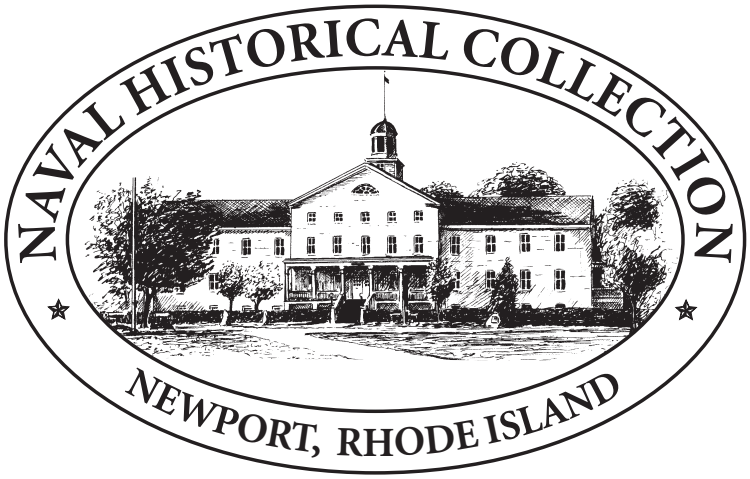
Register of the Wilma S. Miles Papers



Naval War College
Newport, RI

REGISTER OF THE PAPERS OF WILMA S. MILES

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
WILMA S. MILES

Wilma S. Miles was born on March 20, 1904, in Washington, D.C., to Charles and Ettie Sinton Jerman. Her father was from nearby Virginia and her mother from Keokuk, Iowa. Her growing up years were spent in the city where she attended Central High School. In 1921, she enrolled in Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, where she majored in Home Economics and graduated in 1925. That summer she traveled across country with her mother bound for the west coast where she boarded a Dollar Lines passenger ship, SS CLEVELAND, to make the long journey to Hong Kong and her impending marriage to Ensign Milton E. Miles. She was married on September 4, just one day after she arrived, in the city's Union Church.

For the next two years Wilma Miles lived in Hong Kong, traveling on occasion to meet her husband's ship in Canton and to other areas of the country. The Mileses returned to the United States in 1927 where Milton attended the Naval Postgraduate School in Annapolis, Maryland. In 1928 they moved to New York City where they both attended Columbia University. She received a master's degree in Nutrition Publicity and he in engineering in 1929. Their first son, William, was born in March of that year.

Miles next assignment was in the USS SARATOGA and after a summer training session at General Electric in Schnectady, New York, they traveled by ship to the west coast, settling first in Bremerton, then in Long Beach. The couple's second son, Murray, was born there in 1931. In 1932, the Mileses returned to the Washington area where Milton was assigned to the Bureau of Engineering in the Navy Department for a two year period. At that time they built a home in the Maryland suburbs which they maintained for the next fifty years.

From 1934-1936, Wilma and her three sons (her third son, Charles, was born in 1934), lived in San Diego, the home port of USS WICKES, where Milton was assigned as Executive Officer. In 1936, he was named Squadron Material Officer of the USS BLACK HAWK, flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. Anxious to return to China, Wilma and the three boys followed the ship, spending summers in Chefoo and winters in Manila. Wilma traveled extensively throughout the Far East during their three year stay there. She took a two and one half month trip throughout the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China in 1937. In 1939, the Miles family exited China over the newly constructed Burma Road, from Kunming to Lashio. They then traveled overland to India, Afghanistan and Iran before boarding a ship in Greece for the trip back to the United States.

During the war years, while Miles was Head of U.S. Naval Group, China and deputy director of the Sino-American Cooperative Organization, Wilma remained in Washington, D.C., where she worked in nutrition service for the Red Cross. With the war's end in 1945, Miles returned to Washington and worked for a short time at the Office of Naval History organizing his research materials on China. In 1948, he became Commander of Cruiser Division Ten in the Mediterranean area with the rank of rear admiral. Both he and Wilma traveled widely throughout the area, entertaining royalty and heads of state.

From 1950 to 1956, Milton was involved in Latin American affairs as Director of Pan American Affairs and Naval Missions and then as Commandant of the Fifteenth Naval District in Balboa, Canal Zone. The Mileses again traveled extensively throughout the region, visiting most of the Central and South American countries and the Caribbean islands.

In 1958, Miles retired from the Navy and was subsequently promoted to Vice Admiral. He had contracted cancer and died in the Bethesda Naval Hospital on March 25, 1961. Since then, Wilma Miles has remained in the Washington area, where she is involved in community affairs and continues to pursue an interest in travel.

CHRONOLOGY OF NAVAL SERVICE
OF
MILTON E. MILES

1900	Born, Jerome, Arizona, April 6.
1917	Enlisted, U.S. Navy; USS SARATOGA (ACR-2); USS BEALE (DD-40).
1922	Graduated from U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.
1922-1927	Asiatic Fleet assignments in USS PECOS (AO-6), USS HURON (CA-9), USS PREBLE (DD-345), USS BLACK HAWK (AD-9), USS HELENA (GBT 1) and USS PAMPANGA (PG-39).
1927-28	Postgraduate School, Annapolis, Md., Student.
1928-1929	Columbia University, New York, NY, M.S.
1929-1932	USS SARATOGA (CV-3).
1932-1934	Navy Department, Bureau of Engineering, Design & Construction Division.
1934-1936	USS WICKES (D-75), Executive Officer.
1936-1939	USS BLACKHAWK (AD-9), Squadron Material Officer.
1939	USS JOHN D. EDWARDS (DD-216), Commanding Officer.
1939-1942	Interior Control Board, Recorder and Member.
1942-1945	U.S. Naval Group, China, Commander, Sino-American Cooperative Organization, Deputy Director.
1946	Office of Naval History.
1946-1947	USS COLUMBUS (CA-74), Commanding Officer.
1947-1948	Commander Service Force, Atlantic Fleet, Planning Officer.
1948-1949	Cruiser Division Ten, Commander.
1948	Promoted to Rear Admiral, December 13.
1949	Cruiser Division Six, Commander.
1949-1950	Cruiser Division Four, Commander.

1950-1954	Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Pan American Affairs and Naval Missions, Director; Inter-American Defense Board, Senior Naval Delegate.
1954-1956	Fifteenth Naval District, Balboa, Canal Zone, Commandant.
1956-1958	Third Naval District, Commandant; Naval Base, Brooklyn, NY, Commander.
1958	Retired from U.S. Navy, February 1; Promoted to Vice Admiral.
1961	Died, Bethesda Naval Hospital, March 25.

DESCRIPTION OF PAPERS

The Wilma S. Miles papers were presented to the Naval War College in two separate lots: the first accession, mainly correspondence, writings, tourist literature and photographs, was given by Mrs. Miles in 1974, and the second lot, correspondence and tourist literature relating to South America, in 1977. Both accessions were presented through the Naval War College Foundation.

The papers focus on Wilma Miles' life and travels as a Navy wife for over a quarter of a century, with emphasis on the period from 1925-1955. They include materials relating to her life as a young bride in China from 1925-1927 during the era of the warlords and growing Chinese nationalism, and a return three year stay there from 1936-1939, just prior to the outbreak of World War II. Another large segment of the papers focuses on her travels throughout South America when her husband served as Commandant of the Fifteenth Naval District, Balboa, Canal Zone, from 1954-1956.

The collection contains seven boxes, a file cabinet of photographs, and numerous photograph albums and books. It measures 20.5 linear feet and is divided into four series: correspondence, writings, subject files and miscellany.

Series I, personal correspondence, consists of letters to Wilma Miles from her fiancé, Milton Miles, and his letters to her mother, Mrs. Charles Jerman, containing news of China and his experiences as an officer in the Asiatic Fleet from 1922-1927 and again from 1936-1939. Most of the correspondence, however, is from Wilma to her mother during her two separate residences in China. Her letters are lengthy and describe her daily routine, her travels and her impressions of Chinese life. They are important to the researcher for they provide insights into political events, historic figures, and a way of life that has since disappeared.

Series II, writings, contains Wilma Miles' notes and vignettes of life in China during the 1920s and 1930s and an account of the family's exciting journey over the Burma Road in 1939, including a children's version. Her own autobiography, mainly treating with the 1950s, and a biography of her husband through 1939, which she wrote, can also be found here. In addition, a short story about China and a paper on Miles' experiences in China as Head, U.S. Naval Group China are the final components of this series.

Correspondence, itineraries, notes and diaries of the Mileses' travels to South America, Alaska, Europe and the Near East from 1951 to 1960 are contained in Series III, subject files. Besides Miles' experience and fascination with Chinese culture, he also had a strong interest in things Latin American. His assignments as Director of Pan American Affairs and Naval Missions, 1950-1954, and as Commandant of the Fifteenth Naval District, Balboa, Canal Zone, two years later, required that he travel extensively throughout the Southern Hemisphere. Mrs. Miles traveled with him and on her own, and her impressions and experiences are reflected in the materials contained here.

A portion of series IV, miscellany, contains guidebooks, maps and foreign language dictionaries for the Far East, Europe and South America. But the bulk of this series, by far, is composed of individual photographs and photograph albums from the couple's travels all over the world. The Mileses were amateur photographers and both took and developed their own photographs. The collection is extensive and dates from the 1920s through the 1950s. Finally, books treating with South America and the Sino-American Cooperative Organization complete this series.

ARRANGEMENT OF PAPERS

Series I

Correspondence, 1923-1949
(1½ boxes)

Box	Folder	
1	1	*Personal Correspondence*, Letters received from Milton E. Miles, September 3, 1923-June 13, 1924.
	2	Letters received from Milton E. Miles, June 19, 1924-October 28, 1926.
	3	Letters received from Milton E. Miles, 1938.
	4	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, February 18, 1923-September 29, 1925.
	5	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, October 20, 1925-February 24, 1926.
	6	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, March 15, 1926-October 5, 1926.
	7	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, October 15, 1926-May 22, 1927.
	8	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, July 1927-May 11, 1936.
	9	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, August 14, 1936-December 28, 1936.
	10	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, February 13, 1937-June 1937.
	11	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, July 12, 1937-December 26, 1937.
	12	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, Undated, 1938-May 15, 1938.
	13	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, May 22, 1938-December 17, 1938.
	14	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, January 1, 1939-March 1939.
	15	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, March 7, 1939-April 28, 1939.
	16	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, May 3, 1939-May 24, 1939.
	17	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, May 25, 1939-June 13, 1939.
	18	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, September 16, 1939-November 6, 1939.
	19	Letters sent to Mrs. Charles Jerman, November 6, 1949-November 25, 1949.

Box	Folder	
2	1	*Personal Correspondence*, letters sent by Milton E. Miles to Mrs. Charles Jerman, October 3, 1922-July 18, 1938.
	2	Letters sent to Navy Mutual Aid Association, July 18, 1938.
	3	Letters and reports of Milton E. Miles regarding Burma Road trip, 1939.

Series II

Writings, (1925-1973)
(½ box)

Box	Folder	
2	4	*Writings*, Vignettes of Canton, China, 1925-1926.
	5	Notes on Kowloon City, 1926.
	6	Writings on Peiping, 1937.
	7	Typescript Account of Burma Road trip, 1939.
	8	Writings on Java and the Philippines, 1939.
	9	Autobiography of Wilma S. Miles.
	10	Typescript biography of VADM Milton E. Miles, 1900-1939, written by Wilma S. Miles.
	11	Draft typescript biography of VADM Milton E. Miles, 1900-1939, written by Wilma S. Miles.
3	1	*Writings*, "Sein Hsia Mountains, China," short story by Ward Smith, undated.
	2	"Behind the Lines in Asia during World War II, Commodore Milton E. Miles' Mission to China," by Oscar P. Fitzgerald, 1973.

Series III

Subject Files, 1951-1960
(1 box)

Box	Folder	
3	3	*Subject Files*, notes, itineraries and correspondence regarding South American trip, 1951.
	4	Correspondence from Chile and notes regarding South American trip, 1951.
	5	Correspondence from Paraguay, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia and itinerary, 1951.
	6	Correspondence from Curacao, photographs and notes, 1951.
	7	Notes and itinerary regarding trip to Alaska, 1951.
	8	Correspondence, notes, itinerary and photographs of Amazon River trip, 1952.
	9	Itineraries and correspondence regarding trip to Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Central America, 1953.
	10	Itineraries, notes and correspondence regarding European trip, 1953.
	11	Itineraries, correspondence and notes regarding trip to Mexico and Central America, 1953.
	12	Writings on trip to Panama, 1954-1956.
	13	Typescript on assignment and travels in Panama, 1954-1956.
	14	Notes and itinerary of trip to Peru, 1954.
	15	Notes on visit to Peru, 1954.
	16	Correspondence to Milton E. Miles and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Jerman from Peru, 1954.
	17	Notes from trip to Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina, 1955.
	18	Notes, correspondence and itineraries from trip to Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, 1955.
	19	Notes, correspondence and itineraries regarding trip to Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, 1955.
	20	Diary and notes regarding trip to Nicaragua, 1955.

Box	Folder	
3	21	Correspondence, notes and itinerary for trip to Colombia and the Llanos, 1955.
	22	Notes on trip to Morocco, Greece, Italy, Libya and Turkey, 1957.
	23	Correspondence and journals regarding trip to Mexico, 1955; correspondence from Santiago, Chile, 1960.

Series IV

(Miscellany, 1923-1959)
(4 boxes, 66 albums)

Box	Folder	
4	1	*Miscellany*, newspaper clipping, 1923; photo greeting card, 1939.
	2	Tourist literature, guidebooks, maps, and foreign languages dictionaries for Italy and Spain.
5	1	*Miscellany*, guidebooks and maps to the Far East, including India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Thailand, Malaysia, Indochina, the Philippines, China, and the Netherlands East Indies.
6	1	*Miscellany*, maps and guidebooks to Alaska, Canada, Panama, Central America and South America.
7		*Miscellany*, photographs of the Burma Road trip, 1939.
		Miscellany, Photograph Albums

Afghanistan
Bali
Bangkok
Burma Road
Chefoo (2)
Greece and Egypt
Hong Kong
India (2)
Indo-China
Java
Japan
North Africa and Turkey
Peking
Philippines (3)

Box	Folder
7	Shanghai
	Taiwan
	Turkey
	Belgium
	England
	Northern France
	Southern France
	Italy—Florence
	Italy—Rome
	Italy—Venice
	Netherlands
	Scandinavia
	Spain
	Eastern Spain
	Northern Spain
	Southern Spain
	Alaska
	Bolivia
	Canada & Greenland
	Costa Rica
	Cuba
	Mexico (4)
	Tampico
	Alcan
	Argentina
	Brazil (2)
	Chile
	Colombia (2)
	Dominican Republic and Haiti
	Guatemala
	Ecuador
	Honduras
	Nicaragua
	Panama
	Panama East
	Panama West
	Peru (5)
	San Blas Islands

BOOKS

Some History Notes on U.S. Naval Group, China, 1945

Miles, Milton E., VADM, *The Navy Launched a Dragon* (2 vols.)

Stratton, Roy Olin. *Saco, The Rice Paddy Navy*, Pleasantville, NY: C.S. Palmer Publishing Co., 1950.

Kirchoff, Herbert. *Peru*. Buenos Aires, 1951.

Gerstmann, Robert M. *Colombia*. Paris: N.D.

Góngora, Amelia (ed.) *Venezuela*. Caracas: Ministry of Development. N.D.

Documentos del Almirante Brown. Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1958.

Agostini, Alberto M.de. *Nahuel-Huapi*. Buenos Aires: 1949.

_____. *El Cerro Lanin y Sus Lagos*. Buenos Aires: 1949.

Recuerdos de Santiago de Cuba. Photos and momentos.

Other Research Sources

Published works:

Cherpak, Evelyn M. "Remembering Days in Old China: A Navy Bride Recalls Life on the Asiatic Station in the 1920s." *The American Neptune* (Summer 1984), 179-185.

Daniel, Hawthorne. *A Different Kind of War*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967.

Archives

Record Group 34, Records of the U.S. Naval Group, China, 1942-1947, 44 cubic feet. The Dudley Knox Center for Naval History, Navy Department, Operational Archives, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC.