

1LT Albert F. Miller, Jr.

A CALL TO ARMS

Many American males, particularly those born in the early years of the 20th century, faced the greatest challenge of their young lives—survival in a world war. One of these, Albert F. Miller, Jr., with schooling completed and a lieutenant's commission in the U.S. Army recorded, was such an example. Arriving at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, a staging and training center for the U. S. Army, Lt. Miller boarded a troop ship with thousands of other soldiers throughout World War II bound for Europe and North Africa.

ITALIAN CAMPAIGN WITH SURRENDER AND CAPTURE

Having survived the landing operations and multiple ongoing conflicts, LT Miller next found himself in an inland Italian town. On 12 May 1944, during the intense battle of Santa Maria Infante (Italy), 2LT Albert F. Miller Jr. was captured along with infantrymen of company F, 2nd Battalion, 351st Infantry while serving as a forward observer during the battle. He was actually a field artillery officer serving in the 913th Field Artillery Battalion. The 913th operated towed 105mm howitzers in the 88th Infantry Division.

The following account was taken from the American Forces in Action Series, published by the Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, DC:

Capture of Company F (12 May 1944)

All throughout the day of the 12th, Company F at the culvert was in a state of siege. From all sides mortar, artillery, and machine gun fire fell near the group dug in around the culvert. Air bursts splattered the area. A mortar, tucked away in a haystack on the eastern slope of Hill 126, lobbed shells near the culvert. From Santa Maria and the S-ridge, machine guns kept up harassing fire on Company F; from the rear along the Minturno-Santa Maria Road, other automatic weapons were trained on our embattled troops; and German snipers in the creek bed took pot shots whenever a head poked above a fox hole or the slightest movement was detected around the culvert. The heaviest fire came from Tame. Machine gunners and snipers in the hamlet, less than 200 yards away, fired at the culvert and the half-circle of fox holes around it. The men of Company F fired back, but their force was small and their ammunition stocks dwindling. During the afternoon,

enemy tanks added to Company F's troubles. They came along the Spigno road to Tame, from which they harassed Company F with point-blank fire. Our artillery finally dispersed them, knockout out two.

Communications between Company F and the 2d Battalion was maintained by Capt. Edward J. Church, commanding Company H, who operated an SCR 300 on Hill 130, 800 yards west to the Minturno-Santa Maria Road. But after dawn on 12 May, only four radio messages were received from Company F. Since morning the Company's situation had seriously deteriorated. It was hemmed in on all sides and pressed into a tiny pocket. Food and ammunition were running low, and litter bearers were sorely needed to evacuate the wounded. If the feeble batteries of the company's SCR 300 went out, the sole means of communication with the battalion would be cut off.

During the last conversation at 2015, Captain Church relayed an order from Major Edwin L. Shull, acting battalion commander, which directed Captain Nelson to withdraw the company under cover of darkness to the assembly area behind Cemetery Ridge. When he heard the order, Captain Nelson expressed his doubts that it could be carried out, and reiterated his company's plight. "Someone had better do something. I have casualties. I need supplies." A moment later, Company F tried to get through again, but what came over the air was unintelligible. Men who were with Company F at the time stated later that Captain Nelson had declared he would bring Company F back to Cemetery Ridge that night.

If that was his intention, the enemy never allowed him to carry it out. After sunset, six Germans came across the Tame-Santa Maria Road, a few yards southeast of the inverted V-bend, calling, "Kamerad". As the men of Company F scrambled from fox holes and the culvert to capture them, other Germans closed in from all sides. Some rushed from the draw east of Hill 126, others from the Y-Junction across the slope on the left-hand side of the road; most of them came straight down the road from Tame around the inverted V-bend. As the Germans spilled out of their hiding places and streamed down on Company F, one of our machine gunners let loose a short, harmless burst before an officer ordered him to cease firing. Company F and half a platoon from Company H surrendered without further struggle. The only ones to escape were the five enlisted men who played dead in their fox holes and were picked up by the 3d Battalion on the morning of 14 May. The enemy's bag of prisoners included S-2, four officers and about 60 enlisted men from Company F, a Cannon Company Liaison Officer, and one officer and approximately twenty

men from Company H. The capture was as swift as it was unexpected: it took exactly 5 minutes.

Online Source:

<https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/smallunit/smallunit-smi.htm/>

HEADED NORTH

Loaded next into camped, securely locked boxcars for delivery to transient POW camps, the men often endured cramped conditions and limited supplies of water and food with few rest stops. At some point, enlisted men were separated from the officers and loaded onto alternate boxcars.

OFLAG 64

Eventually their train crossed into Poland. Upon their arrival at Oflag 64, a specifically redesignated camp for American Ground Force Officers, the men were marched from the train station and through the town of Szubin to the front gate. The POWs (now known as Kriegies) were then photographed for ID and vetted as to their real identity. At some point Miller was assigned to Barracks 7B. Fellow POWs listed in his diary for Cubicle 12 were: 1LT Thomas H. Wingate (later his long-march buddy), 1LT James K. Glendinning, 2LT Oren Salmons, 1LT Edward Wisniewski, 2LT James M. Gillespie, 1LT Thompson and LT Anderson.

Camaraderie emerged as a positive result of their confinement in the cubicle as each one had a designated bunk which served as a place for rest and space for their private items like letters and clothes. In addition, they ate together in a dining hall located in the largest building called the White House. Meals were produced in a central kitchen with Red Cross Boxes supplying much needed nutrition. The need for more food became a much-discussed subject as many lost body weight and physical strength during their incarceration; most would remember the pains of hunger long after they were repatriated.

For morale purposes, games and sports were organized along with a Kriegy college which offered a plethora of classes. The theatre group provided what many thought to be the most positive feature of their time there. To keep in touch with the outside world, radios called "birds" were hidden throughout the camp and each night "runners" would deliver BBC news to each barracks. A locally written and printed newspaper called THE ITEM also kept the Kriegies updated on camp news and events. Tunnel building and escape planning continued to be constant focuses for many who were known as risk takers.

Many campers simply lived one day at a time and thought about home and the direction their lives would take after the war when they returned to civilian life.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 1945 - THE LONG MARCH

Rumors about the Russian armies and their nearness to sections of Poland which included their camp prompted Oberst Schneider, the camp Kommandant, to prepare for a “move out”. Limited sleep became a common malady, then, as the Kriegies prepared both their minds and bodies for this forced march into Germany.

After much discussion 86 men who needed additional medical attention were left in the care of Col. Drury. The other 1,471 officers and enlisted men prepared for the 345-mile trip.

About 8:30 the next morning they were told to form up in the Appell (roll call) area. Schneider gave a short speech about his role as a good leader while his captives stamped their cold feet, mentally preparing themselves for their uncertain future. A loaf of bread was passed out to men in the first columns to bolster their food supplies (along with the Red Cross box each received the day before), but this ran out by the third platoon: 150 loaves were insufficient to feed 1,500 men!

Outside the gate they joined a miserable parade of refugees—some in horse-drawn wagons, piled high with family members both young and old—too weak or sick to walk in below zero-degree weather. Others carried their belongings in backpacks or simply in their arms while trying to keep their balance on the icy roads.

The Oflag 64 columns of officers and men began this trek in uniformity, but after the first hours, they stretched out for nearly a mile. Some men like Miller and Wingate had built a sled to pull their gear but most were abandoned as they became too heavy to navigate through the snowy trenches; theirs was abandoned by 1 February.

By 28 January, Wingate’s fingers and feet developed frostbite—a common curse among many marchers, severe cases needing amputation. Fortunately, savvy Kriegies learned to trade for food and other useful items. Among them, Miller traded cigarettes (often found in Red Cross parcels) for 10 loaves of bread with civilians to feed himself, Wingate and another POW named Alexander.

LT. Wingate recalled arduous details about the march at a later date:

“We had to walk through knee-deep snow. That’s where I almost gave up. I think if I hadn’t had a Yankee buddy, I might have quit. We were

walking, it had been....We walked through a pine forest and it was snowing. Snow was on the ground about a foot deep and as we got out, when we got out of the forest, it was blowing. The snow was blowing and still coming down, and over a foot deep. And I was tired and I was going to quit. And we operated a kind of buddy system on this march. And my buddy was a fellow named Miller, a Yankee. And I told him I was going to, I said, 'I just can't take it anymore. I'm just going to lie down here and quit'. So, he gave me a lecture and called me a 'weak rebel' and stuff like that. So he made me mad enough to walk on. And we got through that night and that was the closest I came to death. I think, really."

LT Wingate always credited LT Miller with saving his life.

A MEMORABLE MOMENT

On 20 February 1945, LT Miller arrived at Stalag IIIA at Luckenwalde, Germany. On April 1, 1945 at Luckenwalde, LT Miller, CPT Piddington and LT Frodsham presented LT Wingate with a signed birthday card along with a meal and a birthday gift.

HOME IS ONLY A DATE AWAY

- The march began on Sunday, 21 January 1945.
- Miller was sent with a sick group from the long march to Stalag III A at Luckenwalde, Germany that arrived on 20 Feb 1945.
- The Oflag 64 POW Database confirms that Miller departed from Luckenwalde.
- Miller escaped along with other Americans from the Russians controlling Stalag III A at Luckenwalde to the American lines west of the Elbe River sometime in early May 1945.

AU REVOIR

LT Miller survived the war but his whereabouts remain a mystery. It is possible that LT Miller had Jewish heritage to hide from the Germans. LT Wingate mentions this once in post-war years.

LT Albert Miller had two addresses listed, one in California (as listed in the official Army records) and another in New York City (presumably near his father's hotel).

Frodsham reported seeing Miller going on leave from a RAMP (Recovered Allied Military Personnel, Europe) location called “Twenty Grand” towards Paris, France.

FINAL THOUGHTS

People who share a common experience often promise to stay in touch. This rarely happens in real life in spite of the heartfelt sincerity with which this is said. LT Albert F. Miller, Jr. had two addresses, one in California (as listed in official US Army records), and another in New York City, presumably near his father’s hotel.

LT Frodsham recalled LT Miller’s offer for a nice hotel stay at the famed Warwick Hotel in New York City free of charge. LT Miller informed LT Frodsham to drop in at the Warwick Hotel and mention LT Miller by name with the request for a free stay. LT Frodsham did as LT Miller suggested upon return to the United States. LT Frodsham enjoyed an excellent stay free of charge. LT Miller’s father was the general manager of the Warwick Hotel.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writers,
David Little and Ann C. Rogers