

CPT Paul C. Miller

1920 – 2001

EARLY LIFE

Paul Miller's young life reflects some unusual aspects as he was born to American-born missionary parents on 5 September 1920 in Canton, China. He grew up with his mother (father died in 1927), two brothers and one sister in Lincoln Nebraska, half-a-world away from their beginnings. World War II had a profound effect on most families across America and before war's end, members of the Miller family would become fully engaged as well.

Mother worked at the 54th Sub-Depot, Lincoln Army Air Field; Bill, the oldest, was a Captain in the 13th Air Depot in the Pacific; Mary graduated from WAAC OCS Class Number 3, and escorted WAACs to every war zone; I was in the infantry, and Bob, the youngest brother was a Tail Gunner on B-24 Bombers of the 466th Bomb Squadron, 96th Wing in England. I always felt that Bob had the most hazardous job. I always felt more secure with my feet or my belly on mother earth. At war's end, there would be one Major, two Captains and a Staff Sergeant in the Miller family.

MILITARY SERVICE

Paul Miller's military career was initiated when he joined the Nebraska National Guard at the age of 16 (passing for 18) in 1937. As a Ceremonies Officer and the Assistant Bugler of I Company, 134th Infantry, 35th Division, Nebraska National Guard, he learned from First Sergeant Frank E. Conner that *"the leader is always the last in the mess line, after assuring that security is posted and the men are all cared for. Make your men as comfortable as possible in the field, because in the infantry, you don't have to practice being miserable. It comes quite naturally."*

These truths would serve Miller throughout his careers, both military and civilian. Progressing to Browning Rifleman, then Corporal Rifle Squad Leader, Miller and other enlistees learned and practiced the arts of scouting, patrolling, and the secrets of survival. On 28 December 1940 under the provisions of Executive Order 8605, his unit was ordered into Federal Service and he was promoted to Rifle Platoon Sergeant. Stationed next with the 35th Division at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, he became the Commander of the Guard and Company Bayonet Instructor, followed in June 1941 by his assignment as the Platoon Sergeant, the Commander of the newly authorized Weapons Platoon.

On 7 December 1941, Miller heard and recognized the Regimental Bugler's "Call To Arms" which precipitated the move to Fort Ord, California, where weekends were spent in field tents, later to coastal watch duty, then at the Presidio, San Francisco, guarding the Embarcadero. Promoted to Staff Sergeant on 20 April 1942, Miller was selected to attend the Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and received his commission as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry on 25 August. An unusual issue occurred during the course: since Miller's American-born parents were missionaries in China, family loyalty was questioned because of his birth there. Proving citizenship through his birth certificate and the total loyalty of family members (a registered letter from the Department of State, signed by Cordell Hull), he proceeded to New York, boarded the *Queen Elizabeth* on 31 August and arrived in England on 5 September 1942, his 22nd birthday. Billeted in Whittington Barracks as part of the soon-to-be American Replacement Depot, the 34th Infantry Division was soon on its way to Northern Ireland, where Miller was assigned as Leader of the Weapons Platoon of L Company, 133rd Infantry. Next stop after transport to England: Africa.

Elements of the Division took part in the Invasion of Africa on 8 November. The 133rd Infantry sailed from Liverpool, England, on Christmas day 1942 aboard the *Empress of Australia*. Safely across the Atlantic, however, their ship was rammed by another transport on 2 January 1943, 30 miles from Oran, Algeria, and was towed via tugboat to the Oran harbor, with all 4,200 troops safely aboard. Their first duty was to safeguard the port of Oran, until gear and weapons were replaced, followed by a move into an old French Army facility above the city where Miller remembers taking part in an impressive retreat ceremony.

Each evening an American unit and a French unit would march from their barracks to the city square and jointly go through the ceremony of lowering the French and American flags, with the band playing the "Marseilles" and the "Star Spangled Banner". One evening, as we were marching toward the square, a drunken American soldier stood on the side of the street making derogatory remarks and did not salute the passing colors. Around him were crowds of French and Arab civilians saluting with tears in their eyes. I could not understand how a soldier could be so unfeeling in such circumstances.

Rejoining their Division after trekking 900 miles through snow and sleet by jeep and truck, they arrived in Tunisia the end of January 1943 and were initially camped around Maknassy then Hadjeb el Aioun. Here LT Miller experienced his first engagement with Axis forces. This would be repeated many times as his unit moved into position near Kef el Ahmar between 14-17 February 1943.

Moving to a bivouac area along the Mediterranean Sea, they trained half-a-day and swam half-a-day for medicinal as well as for operational purposes. Miller next volunteered for the 3rd Infantry Division—half of his platoon joining

him—a sure sign of respect reflecting Miller’s leadership abilities. As a unit, they were assigned to C Company, 30th infantry on 15 June 1943. Later Miller and his men “*left the lines to train for the amphibious assault on Anzio*” landings in the vicinity of Licata, Sicily. Headed initially for the wrong beach, they corrected course and proceeded to a secondary area and secured the silent beachhead. Finding that 50% of the men were seasick from a violent storm they had encountered, Miller “*fed the troops some good Italian bread, cheese and a wee ration of red wine which cured the seasickness. The Apostle’s admonition to ‘use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake’ was good advice.*”

Miller had been promoted to 1LT on 12 May 1943 and from the middle of July through early August, he was involved in constant engagements with the enemy and took command of C Company, 30th Infantry on 10 August. The 3rd Division moved to the vicinity of Trapani and Marsala on the coast of Sicily for R&R and here Miller shared the story of the “eight passes” which ensured that C company would stay intact as a unit—no “*eight ball*” allowed.

On 18 September 1943, the 30th Infantry landed at the Salerno Beachhead nine days after the initial landing, relieving the 36th Division. Twenty-one days later they had cleared the area south of the Volturno River north of Naples. With tentative permission from the chain of command to “get behind the lines to the river” Miller and 15 of his best men approached a large villa and were invited to share a meal with the family. Declining with a raincheck, the patrol arrived at the river, collected the much-needed information and returned to the farmer’s villa for a refreshing meal. They had discovered a firefight about 500 yards left (a 3rd Division patrol was under attack) but Miller explained that their specific mission must take priority. The entire battalion followed this route the next day and took positions overlooking the highway along the river. Several days later, they crossed the Volturno River at an alternate location and secured the high ground north of the river.

On 6 November the 3rd Division was invested in a desperate battle on Mounts Lungo, Rotundo and Cannavinelle. When relieved by the 36th Division on 17 November 1943, C Company had been fighting for 59 days with 85 men still reporting for duty. After some rest, they continued training for amphibious landings at Anzio, 25 miles south of Rome. On December 26, 1LT Paul Miller of C Company and 1LT Bob Fechtman of A Company received their Captain’s bars from Lieutenant General Mark Clark, 5th Army Commander and Major General Lucian Truscott, Jr., 3rd Division Commander.

The following quoted words of General Truscott were made after a dry-run of the Anzio landing: “*There are two German divisions on the beach. 13 German divisions on the right and the whole German army on the left. We are going in, and we are going to take that beach, and we are going to hold that beach, or we are going to leave the remains of the best damn division in the U.S. Army thereon!*” The 3rd Division took and held the beach at Anzio. C Company encountered no firefight as they crossed the beach, but A Company paid a high price for this beach real estate.

CAPTURED

On 1 February, 1944, the 1st Battalion, with C Company and A Company abreast, attacked toward Cisterna. Two days before, the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions were virtually destroyed in an attack toward Cisterna. Two days later, we also were severely battered. Several of my men were captured with me. Sgt Charles P. Drolla, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross at San Fratello, was severely wounded, and was eventually repatriated before the end of the war. Private First Class Knappenberger, a BAR man with C Company, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on that day.

Miller and other captives were taken to a “collection station where mortar fragment was removed from my shin, then moved to a hospital in Rome in full view of the Vatican”. Sharing a room with a Ranger Sergeant and several wounded Germans, Miller and the Ranger admired the view, but in reality, were looking for possible escape routes. Unfortunately, they were moved that day to another hospital behind barbed wire fencing and two days later to one near Perugia. The next morning, they were moved again to a larger hospital in Florence where Miller talked to a wounded German Sergeant from the 1st Parachute Division. When he replied to a question from Miller and was reprimanded, the Sergeant replied, “I have taken part in every parachute operation of this war, been wounded five times, and when I get out of the hospital I am going to the Eastern Front. What else can they do to me?”

Moved for the fifth time by truck on 12 February, they were placed in a small prison camp on the Po River near Mantua, Italy. While stopping outside of town, local Italians passed bread, cheese and wine into the truck. This caused the German Oberst to berate those who were “feeding the Americans responsible for killing their people and destroying their towns” and placed guards around the truck. As he moved away, the guards continued to toss “groceries” from the Italians into their truck. A large, open warehouse served as quarters for officers Miller and another American Captain, four British officers, two Italians, and two Serbs. A large potbellied stove served as a gathering place and by using a combination of three languages, stories were shared; the best one concerned the fact that the Italian Captain had captured the British Infantry Captain in Libya. Now, they shared the same POW camp.

A POW camp at Moosburg, Germany, was their next destination on 15 March. They traveled by night through the Brenner Pass, finding it still operational in spite of Allied bombers. The next morning, they noted that the rail yards near Innsbruck had also been hit by repeated bombings. Upon arrival at the camp, the Italians were separated from Miller’s group. Later when he received his Red Cross parcel, Miller found Captain Nicolini and shared its contents with him in thanks for his Italian family’s donated food supplies in the previous camp. These exchanges of kindness may have saved Miller’s life as

Nicolini found him unconscious several days later with a high fever—he was suffering from malaria.

ARRIVAL AT OFLAG 64

After recovering, Miller found himself enroute to Offizierslager (Oflag 64) in Altburgund, Poland. He arrived as Colonel Drake was directing plans for Oflag 64's first anniversary to be held on 6 June, 1944.

Imagine the consternation within the German command when the planned celebration of our anniversary and the D-Day invasion of France happened on the same day. The Gestapo descended upon us, certain the we had advance information as to the date of D-Day. The prisoners and the premises were thoroughly searched but of course nothing was found to support their fears.

One afternoon later, a suspicious, surprise barracks search was held and when the Kriegies returned to their billets, they discovered that clothes left in their rooms had been confiscated.

Word passed quickly to wear all clothing when being called out for inspection or Appell. Later in the war when the Ardennes Counter Offensive took place, we realized that those confiscated uniforms went to clothe the Germans who were sent behind the lines to pose as American troops and disrupt movements and infiltrate organizations.

Kriegies were always hunting for ways to alter their routine and provide entertainment for themselves and others; Miller wrote about one version which occurred at night when they were kept inside. Doors were securely locked and German guards patrolled the outsides, so to break the boredom and confuse the guards, the Kriegies played war games against the opposite section which was separated by the latrine and wash room. Sound effects including shouts of “Geronimo” and tank-track-clank noises provided constant irritants for the guards and laughter for others so far from home.

Hunger was on everyone's menu, so when Miller was appointed “short order cook” in charge of baking and cooking, he used food parcels' contents like flour or other ingredients to upgrade fellow Kriegies' usual dining fare.

The real test of a man came when he received a package from home. For some unknown reason, the Red Cross believed that we had all the food items we could eat, and that what we really needed was warm clothes and some delightful, gourmet dessert snacks. As a result, we received gloves, scarves, and dried banana slices. My mother finally listened to me and for Christmas I received a package with dates, some potted ham, tea, cheese and bouillon cubes, a pipe and tobacco, a cribbage board and playing cards.

Mrs. Miller was continually supportive of her service-related children through her letters and packages, particularly towards her son who was in the hands and the camps of the enemy. She wrote often with news and inquiries about his requests for food items, books, etc. and always closed with expressions like "May God bless and keep you".

Paul's responses were equally affectionate toward family members and were made through post cards like the ones below:

21 April '44 [postmarked 3 May 1944]

Dear Mom!

Arrived permanent camp---Use following address in future

Paul C. Miller, Capt POW in Germany

POW number 3139 Oflag 64

Germany via N.Y.C., N.Y.

I love you heaps! Your Son

Paul's mother received the card on 6 June 1944.

Jan 11 '45

Dear Mom,

I dreamed I was home last nite. Perhaps it is a good sign. But then they talk about food here quite some. I've picked up some good recipes from North, South, East, West plus a few of my own. May your next birthday be happier. Love, P.C.

THE ROAD HOME RUSSIAN STYLE

In January, 1945, the Russians were closing in on the area when Miller was in the Oflag 64 hospital with a recurrence of malaria. The German doctor, conducting rounds, made the determination of "laufen" (walk) or "kann nicht laufen" (cannot walk). It was decided that he was unable to make the trip for even though his fever had broken, he was still very weak. Miller remembered seeing a long column of men walking out of the camp toward Hammelburg leaving almost 90 men in the hospital. The camp was without electricity which meant that no water was available. Fortunately, two Lieutenants, Teal and Patterson, had returned to camp and joined Miller in his efforts to pull a water wagon into town. There they found a well with a pump, filled it half full, and were navigating it toward camp when they encountered several trigger-happy Russian soldiers. The Kriegies immediately pointed to the American flag on their shoulders and shouted "American Prisoners of War." When this received no response, they shouted "Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin." This received a

positive response. Declining their offer of a trip to Moscow, the three Kriegies returned to camp with the much-needed water.

On 22 January the Russians entered the camp, surveyed the conditions and butchered a steer to feed those allies left in the camp. Miller became ill, but was well enough several days later to begin the trip East. Enroute to Warsaw, they rode in lend lease U.S. Army 2 ½ ton trucks. Each night was spent in a different village and the Americans were instructed to find their own billets among the village population. One night as Miller was ascending the stairs of an apartment house, three Russian Officers were descending and became suspicious. He explained his status as a freed American POW making his way to Warsaw when a Polish woman who spoke English appeared and explained the situation. Satisfied, the officers left. She ushered Miller into her apartment, fed him tea, and stated that she had not seen her Polish Officer husband since the German invasion. He reciprocated with a can of powdered milk for her three young children, slept for several hours in a feather bed, but became ill again and returned to the truck.

Miller remembers the miles traveled and the formidable numbers of Russian soldiers advancing West, many tribes represented from huge Mongols to small Orientals. Various forms of transportation were being used: dogs, donkeys, oxen, even animals resembling llamas and all pulling sleds or wagons or being used as pack animals. He also noted groups of German prisoners being herded East—all walking through the snow barefooted as the Russian guards had their captives' boots slung over their shoulders.

Warsaw appeared to have been leveled by the Germans in retaliation against the "Home Army". Taken to a collection point in a town east of Warsaw, named Rembertov, they were billeted in a large building with Americans on the top floor. Lower floors contained the sad remnants of survivors whose lives were severely altered, and Miller wondered if these poor souls would ever experience *"a normal, happy life after experiencing the fear, cruelty, devastation and death in the many forms they had observed."*

Shortly after their arrival, they learned that an American base was located in Rumania, present-day Romania, and decided to find it. Walking to Rembertov, they sold any valuable items they had for Zlotys (Polish currency) and some non-perishable food. Unfortunately, Miller became ill again, felt his continued poor health would slow the others, and encouraged them to leave without him. They finally agreed and departed. The following statement from Miller's writing was truly phenomenal:

About three years later, Patterson came to my office in the Pentagon and reported that they had found the air base and his brother was one of the pilots. They were royally treated for one week then flown to Washington, D.C. for a personal interview with General Marshall, as they were the first of the prisoners of war to return from Germany.

Departing Warsaw, Miller and the other Americans were placed in boxcars which contained a raised platform supported by huge logs. Miller found this arrangement made sleeping a confining and dangerous situation, so he was careful when choosing a place to bed down for the night.

In Odessa, they were housed in a compound within the city and told not to venture outside the walls as anyone caught would be thrown in jail. Departing Warsaw on 7 March 1945, the group was reduced by three men. No word of their fate was learned.

Their liberty ship sailed out of the Black Sea and anchored overnight in the Bosphorus. The next day was spent sailing through the Sea of Marmara, the Dardanelles, and past the Gallipoli Peninsula. Passing through the Aegean and the Mediterranean to Egypt, the boat was anchored and they spent several days on the naval base at Port Said where they were “*deloused, bathed, given fresh uniforms and fed.*”

Arriving next in Naples, Italy, they completed physical exams and turned their thoughts toward home. Departing Naples on 29 March, the ship sailed into Boston Harbor on 9 April 1945, welcomed home by bands and waving Americans. Awaiting a bus to take him to Camp Miles Standish, Miller heard that President Roosevelt had died. He reflected later that “*Roosevelt had, in his own handwriting, outlined his desired plans for his funeral in the event that he should die while in office. This would be the last time a President would be buried without any advance plan being known.*”

On 14 April 1945, Prisoners of War and other returnees headed for destinations to the West boarded a special train and were dropped off at one of the twenty-one military posts close to the train’s route. Miller was among the last group, arriving at Camp Beale, near Sacramento, California, where he received leave and assignment orders. He also received 60 days delay enroute to the Redistribution Center at Santa Barbara, California. Catching a ride to Berkeley with an American Master Sergeant Japanese POW returnee from Bilibid prison in Manila, Miller was grateful that he had been a POW of the Germans and not the Japanese!

Home at last, he embraced his mother and relived some of his experiences while inquiring about those of his still-serving siblings. Two weeks later, he left for Denver to see Marie Benzel and her sister who shared an apartment. This allowed Paul and Marie to spend quality time together and led to a serious relationship which flourished when they became engaged on 28 May 1945, on the University of Nebraska campus.

Deciding to remain in the Army, Miller reported to the Redistribution Center in Santa Barbara, California for nine days and received orders for Fort Ord, California. On arrival he was assigned to D Company of the 4th Replacement Regiment. In October, 1945 he took leave to spend time with his mother who had decided to return to Lincoln. In December he had orders to the Military District of Washington, Washington, D.C. Applying for and receiving 10 days

leave, he returned to Lincoln to spend more time with his mother and Marie. On the day before he left for Washington, Marie returned the ring.

Miller arrived in D.C. on 4 January 1946 and was assigned to A Company, 703rd Military Police Battalion at Fort Myer, Virginia, the Post of the Chief of Staff of the Army. The battalion also provided the Honor Guard for formal ceremonies in the Washington area. His next assignment was Provost Marshall's School at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. These assignments were to serve as insightful previews for his retirement career. His life was to change in another way as he returned to D.C., met Marie at Union Station, put the engagement ring on her finger a second time and together, they set a wedding date for 30 March 1946 to be held at Fort Myer. Miller continued to serve in the Korean War and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel on 21 October 1960 after a successful and memorable U.S. Army career. His new position, following his U.S. Army commitment, was unique as well, for he became Chief of Ceremonies and Special Events of the Military District of Washington, D.C.

CIVILIAN COMMITMENTS

Miller's retirement took place in the Oval Office with President Reagan and when asked personally to accept the civilian assignment as Chief of Ceremonies and Special Events he accepted. Miller directed ceremonies for every U.S. President from Truman through Reagan. By 1985 these exceeded 8,500, including official and state funerals, presidential inaugural events, and the arrival ceremonies for heads of state and government. He assisted in the planning and supervision of the presidential funerals of John F. Kennedy, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Harry S. Truman, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

One of Miller's memories about the presidential "likes and dislikes" concerns the conduct of ceremonies: Eisenhower's heralded trumpets, Reagan's colorful flags, and Carter's discomfort in receiving lines. Accepting tributes from around the world for his military and civilian services, Miller fully retired in 1986. An insightful reflection about any soldier's death was included in his office notes:

"The little soldier, with six body-bearers and a seven-or-eight-member firing party deserved my equal respect and attention" stated the man who had been in the presence of Presidents and Royalty.

Self-imposed service obligations continued during his Deaconship and Sunday School affiliations through his membership at the Haven Baptist Church and Downtown Baptist Church, both in Alexandria, and his presidency of Covenant Village, a Pennsylvania Christian Retreat Center serving congregations and inner-city children from the Washington area.

Fifteen years later on 29 September 2001 he would be the receiver of one last ceremony, his burial with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery with family, friends, and many well-known colleagues in attendance. Immediate family members included his wife, the former Marie Benzel; four

children, Kathy Hampton, David Miller, Ann Hays and Lexie Miller; a brother, William Charles; a sister, Mary Miller; and four grandchildren.

ACADEMICS, AWARDS, AND DECORATIONS

After establishing a permanent home in the Washington D.C. area during the 1950's and commensurate with his military and ceremonial service commitments, LTC Miller attended George Washington University and the Universities of Maryland and Nebraska.

His military decorations include the Silver Star; Bronze Star, OLC, V device; Purple Heart, OLC; Combat Infantry Badge; Secretary of Defense Medal for Meritorious Civilian Service; Army Exceptional Civilian Service Award; and the DA Meritorious Civilian Service Award (4th Award).

FINAL THOUGHTS

When CPT Miller arrived at Oflag 64, he was given a note signed by COL Drake, Senior American Officer and the Commander of the 168th Infantry at Faïd and the Kasserine Pass in Africa. Years later when he was writing *Reflections* as a part of "Chapter Two" which contained significant insights and information about his Army experiences, he included the following:

It is a fact that prisoners of war have offered their best in the service of their country. The only difference between them and those who so gallantly died in so doing is that the enemy did not choose to kill them when they were overpowered.

If you are close enough to the enemy to be captured, you are close enough to be shot or bayoneted.

Let no man think there is a stigma attached to having been honorably captured in battle. Only the fighting man gets close enough to the enemy for that to happen. That he is not listed with the slain is due to the infinite care of providence.

Be proud that you carried yourselves as men in battle and adversity. You will be enriched thereby.

Let us, anew, pledge ourselves, that we may return to our place in the American life better fitted to carry on the duty assigned to us and none the worse for the inevitable role we have carried for so long.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers