours a day and had absolutely nothing to do except consider their fate?

Million: Right, that's it.

DePue: Do you know why they made those decisions, not even let them have something to read?

Million: Well, you know, they could make something out of nothing. They were crafty, these people. Give a man a magazine or a newspaper, he could make a rope out of it by putting the paper together. It wasn't impossible for them to do that. So they weren't permitted anything, mainly because we were always afraid of suicide, which they would do, with their mindset, you know. They were trained from the time they were five years old as soldiers, and, we'll die for the emperor.

DePue: A lot of these people, though, on this particular cell level, had to be civilians.

Million: No, they were soldiers.

DePue: Everybody who was there?

Million: Yes.

DePue: I thought there was a couple ambassadors and some civilian prime ministers and things like that.

Million: Now, that was B level; that was what we called the major Japanese war crimes prisoners, and they would have been the ambassadors and some civilians. Like the man that signed the unconditional surrender aboard the *Missouri*. He was a civilian. Remember he wore the silk hat?

DePue: Yeah, yeah.

Million: Had to walk with a limp because he had a wooden leg.

DePue: And you said you were on B level, right?

Million: Yes. But I had access to C level if I wanted to go up there, but I couldn't go up there with the job I had.

DePue: Okay, tell us about the specific duties, how your duties changed from when you were in cell block six.

Million: Well, when I was in cell block five, there were twenty-five prisoners, of course.

DePue: On this B level?

Million: On B level. Only twenty-five men, individual cells, regular-sized cells that the foremen lived in. They had the same facilities that the other cells had—sink and a toilet, a mat for them to sleep on—and pretty much could—they had papers to read, and they could have utensils to write with, but nothing that could be harmful to them. Now, that's kind of hard to explain, but…

DePue: So anything with a sharp point …

Million: Yeah, exactly. And in that particular cell block, five, B level, we had two men that walked in front of their cells; they each had twelve men to walk in front of the cells. And then myself did nothing but sit in a chair and watch Tōjō for my entire shift.

DePue: Was Tōjō the only one who was watched by an individual the whole time, or were there others that—

Million: Well, the other two jailers that walked in front of the cells could stop at any time to look in on a man. Their cells were all open. The doors were not closed; their cells were always open so we could have access to them at any time.

DePue: Which means that the prisoners could come out at any time, too.

Million: That's correct, but they didn't. They didn't.

DePue: What were you armed with then? What were the three jailers armed with?

Million: Just a club. And I, as the corporal in there, had a key to lock their cells with if I had to.

DePue: You were the ranking man, then?

Million: Yes. Just a plain old corporal.

DePue: And a six-hour shift, you said.

Million: Six-hour shifts.

DePue: What was the time of the day that your shift was?

Million: We would be from 7:00 till 3:00.

DePue: Seven p.m.?

Million: Yes. Let's see. Four shifts, divided into six-hour shifts, so I think we started—because of the fact that the majors were going to trial every day, the shifts were set up, especially in theirs, to coincide with them going to trial and then returning from trial every day. And they returned somewhere around six o'clock in the evening by the time they got there.

DePue: Which sounds like the time you got there, the prisoners are already back in their prison cells.

Million: Well, yes, that was about the time of our shift change. We had to be very careful. Things happened during shift changes. In one of the other—I think it was in cell block one—during a shift change, one of the prisoners, who was a colonel, committed suicide, and the way he did it was he wrapped a towel around his neck and then tied it to the knob, the faucet, of the sink, and he turned himself around and around and around till it tightened that towel and kept him up off of the floor, and he strangled.

DePue: It's hard to imagine anybody doing something like that, isn't it?

Million: Yeah. And that happened at a shift change, so when that happened, of course, they kind of changed things around a little bit to see that that wouldn't happen. In other words, the men that were getting off of shift still did what he had to do until the jailer that relived him was following him in order to make the changeover. In other words, took over where he left off. If he was walking, the jailer went up to him, relieved him on the spot, and continued the rounds.

DePue: Did the prisoners have an opportunity to talk to each other between the cells?

Million: Not really. Not those, but they talked at trial, when they went to trial.

DePue: So they sat close enough together at the trial they could talk to each other.

Million: Yes, uh-huh.

DePue: Was there anything like tapping on the walls to communicate with the neighbors?

Million: No, didn't see any of that. Never heard it. But no, prisoners find a way to communicate, and it doesn't have to be with our knowledge. It's not impossible.

DePue: Sam, you're in a pretty elite group. There couldn't be more than five or six people who had the experience you had of sitting in front of Tōjō's cell for six hours a day.

Million: I think you're right.

DePue: What was that like?

Million: Well, I won't say it was nerve-wracking, but you were always conscious of why you were there and what you were doing, and was anything going to happen while you were on your shift? And something would happen. You was always conscious of that. So you had to be very careful and very, you know, on the ball. Just couldn't let anything interfere with what you were doing.

DePue: Was there anything between you and Tōjō if he decided to come at you or to try to escape?

Million: I had a club.

DePue: Was there a door; was there metal grates, bars?

Million: No. He could come straight out from his cell and get to me if he wanted.

DePue: Why would they not have doors on these cells?

Million: Well, there were doors, but they were left open. We weren't allowed to close them for the simple reason that if we had to get to these guys right away, we didn't want to be bothered with having to open a cell and maybe struggle with a key, for example, in case you're just a little excited—which could happen.

DePue: Yeah. I'm afraid I'm probably belaboring under the misconception here that this is—and you already explained what it was like in the other cell block—but I keep having this image in my mind that you've got nothing but a wall of bars, and what you had was a wall with a door, and I'm assuming now that you had the door open so you could see into the cell, because otherwise you couldn't.

Million: Yes, that's correct.

DePue: Okay. Did you ever have an incident where you were afraid Tōjō was going to come at you?

Million: No, no. Really didn't really think about that, because it never, ever happened. Not saying maybe it wouldn't happen, but like I said, they resigned themselves to the fact that they were there, and they caused no problems

whatsoever in the way of, you know, wanting to get to someone. That never did happen.

DePue: Sounds like most of the time, though, you were watching Tōjō, he was sleeping. Is that right?

Million: Yeah, or maybe he might have been writing to his family, which they were permitted to do, and—

DePue: Well, did he have a desk in there to write on?

Million: No, no. He had a pad, I guess, you know, that he could write on, and there was always a way you could sit and write a letter, you know, so that's what they did.

DePue: But no chair, so he'd be sitting on the floor?

Million: Yes. No chair.

DePue: How did the two of you communicate, or did you communicate?

Million: We didn't have to communicate. First thing, we were not to be carrying on conversations with these. Every now and then we'll ask them a quick question to get an answer maybe you were thinking about, but outside that, we carried on no conversations with the prisoners.

DePue: Did you ever have any temptations to ask things like, Why did you want to go to war with the United States?

Million: I did, but we didn't. (laughs)

DePue: Okay.

Million: I don't know that we would have got a direct answer to that, except they thought that they were going to win. That was their mindset. They thought they were going to win.

DePue: A six-hour shift, given the assignment of doing nothing but watching General Tōjō for six hours straight in the middle of the night—I'm afraid that I might be in the position where I'm drifting off about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning.

Million: And that happened. You would get a little sleepy, so you'd have to get up out of your chair and walk up to his cell, walk back, and make sure that when you did this, one of the jailers that was walking in front of the others would cover his cell if you wanted to stand up and move around to shake yourself up a little bit, you know, so you wouldn't fall asleep.

DePue: Were you allowed a bathroom break during this timeframe?

Million: We could. The other guys had to take over for us, and there was a place in the cell block on that level that we could go, but we always had to call the sergeant of the guard and tell him what we were doing. And so they would be watching as well with an extra guard outside, and then, of course, when you returned, the sergeant and the guard went back to their place in one of the offices where the sergeant was staying.

DePue: Were you allowed to have any food or drink with you?

Million: No, not at all.

DePue: Not even a cup of coffee?

Million: No, nothing. We just had to (laughs) bear it—grin and bear it.

DePue: We never really did establish, though, why it was that you had to be watching General Tōjō for six hours straight, and I assume that somebody replaced you, and so twenty-four hours a day, there's somebody watching every single move Tōjō makes. Why?

Million: That's right. It was a suicide watch, because he tried it once before; why wouldn't he try it again?

DePue: Was that before you got there?

Million: Yes. He shot himself one day right before the military went to his house to pick him up to bring him to Sugamo.

DePue: This would have been back in August or early September of '45, then.

Million: Yes, yes. Well, let's see. Yes.

DePue: Where did he shoot himself, do you know?

Million: Right in the belly, left-hand side. Right, well, midway from where his legs were and up to his shoulders. About midway. Shot himself with a pistol. I don't know if it was a .32 or a .38 or 7.62, which is thirty caliber.

DePue: I'm thinking that there's probably better places to shoot yourself if you're trying to commit suicide.

Million: Well, I would think so, so who says—did he really want to die?

DePue: Was that some speculation the jailers had about it?

Million: Yeah, mm-hmm. And you could see the bullet wound. It was right here. I saw it.

DePue: Was he in his military uniform most the time?

Million: Sometimes he wore the military uniform to trial; sometimes he wore civilian clothes.

DePue: Watching somebody as close as you did, he has absolutely no privacy.

Million: Correct.

DePue: What happens when the man needs to relieve himself?

Million: He just has to go. Just does what he has to do.

DePue: Did you ever sense that he had some embarrassment about you watching him while he was doing this?

Million: Well, maybe at first they might have had, or maybe we might have had, but then it became, hey, it's part of the routine. It happens.

DePue: Watching him as closely as you were, then, you've got to develop some impressions of the man. So what were your impressions of the man?

Million: Well, my impressions were he was a general. He didn't get there the easy way. Very highly disciplined, expected the same thing from his men, and I think he kind of expected that from us, too. In fact, that I know because there was an incident one time that—do you want me to—

DePue: Oh, absolutely.

Million: —bring it in now, or…?

DePue: Yeah, let's do that.

Million: All right, then. So one of the situations we had from him was he had a silk scarf in, you know, part of his dress that he wore at times, especially if they went out to exercise. Because Saturdays and Sundays, when they were not at trial, they had an exercise yard, and we would take them out there for their exercise period. And he had this silk scarf that apparently, I'll say, one of the jailers at one time or another went in his cell and took it—stole it, I guess you might say. And when he realized it was gone, he wrote a letter to Colonel Crary, and in this letter he stated that he had this silk scarf, that it is now missing, and I will assume, he stated, that it was one of the jailers or one of the guards, whoever, at one time or another, stole his scarf. I hand-delivered

that letter myself to the outside and the sergeant of the guard, and from there, it went to the colonel. So the colonel wrote back in a letter to him, "Let us know what kind of a scarf it was, the color, and we'll try to find one as near as to the one you had. We will replace your scarf." He wrote a letter back to the colonel and stated, "It's not the idea that I want my scarf replaced," he says, "it's the discipline your men have." So needless to say, if I was in the colonel's shoes, I don't think I would have appreciated that, being told by the enemy—the general telling me that my men are not disciplined. Well, needless to say, things really clamped down after that.

DePue: Clamped down on your end of things.

Million: Yes. Well, any man caught stealing from any of the prisoners will be highly disciplined, maybe even court-martialed. They weren't going to stand for that.

DePue: Were you questioned about this incident?

Million: You know, I don't remember, but I'm sure that all of us went through this time when we may have—and I really don't remember if we had to give a statement on that or not.

DePue: It's not a very big group, either, that you could say were under suspicion, just because the very limited number of people were doing what you're doing or were jailers at that time. Did you have any suspicions of who it was?

Million: No, had no idea. It could have been any one of the jailers who were directly there in the cell block.

DePue: Did Tōjō get a scarf back, then?

Million: No. That ended when he wrote a letter to the colonel and stated to the colonel, "It's not the idea I want the scarf replaced; it's the discipline your men have." So that ended the scarf incident, because I guess the colonel figured at that point, well, forget the scarf, buddy; you're not going to get it. So that's the way that ended.

DePue: Did Tōjō know English?

Million: He spoke some English, yes.

DePue: Did he write this letter in English?

Million: Yes, he did. He did.

DePue: So he was a very well-educated man as well.

Million: Oh, yes. He was. He was. The other incident that I recall was one of the other ranking people of the twenty-five complained to the colonel that the men who are walking had squeaky shoes and it was keeping them awake, and also, they didn't get enough rest and they were falling asleep at trial. So those who walked had to make sure they did not have squeaky shoes.

DePue: But they're wearing Army-issued boots, I would think.

Million: Right, right.

DePue: Do you know (laughs) what they did to make sure their boots weren't squeaking?

Million: They had to be tested to make sure they didn't squeak after they were replaced. We also had regular dress shoes that we could wear as well as the boots, but the men who walked in front of the cells, wore boots because they were more comfortable. They had a thicker sole and is easier on their feet to walk with a thicker-soled shoe or a boot.

DePue: That's a lot of marching if you're doing that six hours a day.

Million: Oh, yeah, absolutely. So that was the other incident that I recall. And then, of course, on C level, we had a jailer there that, well, wasn't very kind to the prisoners His way of taking out his frustrations was he made a little noose out of a piece of string, and if you put it in front of a light, well, then when it shines on the other wall, it gets a little bit larger and looks like a rope. Well, he would take that and put it in front of the light, and then he'd beat on the door of one of the condemned prisoners and wake him up and motion for him to come here and look, and he'd show him that noose swinging back and forth. Of course, a lot of those prisoners were in the Philippines or in the jungles and developed malaria, and they were taking Atabrine to counteract the malaria, and they had turned yellow from taking Atabrine. I don't know if you were aware of this, but taking Atabrine made you yellow because of what it did to your pigment. And (laughs) when he saw that, he turned white.

DePue: Well, I read someplace that General Honma, who was the commander in the Philippines 1941–42, was one of the people in the prisons. Does that ring a bell?

Million: No, it doesn't, because I've got this flag that's all signed by these guys. I've also got a book that one of the lieutenants wrote about Sugamo, and he names all of these people and where they were and what they did. So to know these guys individually and what they were—it wasn't until I saw the book that I really know where they were and what they did.

DePue: You have given us a picture of the flag, and since you brought it up, this is probably a good time to talk about that a little bit. I thought I had it here someplace. Anyway, tell me about how it is that you ended up with a Japanese flag with signatures of all of the prisoners.

Million: Well, I had purchased this flag in Tokyo, which we were able to get, and it's approximately twenty inches by thirty inches in size, made of silk, the white background with the red ball. And I found out that this was a possibility, that they would sign these things, because, you know, even the troops carried battle flags with them like this, but they were smaller. I have a pair of those, that are about eleven by seventeen. And I took it into the cell, one at a time, on any given day, and would get them to sign it, which they did. They had no qualms about signing these. So I'd take it in, they would sign it, and, as you can see, they signed in English and also the Japanese script.

DePue: Yeah, we've got a photograph of this that's not the best quality, but I think your niece says she's going to help us get something that's a lot crisper that will pop these signatures out, because I think that's very important to be able to get an artifact like this.

Million: Yeah. What we're going to do is she's going to get me lined up with someone who can do this, and also the picture of the geisha girl—

DePue: And we've got that too.

Million: Yes. And then you will be given these better pictures. They'll be sent to you, along with other pictures that I have in my album. And this, the picture of the geisha girl, was made by one of the Japanese prisoners in cell block six, and, as you can see by the paper—this is rice paper that he joined together in two different pieces. (coughs) Excuse me. And he made a pen out of a feather, because he wasn't allowed a steel pen, and he crushed blackberries to make the ink—blackberries that he would have had for dinner. And he crushed some of the berries and made the ink, and he just drew this using that feather pen and the blackberry ink. And, as you can see, it's very professional-looking.

DePue: Well, you know, the people who are listening to this are going to have to see this picture to see just how incredibly intricate this is.

Million: Yes, yes, absolutely.

DePue: And how did you end up having this picture?

Million: When he drew this picture, he gave it to me. I guess maybe he might have liked me, you know.

DePue: Well, I was going to say, why you instead of all the other guys?

Million: Yeah, why me? And he came out through the window, "Jailer-san," he called me. He says, "I have this picture I want you to have. You good jailer-san," he said, and he gave me this picture.

DePue: Did you know he was making this picture while you were there?

Million: Well, he was drawing all the time. As you can see, he was a good artist.

DePue: He's a superb artist, and he's drawing this in his lap, I would think.

Million: Yes. He had no table.

DePue: Yeah, it's an incredible piece of work, considering the circumstances it was created under.

Million: Yes. It's a beautiful picture.

DePue: Well, let's go back to being in cell block five and working with these most, for lack of a better term, the most important war criminals that were held in Japan at the time. Tell me about the daily routine that somebody like Tōjō would go through, assuming that part of the day is going to the trial itself.

Million: Well, of course, we didn't see what went on at the trials, and they didn't necessarily project on him all the time; they had the other prisoners that were on trial too. So their day at trial, I guess, was as any trial would go, whether you would say it was routine or what, who was conducting the trial. And so their time was spent doing all of that, and, of course, they were on heavy guard at the trials. It was the outfit called the 720 MP outfit, and they were the ones in charge of taking him to trial every morning and bringing him back. And they had a special routine that they used in putting these men on the bus and taking them off. They had maneuvers that they went through to make sure that nobody was around or could interfere with them getting on and off the bus every day. And we used to call them the 720s. They wore white gloves, had khaki uniforms, and I guess they thought they were pretty special, and in a way they were, and I guess they always thought they were more special than us. (DePue laughs) But we never ever expressed that to them or…you just have your thoughts about these things.

DePue: I know enough about the military, (Million laughs) having spent quite a few years in it, that the military is going to want to present its very best face when you're having these trials going on and when they're around these prisoners, and it kind of reinforces why you guys were apparently somewhere in this process hand-picked to do this job as well.

Million: Yes, mm-hmm. Yes.

DePue: Okay. Did you feel a certain amount of pride in the job that you had?

Million: Yes, I did. When I really got to thinking about this, is, my gosh, I'm part of history. That's the way I looked at it, and actually it was. In a way, you can say you have become a historical figure in a way. But yeah, I thought that, my God, this is special in my life. Yeah.

DePue: Are you glad that that's what you ended up doing in the military?

Million: Yes. Yes, I'm proud of it. I really am. And, you know, when you think about it and you see other guys who have become your hero for what they have done… Yeah, I'm real proud of the fact that I was there and did what I did, and not everyone would have had this experience. I didn't know when I hit Japan that this is the way it was going to end up.

And do you know what? Strange as it seems, I had a friend that I went to school with, grade school and part of high school, that he attended. There used to be a little park by where I lived, and it was called Enos Park. We were sitting in one of the swings there, and the guy that was in charge of the park—custodian, I guess you would call him—we're sitting in this swing, and out of the clear, he just said to me, "You know what?" And this was just about the time we were finished with school, and the war was on. He says, "You know what's going to happen to you?" he said. "You're going to end up in Japan guarding Tōjō." Now, whatever brought that to his mind, I'll never know to this day, but those are the very words he told me. This is before I was ever in the service that he told me, he says—and why he ever said this, I'll never know—he says, "You're going to end up in Japan guarding Tōjō."

DePue: Well, did you track him down after you'd had that experience?

Million: Well, yes, after I came home, he was waiting. He was waiting for me. Well, he knew I was coming home because he checked with my parents, and he came by the house, and I says, "Well, do you remember telling me that?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "That's the way it ended up." I wouldn't have never believed it. Now, why he would ever said that, I'll never figure out to this day.

DePue: He didn't mention at the time why he said that, just a spur-of-the-moment thing?

Million: It was just a spur-of-the-moment thing because, you know, we were involved with watching what the military was doing, trying to be military ourselves as kids. You know, things that you do, things that you look for. Whenever a parade would go by, we were always there. Yeah.

DePue: Well, it seems to be—I don't know how you would feel about it, but it seems that there's a bit more going on there than just pure chance.

Million: Possible. I really don't have an answer for that. I really don't.

DePue: Let's go back to his daily routine, Tōjō's and the other prisoners' daily routine. I'm curious also about eating.

Million: Okay. Almost immediately after they came back to Sugamo from their trials in Tokyo, well, the first thing they do, within fifteen minutes, the food was coming in to them. And they were allowed to line up out of their cells, and they had the trays with their metal container for soup and fish that was cooked one way or another—different ways. And they had a spoon and a cup to drink their tea out of, which, they got tea. And take it back to their cells, and, of course, we were patrolling all this time in front of their cells and watching. And when they would get done eating, well, then, those that served their dinner to them would go by and pick up their trays and examine everything that they were given to make sure there weren't parts missing or whatever.

DePue: "Those who served"—were these American jailers?

Million: No, they were Japanese cooks that were brought in. They were civilians, and, of course, were accompanied by military who stood there and watched everything that they did to make sure that they were not handed anything. Of course, they were searched before they ever entered the cell block, and they were watched while they were dishing out this food to the prisoners. And then they were escorted out, but then it was the military who picked up their trays from them out of their cells.

DePue: Was there any time where these cooks or the people serving the food would talk to the prisoners?

Million: No, they were not allowed to talk to them.

DePue: What happened to them if they'd try?

Million: They were probably booted out of there. That never, ever happened, but they would not allow them to stay there; they were immediately dismissed.

DePue: Wouldn't the prisoners themselves attempt to have a conversation with them?

Million: No, they didn't. They didn't.

DePue: They knew the rules.

Million: Except to say, you know, thank you, *arigato*. That was it. No words passed between them.

DePue: Do you know if there was an incident involving one of the prisoners, how would the prisoners be disciplined? What was allowed?

Million: Well, not having that situation, I really don't know how they would be disciplined. I mean, first off, they're in jail, and it just never happened that they had to be disciplined.

DePue: Why do you think it never happened?

Million: They were disciplined themselves, highly disciplined people.

DePue: Were they also resigned to their fate?

Million: Well, of course they didn't know what their fate was going to be because some of them were sentenced to maybe seven years after it was all over with. I think the records will show what they were given—some twenty years. Tōjō and six others were sentenced to be hanged. And those that had that situation probably knew in their minds what was going to happen to them, because after all, they were the leaders of what they did. Like the man that was charged with the rape of Nanking, China—he had thousands of people killed just by his say-so. So you knew he was going to get the rope, (laughs) as they said.

DePue: Did you get the sense that Tōjō or any of these others had remorse about what had happened?

Million: I don't know. They never spoke of it that we knew, and—well, if you put a person into war, like they did with us, why would you have remorse about that if you were of such a mind that they were going to win this war? So there wouldn't be any remorse that I could see. And I didn't hear of that with any of the prisoners and sometimes if you could engage in conversation, you never heard of that.

DePue: Well, let's go on the flip side, then. Did you have the sense that they were still very proud men?

Million: Yes, they were. Yeah.

DePue: That they believed that their cause was just?

Million: Yeah. They just didn't give up those beliefs that I could see.

DePue: Well, let's go to when the execution would have happened. When did you leave there? I assume it happened after you left.

Million: I left about…February, maybe March of '48. I was there for about one whole year.

DePue: And these seven that we're talking about were executed—

Million: After I left.

DePue: —December 23, 1948, after you left.

Million: Yeah, that was after I left.

DePue: And I'm putting you on the spot here, and I apologize for that, but I'm imagining that these people who were raised and imbued with this whole notion of the samurai spirit, where it was honorable, if you had failure, to commit suicide, and that's obviously what Tōjō had tried to have done. It must have been incredible dishonor to be hung.

Million: I would say yes. In keeping with the samurai code, of the Shinto beliefs, yeah, I would say that to be hung, that's the lowest death that you can get, is to be hanged, by what I understand. So to them, I guess that would have been a lowly death, but you never, ever heard the people, even the civilians, complain about this, at least that we knew of. And going into town, nobody ever mistreated us.

DePue: Did Tōjō or other prisoners have deep religious views? Were they allowed to practice any religion?

Million: Oh, yes, yes. They were allowed to go to church, those that wanted to go.

DePue: To Shinto shrines, or…?

Million: No, no, no. I don't know what religion they followed through with, but they had their beads, and they—well, you've heard of them probably in some movies where they talk about their religion or—

DePue: Their chanting, you mean?

Million: Their chanting, yes. That's the word I'm thinking or trying to think of. Yeah.

DePue: Well, the dominant religions—and I'm certainly no expert—but Shinto would have been the state religion, but I think Buddhism was also a popular religion.

Million: Yes, and probably some of them did practice Buddhism. Now, we had a church at Sugamo, and if they wanted to be taken to church, they were escorted to church.

DePue: A Christian church, you're talking about.

Million: Yes, yes, or Buddha—you know, Buddhism. They weren't allowed to practice the Shinto, because that was a different thing. That was a wartime thing.

DePue: That was the religion that got them into the conflict in the beginning.

Million: Yes, yes.

DePue: Oh, that's interesting. Did Tōjō avail himself of that opportunity?

Million: Not that I know of. Now, if he did his prayers in his cell, that could have been.

DePue: Were they allowed any visitors while they were in the cells?

Million: No, no, no, no. No visitors whatsoever. None, even their—no wives, no children.

DePue: The visitors I'm thinking about are their defense team, or did they not have—

Million: No, not in jail. Only at trial. Now, if this was done prior to the time that I got there, to set up their defense teams, I don't know about that because I wasn't there.

DePue: Okay, let's take a quick break here.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Well, Sam and I took a very quick break, and kind of reflecting on things. Sam just told me that you've pretty much covered all the stories, and it occurred to me that's exactly the way it was supposed to be in the cell block five, that there weren't supposed to be stories coming out of here.

Million: That's very correct.

DePue: And, by God, everybody on both sides better be conducting themselves professionally.

Million: Yes. It was very professional, yeah. It had to be.

DePue: What uniform were you wearing?

Million: In the winter, we wore what we called the olive drabs, the wool uniform. We were not allowed fatigues at any time in the prison itself while we were on duty. And in the summer, of course, we wore the suntans, what we called the suntan, which was the tan uniforms. No jackets except with our winter

uniform, and in the summer, straight shirt and pants, polished shoes, and that was it.

DePue: It sounds to me like you had to dress up a bit to guard and to be a jailer in the prison.

Million: Well, you had to be presentable. That was the thing. You couldn't look like a just plain old sloppy guy; they weren't going to have that. All haircuts all the time, you know.

DePue: Did you go through a uniform inspection before you started duty?

Million: Yes. Before we went into the cell blocks to go on duty, we were all lined up and inspected.

DePue: What kind of things could get you in trouble.

Million: Haircut; sloppy, wrinkled clothes. It just was not permitted.

DePue: Did you have a tie on?

Million: No. Summertime, we didn't wear ties with our suntans. The winter uniform was different; you had to wear a tie.

DePue: How about shining boots?

Million: Absolutely. Had to be shiny. Didn't have to be spit-polished, but they had to be shiny. And it's hard to shine combat boots.

DePue: Are these brown boots?

Million: Yes, and they had the additional part sewn on them that was with the combat boots. Some guys were fortunate enough to have paratrooper boots, and they were permitted to wear those because they were Army issue—well, paratrooper issue, I should say. But you had to wear your boots, and you all had to be the same. Couldn't part of us wear regular dress-up shoes; you all had to be the same. That was without saying.

DePue: This might be the perfect way to transition from being on duty to off duty, and I'm going to speculate and say that there was probably enough Japanese around who were desperate to make some kind of living that you could get yourself a houseboy who could do things like polish the boots and take care of your gear.

Million: Wasn't permitted.

DePue: Was not?

Million: Was not permitted. We had to do it ourselves. Now, we did have a hut boy that would come in and clean our hut, sweep and mop every day, but he was not allowed to touch your clothes; you had to do this yourself.

DePue: Why do you think that was the policy?

Million: They didn't want them messing around with our clothing or anything in our footlocker.

DePue: Where were you billeted, then?

Million: In Quonset huts. There was a whole line of them. There might have been in line about fifteen to twenty Quonset huts, twenty-men Quonset huts.

DePue: Was this in a military compound?

Million: Yes, at Sugamo. It was a pretty—well, it wasn't an extremely large compound, but it was large enough that on our part, the jailers' end, we had twenty Quonset huts, and then right up front from that was our mess hall. Off to the back was our enlisted men's club, and then in front was the Red Cross club. Next to that, we had a little ice cream place called the Igloo, then the prison itself. Then on the other side of the prison was the guard outfit at Sugamo that had a line of twenty Quonset huts where the guards were stationed, some of the cooks, some of the drivers for the motor pool, and mechanics, and toward the end of ours, some of the same. So we had everything we needed there.

DePue: One of the things we haven't established—I don't think we have—is the unit designation for your outfit. No?

Million: I can't think of it.

DePue: Well, I know you were assigned to Eighth Army, but was there a specific unit below Eighth Army that you—

Million: Yeah, we did have, and I'm going to have to get that information to you off of my discharge papers.

DePue: I would appreciate it if you can get that, because that's—

Million: I will get it. [Military Policeman (677) Sugamo Prison, Headquarters Detachment].

DePue: Because that's the kind of information people are oftentimes interested in. But in you describing the compound, it strikes me that even outside the prison itself, still in the compound, but the Army has decided to segregate the jailers from the guards. Was that the case?

Million: Yes, because we could have had different hours. Like, in each Quonset hut that I was in and on down the line, at first when we first went there, we had people that were on different shifts, and if you were there sleeping and they were on the night shift, well, then, you know, they could be wandering around, getting dressed, and making noise as a person would, not wanting to. So what they did, then, they—every man that was on the same shift was in the same hut and on down. That took care of that.

DePue: Let's transition then and start talking a little bit about what you did during your off-duty time. What activities were available?

Million: Okay. When we were off-duty, of course, we always had Class A passes. We could go by rail to Tokyo from this little town that we called Ikebukuro—I think you may have written that down.

DePue: Yep.

Million: Or if we had a truck, the four-by-fours, that could take us in town, which they did—when they got a group, they would take us into town and be in Tokyo at a certain time to pick you up to bring you back.

DePue: Sugamo Prison wasn't in Tokyo proper?

Million: No, it was not. It was about ten miles out—I don't know if it was north, south, east, or west of Tokyo. I don't remember that.

DePue: And the town that was closest was Ikebukuro.

Million: Yes. They had a couple little stores there, the people would go and shop, and they had a train station there, and they had the electric trains, the commuter trains, like they do in Chicago and places like that. And in their trains, they had one car specifically set up for the GIs. Civilians were not allowed in that car. But they were roped off, and you could see—you know, we'd be sitting there, and maybe there'd be two or three or four of us in this car with wide open spaces, and you'd look to where it was roped off, and these other people, the civilians, were packed in these cars like sardines. It made you feel kind of bad that you're sitting there with all this room, (laughs) but they weren't allowed to come in our cars.

DePue: Why did they have separate cars for you?

Million: Well, they didn't want us mingling with the civilians, because some of those places and people from those places were off-limits.

DePue: What kind of things were off—

Million: We weren't allowed to mingle with them or fraternize. We weren't allowed to fraternize with them.

DePue: What kind of things were off-limits to you?

Million: Some of the eating places, some of the—

DePue: Some but not all?

Million: Not all of them. They had to be made up specially and approved by the Army, such as the one little place they had at Ikebukuro. They had a place they called the Wisconsin Beer Garden.

DePue: (laughs) Well, that's descriptive.

Million: Yeah, and we could go there and get a beer. They had tables set out for you. You could sit outside and drink a beer if you'd like, but that was approved by the government. We were not allowed to eat food from their little stands because they were fertilized with human manure, and, of course, that could be dangerous. Basically that was about it.

DePue: Well, you've explained a scenario where some of the restrictions at least were based on health reasons. Do you think some of the restrictions were because of wanted to minimize fraternization?

Million: Yes. Very much so, I'd say, because we were not allowed to fraternize with the people. It wasn't until later on—say, about '49, '50, Korean War type thing—where a lot of men came back to Japan for R&R from Korea. Things kind of opened up a little bit better then for them, but for us, we were still under (laughs) war situations, more or less.

DePue: The commander on the island at that time is Douglas MacArthur.

Million: Correct.

DePue: How much did you guys know about MacArthur and what he was trying to attempt to do with the Japanese society and culture?

Million: Well, we knew that he was trying to establish democracy for the Japanese. He kept the emperor, which I think was a good move, because that kind of eased tensions with the Japanese and the Americans who came in as conquerors, and

things were pretty smooth. He had enough know-how and enough smarts to do that, and it probably perhaps saved a lot of lives.

DePue: What do you think the attitude of the Japanese people to being conquered and now being expected to make some pretty radical changes in their culture and their politics?

Million: Well, I'm not going to say that they liked it, but you didn't hear anything to the contrary. There's not much they could say, but by retaining the emperor the way MacArthur did may have been probably one of the reasons why they accepted him the way they did and accepted us, because, as I say, we had no problems. If there was a problem, you created it yourself.

DePue: Did you ever feel a threat from the Japanese people themselves?

Million: No, never. They were very polite people, very polite.

DePue: Did they treat you with respect, then?

Million: Yes, absolutely.

DePue: They treated all the Americans with respect?

Million: I would say most of them. As I say, if you didn't get respect, it's because you created it.

DePue: How about any situations you saw where Americans were not respectful to the Japanese people?

Million: I may have seen one or two incidents while in Tokyo that they tried to hassle some Japanese people, but the military, the MPs, used to patrol Tokyo and the big cities, and they saw it, and they put an end to it. It wasn't going to be. We were there to teach democracy, and democracy was being treated fairly.

DePue: That was the very clear message to you and the other soldiers on how you're supposed to conduct yourselves?

Million: Yes, yes, it was. Conduct yourself the way you would want to be treated. And it worked.

DePue: Tell me about a typical trip to Tokyo, then. What did you do?

Million: Okay, we would board the trucks or get on the train station, wait to get to Tokyo by either method. We would try to find the shops that were not off-limits. There were shops where you could buy scarves, maybe buy things that you would want to bring back home. Perhaps you could run into a certified

eating place where you can get the typical Japanese food. And, of course, we had the Ernie Pyle Theatre, which was one of the three thirty-five–millimeter theatres that was in Japan at the time. Ernie Pyle was a biggie. It was a regular movie place like you would find any movie house in modern times, and it was a very nice place. They had a stage. We would go there and see stage shows and movies. Plays, they had. We would go around to the camera stores that were still around, and there was many, many German cameras that were available there, because, of course, they were in alliance with Germany, and they probably had to take on a lot of that stuff that Germany sent them. So there was a lot of German cameras that were available. And had tailor shops there if you wanted to take your clothes in to be specifically tailored for you, which some of the guys did. I never did; I just accepted what I had. And that was basically what we did, yeah, when we went to Tokyo. And always tried to find a good place to eat, and the Americans had set up places there.

DePue: Could you find a good American steak?

Million: Yes. There was one place at the Dai-Ichi Building, which means "number one," that had a fantastic restaurant in there. I had one experience going in there. There was my sister's boss that was in California, he was in the importing-exporting business, and he had to come to Japan on business. My sister give him my number where I could be reached at Sugamo, and he called me, and I went into town and I had dinner with him at the Dai-Ichi Building. Fantastic. Good American food.

DePue: Dai-Ichi Building. That was MacArthur's headquarters as well, wasn't it?

Million: That was one of the buildings, yes.

DePue: I'm going to have to look how to spell that up, I tell you.

Million: D-i-a. Ichi is I-c-h-i, I think.

DePue: Okay. That'll be close enough. That'll get us—

Million: That'll get you there.

DePue: Well, Sam, I don't want to embarrass you here, but GIs being GIs, some of your buddies, I would imagine, would be looking for other kind of pleasures when they got to Tokyo as well. Could those be found?

Million: They could be found, but of course they were off-limits, and you had to be pretty darn careful.

DePue: Some of these approved restaurants, could you go in and get good American beer?

Million: Sure.

DePue: And hard liquor?

Million: Yes, you could get everything.

DePue: And enough to get pretty (laughs)—

Million: Snookered?

DePue: —pretty liquored up? Yeah.

Million: Yeah, I guess you could. Of course, I'd kind of resolved myself that if I was going to do any drinking, it was usually beer, and it was the beer that was allowed in our EM club, and of course it was, what'd they call it, 1.5 or something like that. Is that what they used to call the beer that we…?

DePue: The watered-down beer.

Million: Yeah, it was, but if you went these other places, like the Wisconsin Beer Garden, you could get the Japanese beer, made from rice, I guess. It was good stuff. It was good beer. We would try to get that if we could.

DePue: Was there a black market going on in the country?

Million: Oh, gosh, was there! Yeah.

DePue: A lot of black market because things you guys had access to in the PX that were scarce on the open economy?

Million: Yes. Chocolate, soap, things of that nature. I played the black market. I came home with some nice stuff. I say "nice stuff"—things that would have been of value to my family that I brought back items to. But the most gifts that I ever brought back from Japan was at the stores, jewelry stores, that they had in Tokyo, and I brought back several nice items, two of which I have still. I brought back an opal that my twin sister has; charm bracelets made of silver with as many as fifty and seventy-five charms on them that were typical of Japan, like the little rickshaws, pagodas, things of that nature—I brought back two of those, two silver engraved compacts for two of my sisters, and a cigarette case that I brought back for myself. Beautiful—all hand-engraved. Just beautiful. You polish that up and it looks like diamonds shining. That's the way the engraving worked on it.

DePue: When you got to Japan, at the same time in Germany, there was a thriving black market, but it was an economy all based on American cigarettes. Was that the case in Japan?

Million: Pretty much, yeah.

DePue: So the cigarettes were the coin in trade, so to speak?

Million: They were the biggie and certain kinds of cigarettes, like Lucky Strikes. That was the most popular at that time, and then Camels, but any cigarette brand, you could get, while I was there, as much as about fourteen hundred yen for a carton of cigarettes. I think the medium of exchange at that time was fifty yen to the dollar. So—

DePue: Wow.

Million: So those were black-market items. That was the number one. The others were chocolate, soap, things of that nature.

DePue: Were you a smoker yourself?

Million: No, I didn't smoke.

DePue: Well, that means you've got some good material to trade.

Million: So I would get my ration, and when I got enough to do what I had to do, went outside the gate in Ikebukuro, and there was always somebody there waiting for you. "GI, you have cigarette?" What we did mainly was get the Japanese yen in order to buy the things that we wanted to buy, because the American dollar or the American script wouldn't cover the things that you wanted, and it would cost you too much.

DePue: Now, the things you're talking about are jewelry, but was there some other things that you typically wanted to use that money for?

Million: Well, it was mainly the jewelry that I brought back. I didn't bring back any clothing-type things—no kimonos, nothing like that. The stuff I brought back was mainly jewelry that would be a lasting thing.

DePue: Okay. Some of these off-duty places, now, I'm sure that you didn't have any direct experience, but I'm sure also that other soldiers were able to find these places and get themselves in trouble. Did the prostitution rings start up pretty quickly and those kinds of things going on?

Million: Well, they were, outside our gate. Of course, we had a gate guard and you had to check in with him, in and out. But away from that and off, there was a fence, and then of course the civilians were beyond that. And they would gather out there, the women, and they'd be out there selling their services if you wanted to go out. Me, I never did. I was a good guy—tried to be.

DePue: How did the other Japanese people respond to the women who were doing that kind of business? (pause)

Million: Well, I'll put it this way: you did what you had to do to survive, to live, feed your family.

DePue: They did, you say.

Million: That's what they did. I can understand that, because that's what war does.

DePue: Well, tell us a little bit about the conditions of the country at that time. You're very close or in Tokyo a lot of times, and that city was absolutely devastated by bombing.

Million: It was, and surrounding cities were in bombed-out conditions. We were always present of the fact that what the firebomb raids did to in and around Tokyo. Devastation was complete—I'll just put it that way. Tokyo was burnt down. Now, the emperor's palace survived because they didn't bomb that, purposefully, so the emperor still had his palace with the moat and everything else. I'm sure you have probably seen pictures of it. Surrounding cities were bombed out. Yokohama was bombed. Any major city, and even countrysides got part of it, was bombed out. Just on the outside of the prison walls, devastation around there. Little kids walking around half-naked, starved. But that's what war does.

DePue: How would you compare the housing that you saw over there versus what you had experienced here in the United States?

Million: Tinderboxes. Made of wood, whatever they could build up real quick. Prior to that, I guess would be—before they firebombed—that's the reason they firebombed, because of these wooden homes. And God, they went up like (makes whooshing noise)—like nothing. Only in downtown did we see the stone buildings or brick buildings. The outskirts was the wooden-framed houses and wooden siding and things like that.

DePue: I assume that none of these or practically none of them had anything like indoor plumbing.

Million: You know, maybe some of them did, but a lot of them had outside outhouses, and yeah, they—that's what they had, yes.

DePue: Did they have electricity by the time you got there?

Million: Some of them did. Some of them did. A lot of them did not. They lived by their little lights, their little lamps, Japanese lanterns. That's what you saw in a

lot of the houses. Of course, most places were off-limits. We couldn't go into a civilian's house.

DePue: I know that they had more respectable geisha houses and bath houses and things like that. Was there any of those that Americans were allowed to go to?

Million: There probably were. The guys that I hung around with didn't go looking for them, but I'm sure that they existed, without a doubt.

DePue: Okay. Well, I appreciate you bearing with me as I'm asking all these peculiar questions about what it was like at the time, but you've painted a very good picture of it.

Million: Now, I do remember that there were places, approved bath houses, now that I think about that. There were approved bath houses that we could go to if we wanted. But you don't go looking for a bath house unless you're going to spend a weekend in Tokyo, if you can find a nice place at one of the resorts. Now, that was another story. They had the resorts that we could go to. We were taken there by buses by the Red Cross. They had tours that were set up for if you had a couple days off, you could go on these. And then they had all the facilities you needed. They had the bath houses and the gardens, the eating places. They were nice, and we could go visit the shrines. And that's one of the things that we did off time, off duty, we'd go to the shrines and see them for what they were, because they were hundreds of years old, and they were not bombed out.

DePue: In other words, you were being tourists when you went there.

Million: Yes, exactly. I wanted to see as much as I could see.

DePue: Now, you've already said that as far as the prisoners were concerned, the folks that you were guarding, that you were jailer for, didn't have any sympathy for them much at all.

Million: No.

DePue: What feelings did you have, if any, for the Japanese people?

Million: I just felt that they were being led into a thing that they were forced to believe, that Japan was going to win this war and they would be conquerors, and they were going to live good. But they didn't stop to think that they awoke the sleeping giant, as they say.

DePue: As far as the United States is concerned.

Million: Yes. And so they just really didn't have any say-so in the matter, like the Germans. You know, Hitler painted them a picture, and they believed it.

DePue: Over time, did you develop any admiration for them?

Million: I respected them. I respected them. And, of course, if it wasn't for us, they wouldn't have rebuilt the way they did. I believe that. So did we win the war or not? (laughter)

DePue: They at least accepted that.

Million: Yes, of course.

DePue: Well, since we're talking about that, the thing that led to the ultimate capitulation was the atomic bomb. What was your opinion, having served there afterwards? Were we justified? Were we right in using the bomb?

Million: Well, I feel this way: yes, we were justified. It stopped the war—the bomb stopped the war—and if that's what it took, we had to go for it. My opinion.

DePue: Let's ask you some questions here about the other soldiers that you served with as well. You were serving in the military at a time that it was segregated. Were there any black troops that you saw overseas?

Million: No, none. Not at that time.

DePue: A matter of policy, you think?

Million: But there were a few of them there, but they was within their own outfits. They were not with us; they were segregated.

DePue: It sounds like you didn't have any direct dealings with them, then.

Million: No, we didn't—none at all.

DePue: How about the soldiers that you did serve with? What was your opinion of them as a lot, if you will?

Million: Pretty nice guys. There was a few that got carried away, but most of the guys were pretty nice guys. Mostly, I would say, guys my age, a few of them that were older, and some of them were carryovers from the war that was in our outfit. Our first sergeant served in the Army during the war, and there were some other ones. Our weapons instructor, who was a lieutenant, served in the war, and he was the one that taught us how to use the club, our clubs that we carried, to protect ourselves or anyone else. And, of course, that training was

good training. Try and get to me with my club—you couldn't do it. You would be stopped.

DePue: Any particular blow or a defense that you used?

Million: Yes. You wanted to stop him, you cracked him one in the shins first, or you hit him between his shoulder and elbow, or you hit him in the forearm. A blow to the forearm will break their arm.

DePue: So you were taught to be hitting people hard enough to be breaking bone.

Million: To stop them. That was the idea. You stopped them. Now, if you want to kill them, you give them a blow right underneath the nose or across the bridge of the nose, smack them in the ears with the club. You'll stop them, you'll kill them, if that's what you want to do.

DePue: Apparently, though, the instructions you were getting was to stop them first?

Million: Yes, yes. We were given total training with that club.

DePue: Okay. Anything else you want to talk about in terms of your experiences while in Japan, either in the prison or off-duty time?

Million: Well, I'm just trying to think of experiences. Yeah, I think we've kind of covered it pretty well.

DePue: Well then, Sam, let's bring you back home.

Million: Okay.

DePue: How did that process happen? And I assume you got to a certain number of points or a number of time of service.

Million: No, we didn't have the point system. That ended earlier, and when it was time to leave, of course, we were separated from Sugamo the Army way. We boarded the trucks that took us into Tokyo, from Tokyo we took the trains back to Yokohama and boarded the ship. And the ship I boarded to bring us back to San Francisco, to the replacement depot there, Camp Stoneman—I went back to Camp Stoneman—was the *Private Johnson*.

DePue: That was the name of the ship.

Million: Yes. It was a converted hospital ship. There was two hundred GIs aboard and two hundred civilians.

DePue: Well, this is a luxury liner compared to what you came in.

Million: It was, yeah. The promenade decks, one was set up for the GIs, where we saw movies aboard the ship and there was one for the civilians on the other side. And with this, they asked if anybody wanted to be a guard aboard the ship.

DePue: Raised your hand?

Million: I volunteered. Guys were telling, oh, crazy, sucker, you know, what are you doing? I was a guard prior to this; that wasn't going to hurt me. So I had access to the entire ship. Could go down to the civilians' mess hall, our mess hall. If I got sick, they stuffed my pockets with crackers and apples and oranges so I could eat right away after I got sick. And the other guys, they were scrubbing floors (DePue laughs) that told me that I was crazy for volunteering for guard, but I saw them scrubbing the deck. So I had it made.

DePue: You mean that old adage about never volunteer if you're in the service—

Million: Didn't work. Didn't work for them, (DePue laughs) worked for me. But I knew the situation, so yeah, I volunteered for it right away. But coming back, our ship didn't pitch, but it rolled side to side. It feels like you could almost reach out the porthole and touch the water. And boy, did we roll. You'd be down here and the waves up there, and then you would be up here and the waves were down there. I got sick.

DePue: Well, which is the worst kind of sick, pitching or rolling?

Million: Both. They're both the same. When you get seasick, you're sick.

DePue: In other words, you were as miserable returning as you were going over.

Million: Yeah, but you know, I got used to it coming back. We kind of got away from that. And we were eleven days coming back—of course, going over, we were thirty-five days—but we didn't stop anywhere coming back, so we were able to make twenty-two knots. Big deal. (laughter) But yeah, it took us eleven days to get back.

DePue: How long did you spend at Camp Stoneman, then?

Million: Camp Stoneman, I was there for about maybe four days to get processed and discharged.

DePue: Did you have any intentions, any thought of staying in?

Million: I was asked by one of the captains when I was in one of the cell blocks. It was getting near the time for me to be leaving, and he says, "If we would give you a sergeant's rating, would you stay for another six months?" And I says, "No," I says, "I think I'd like to get home." He says, "Okay, fine," and that was the

end of that. But now that I think about it, why didn't I do it? You know? It wouldn't have hurt me. Well, the service didn't hurt me anyway. I just felt like I wanted to get home.

DePue: But you would have ended up in Korea and Vietnam if you'd have been a lifer.

Million: Sure. Yeah. And I thought about, you know, do I want to stay in the service? No, I didn't. I didn't want to be a permanent serviceman, so I chose to leave, not to take the sergeant stripes and stay there for another six months.

DePue: I'd like to have you now spend just a couple minutes going through what happened to Sam Million in those next few years after he got out of the service.

Million: Well, when I got discharged from the service, I took it easy for about a month, didn't do anything, and I went to work for Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company in Springfield, here in Springfield. (pause)

DePue: Do you remember your homecoming, getting home, being welcomed when you got back?

Million: No, it was like I walked in the front door or back door, and, "Mom, I'm home." Well, it was just like one day to the next to me—no big fancy thing, except Mom cooked a special dinner.

DePue: What was the special dinner?

Million: Spaghetti and meatballs.

DePue: I knew it.

Million: And a good pork roast.

DePue: Oh.

Million: Yeah, yeah. She always had a second dish, always. But yeah, that was it for me.

DePue: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill?

Million: No, I did not. I should have. I was going to try to go into flight training, become a pilot. And I was going to go at Parks Air College in St. Louis and give that a try and I talked myself out of it. Then I went to Chicago to DeVry Institute to study electronics, and at that point decided that electronics were not for me because I was not all that good in math at school, and that kind of

held me back. So I decided against that, went to work at Pittsburgh Plate Glass. I had two sisters working there, and there was an opening for a glass cutter. So I got the job and learned how to cut glass. I could cut a piece of glass in any shape you ever wanted. I got good at it. And so I was there for five years. Then after about four years, they needed someone up front as a salesman, so I took that job, and then they hired another glass cutter. And I was at the front of the store selling paint and learned everything that had to be learned. I asked questions from the painters that used to come in, because then they had to mix their own blends to match whatever had to be matched if that were the case, so they would give you what had to be done, and you had to blend it and put it in the mixer and blend their paint for them. Not the way they do it today, though, had to be done different.

And so I did that, and then we got a new manager in the place, and things were not the same as the way the old manager conducted business, because he was good, he was sharp. And this guy came in with the idea—he came from Michigan—and he came in with the idea that, oh, well, you're just a person, just a warm body there. And with that, after I'd had enough of it, and I only had one sister there because the other one went to work for the government, CIA, way back when they were first organized. And with that, I told the manager, "Well I'm going to be changing jobs." I says, "I did get myself lined up with another job." And he says, "Well, we're going to be moving to another location. It's going to be a nicer place and bigger" and all this and that. And I says, "No, I don't think so," I said, "because first off, you promised me a raise a year ago, and I've never received that raise." So I said, "Apparently your promises aren't any good." That's the way I told him. I said, "Apparently your promises aren't any good." Well, who wants to hear that, you know? A manager doesn't want to hear that. So I says, "I'm going to be taking another job." He said, "Well, you know, I can pick up anybody off the street to do your job."

DePue: And who wants to hear that?

Million: So I didn't want to hear that. I says, "Well and good. Give them my five years' experience that I've learned here the hard way and let them do the job and see how you like that, because you're going to have to train him. I'm not going to train him," I said. So with that, I give him two weeks' notice, and I was out of there. Went to work for a window place making storm windows. Kaufman-Lynch was the name of the place back then.

DePue: Did you manage to meet any young ladies during this period of time here that piqued your interest?

Million: Yes, I did. I had one gal that I was really attracted to. She lived two doors away from my house on North Fifth when I was living with the family. And I was outside polishing my shoes out in the back porch, and she come out of her

back door—they lived upstairs in an apartment—and I didn't know her, didn't know who she was. And she yelled over to me—because she didn't know me—she says, "Why don't you polish my shoes for me?" That was the opening. I said, "Bring them over." I said, "I'll polish them for you, but," I says, "it comes with a price." I heard that she was a good baker. I had heard this prior to meeting her. And I says, "It's going to cost you some baked cookies." So she said, "That's a deal." So she brought the shoes over for me, I polished them. The next day she come over with some cookies that she had baked. So I asked her out on a date. We went to a movie. And, oh, I guess we were seeing one another at least once a week, and saw her during the week—I'd go over and talk to her, that type of thing—and she was my first real sweetheart, you might say. Yeah, I liked her.

DePue: What was her name?

Million: Her name was Virginia.

DePue: But that wasn't the one that you settled with, I assume?

Million: No, no, I didn't, because I was over at her house one day, and it was Sunday afternoon, and we were sitting around talking. Her sisters—she had two sisters that lived there with her, and one of them that was going out with some guy, but she happened to be there also that particular Sunday. And her people are originally from Chatham. She got a phone call from her brother, who knew my family as well through in and around Auburn, because people at those distances knew one another. And her brother called up and probably said, "Well, what are you doing?" You know, normal question. "Well, I'm entertaining a few people here, and my sisters are here," she said, "and Sam Million from the corner." I don't know if there was anybody else there or not. So he was one of these kind of guys that liked to throw the ethnic slurs, and she just said, "Million." He said—and I was just catching part of this conversation by what she was responding to from him. "Oh," he says, "he's one of those Guineas, isn't he?" referring to me. And she says, "Guinea?" She says, "What's that?" because she didn't know. Well, and he proceeded to tell her. Well, she heard him say that and started laughing and thought it was pretty funny. Well, I didn't, and I let her know about it. I wasn't going to keep it back. I says, "Why is he calling me this? What gives him the right to call me this?" "Well, he's just a—you know, just what we call people like that." I said, "Well, I don't like it." I says, "Goodbye, and good luck." I walked out. It was the end of Virginia. Didn't like it. I didn't like it. Didn't need to be, but that's the way some people are.

DePue: Did you ever get married, then, later on?

Million: Yeah. Then the lady that I married, I met her. She was four years younger than me. And 1950, we got married—October 7, 1950. And we lived in Springfield up until the time that I moved to New Orleans in 1963.

DePue: Okay. What's your wife's name, then?

Million: Her name was Joan [pronounced jo-ANN], J-o-a-n. Actually, Ruth Joan was the way she had it on paper.

DePue: And her last name?

Million: Hadley.

DePue: Okay. Anything else you want to mention here very briefly? And then we'll kind of close with some general questions.

Million: I can't think of anything. Let me look and see if there's anything I may have written here.

DePue: While you're looking, did you have any children with Joan?

Million: Any what? Yes, we had two boys. One that's still—well, he lives by me, next door, in Mississippi, and I lost the other one at thirteen. Tough, real tough. (pause) Yeah, he had what they referred to as one of the collagen diseases—arthritis-type. They never could figure it out. But then he was on cortisone all that time. Cortisone did him in. Cortisone's a killer. It just destroyed all of his internal organs.

DePue: Yeah, I'm sure that was a very tough time for you.

Million: Yeah, it was.

DePue: Let's finish off with some general questions, as I mentioned before. Looking back at your experience in the Army, and especially that crucial time when you were in Sugamo prison, do you think that experience changed you?

Million: I would say that it made me a better person, from being in the service, to start with, and being with guys from all over the country and see how they lived, how they talked. And everybody has a different routine, the way they live. And I met a lot of darn nice guys, who I in part stayed in touch with, but they're going by the wayside at this point. And yeah, I would say that that, being in Japan and being in the service, really rounded me out and made me aware of what's really going on with other people. Yeah, it was a good experience.

DePue: Did you come back from that experience being more mature and focused?

Million: Absolutely. I sure was. Yeah, it does that to you.

DePue: What did you think when—it wasn't too long after you came back—the Korean War bubbled up, and, you know, that's kind of in the same area of the world, obviously.

Million: Yeah. Of course, at that time, I was married, and we had moved to another place, and the mailman came around with the mail, and this one letter had on there, "United States government," and I thought, oh, boy, this is it, they want me. When I got home, then you could file for—you were discharged from the service, and you had a different classification—I don't know if it was what they called C-1 or D-1 or whatever it was—that indicated that I was discharged from the service and not in the Reserves. But I still could have been taken regardless, if they would have said, we want you. But [the letter] was reclassifying me from military status to discharged status and with a dependent now. So, you know, that's all it said. It didn't say anything about having to go. So I give a sigh of relief. But I thought, oh, boy, here I am. I'm going to Korea. But it didn't happen. I was thankful. I didn't want to go there.

DePue: Having grown up during World War II, having gotten that close to being in the Korean War, what was your response during the Vietnam War, especially to all the protests and the way American society was dealing with that?

Million: I didn't like the protests. I don't like anybody protesting the military, because they're over doing a job, and they're being criticized for it. Because today, we don't fight wars to win, and those that criticize our troops, I don't like. And I also say that when those guys were over there fighting, they didn't know what they were fighting for. They were getting killed for what? And that reason I didn't like the protesters, and I was in support of our people that were over there. At first I said, "Right or wrong, we're there to do a job, we'll do it." But when they would walk into a town through battle, win it, and turn around and walk out and say, it's no longer considered strategic, I say that's wrong. So I was disillusioned after I saw that, and I thought, we don't belong there. Those people don't want to even fight for their own country and win—why should we go over there and get killed? For what? Same thing with Korea. That's the way I felt about it. Maybe that's wrong, but those were my feelings.

DePue: Well, can I ask how you feel about our current scenario in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Million: Well, we went into Iraq and we won, but now we're getting back to the people are still bombing one another with these bombs they're carrying on themselves and killing 115 people—for what? This is what I don't understand. What'd we go out there and fight for, for these people to still do this? They need to get a leader, a good leader. And I'm beginning to think, well, was

Saddam so bad? But then he killed innocent people—that, I don't like—but he kept all of that in check.

DePue: He could have been one of those guys you were guarding in prison all those years.

Million: You're right. You're right.

DePue: Certainly the same kind of personality.

Million: Yeah, absolutely. But, you know, he didn't need to be there to do that, what he did. And the same with the Afghanistan now. We've got those guys over, and they're thinking about sending more over there, Pakistan and those other places are fighting among themselves. What do we need to be there? It's been going on for too many years—thousands of years they've been fighting. We're not going to teach these people democracy. They don't want it. They don't want democracy. So I say let's get out—my opinion again.

DePue: Well, having said all of that and getting back to your experiences in 1946–1948, overall, are you proud of your military service?

Million: Yes, yes.

DePue: Because…?

Million: Well, we did something. We accomplished something. We give freedom to a lot of people that were being oppressed, that were run over by the Japanese army—the Philippines, especially. They killed people for nothing. Same way with the islands—same thing. And we went there with a purpose and we did it. Same thing in Germany. I had a brother-in-law that went all the way through, second wave on Omaha Beach, went all the way through. Fortunate he didn't get killed.

DePue: Yeah, very fortunate.

Million: Yeah, those are the heroes.

DePue: Any final words, then?

Million: Well, I take great pleasure in this interview.

DePue: Well, it has been thorough enjoyment for me to hear the stories and to have the privilege of hearing an important story. (pause)

Million: (tears up) Just been a real pleasure. (pause) I'm just so glad to have done it, really.

DePue: It is a pleasure for me, too, so—and it's going to be a thorough pleasure for anybody who has a chance to hear it.

Million: I hope.

DePue: Well, I think you've got some relatives that are going to be anxious to hear it.

Million: Yes, I'm sure. I'm sure.

DePue: Thank you, Sam.

Million: Yeah. Thank you.

(end of interview #2 – interview #3 continues)

Interview with Sam Million

VR2-A-L-2009-031.03

Interview # 3: February 5, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Friday, February 5, 2010. I'm doing a continuation of an interview with Sam Million, who we interviewed late last year, late 2009, about his experiences as a jailer at Sugamo Prison. Is that right?

Million: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. What I'd like to have you do, then, Sam—now, you're where now? Where am I talking to you?

Million: I'm at home, at Crossroads, Mississippi.

DePue: Okay, a long way away from Illinois, and that's why we're doing something a little bit unique, and this is a telephonic interview. But I heard that there was one story that you had not told me when we were together before, so I wanted to give you the opportunity to talk about that experience. (pause)

Million: Well, Mark, this story is about Tōjō, Hideki Tōjō, and an experience that he had with a dentist. In fact, the dentist was Dr. George C. Foster. He was a naval oral surgeon assigned to Sugamo Prison as chief of dental surgery. He made up some dentures for Tōjō, and when they made these dentures, he wrote in the upper part of the dentures, "Remember Pearl Harbor" in Morse Code. And it wasn't till later that Tōjō had discovered this, and he was not very happy about this at all. And the way this went, there was a friend who helped concoct this prank. He was in a Tokyo bar several nights later and told several of his friends about this little joke. He was overheard by several reporters and a news broadcaster, and when this word got out, Dr. Foster (laughs) really got into trouble over this with the Navy brass. He was (laughs) really chewed out about it and was denied a commendation for his work. You know, it's very possible that he could have been court-martialed over this except that it had trickled down throughout the United States what he had done, and the Army officials stated, well, the nation needed a good laugh after World War II.

Of course, I knew about it, being stationed there, and that's the way I found out about it. In fact, I even talked to the dental surgeon, and in a book that I have that was written about Sugamo Prison, I had him autograph this particular picture that's in this book about him working on Tōjō's teeth with an assistant standing by. It was a very, very interesting story, and it, of course, was actual, was true, and I even got to see the dentures when Tōjō would take them out of an evening, (laughs) I saw the dentures sitting on his sink. So it was fact. (laughs)

DePue: What was your opinion about the incident?

Million: Well, I thought it was kind of funny, myself. Tōjō didn't think it was funny, but we thought it was funny at the time, and a little bit of humor there. Well,

of course, you know, we're always ready for a good laugh, and to us that was a good laugh But to Tōjō, who was a very strict military man, I didn't think he was very happy about it, but he had to live with it.

DePue: What was the problem that the American brass had with it?

Million: Well, you know, you're not supposed to do this type of thing. I guess, this wasn't acceptable, and the brass didn't like it. But, you know, they laughed about it, too.

DePue: Well, I was going to say, I imagine in their heart of hearts they thought it was fine, but…

Million: Well, sure, but, you know, militarily, I guess, that was a no-no. But anyway, we got a laugh out of it. (laughs)

DePue: No, it's a great story, and it illustrates a lot of different things. Do you remember much more about the reaction that you got from stateside, from both politicians and the general public on it?

Million: Well, you know, you had to really tell them about this, because people that I'd talked to about having served at Sugamo, they didn't know anything about it unless we had mentioned it to them. They didn't even know that Sugamo Prison ever existed. It seemed like it was a little different than the European courts when they had their trials over in Nuremberg, talked to people about the trials in Tokyo, about the prisoners at Sugamo Prison, and they—I guess they just wanted to forget. They just wanted to forget the war, and so to me, unless you mentioned it, they didn't know anything about it.

DePue: Okay. Are there any other stories that you thought after we had our main interview that you'd want to get recorded here?

Million: No, I think that has pretty well covered the stories that I knew of in being on duty in that particular cell block guarding these prisoners, the major war crimes prisoners, which I think in the book they referred to these as Class A prisoners. So most of the stories that I remember, I think I have given you. I can't think of any more that came up.

DePue: Okay. I want to thank you very much, Sam. I'm definitely pleased that we decided to do an addendum to the main interview because that's a fascinating story and well worth recording about. So.

Million: Oh, I think it is.

DePue: Okay. Thank you again, Sam.

Million: Okay. Thanks, Mark.

DePue: You bet.

Million: I'll be in touch.

(end of interview)