

A Story of Sacrifice

by

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This being the 50th anniversary of my father's involvement in World War II has caused me to reflect on it more than ever before. The recent television coverage of that war has caused me to think more about what really happened.

It finally dawned on me that the years are taking their toll on my father's comrades, thus if I could find anything out, it must be done now! So I began to investigate.

My mother, Nobia Miller, received a Western Union telegram on January 5, 1945. I was seven years old, and I will always remember that awful day! The telegram stated that Private Robert G. "Bob" Miller had been missing in action since December 21, 1944. Mother didn't hear a single word from anyone about Bob until August of 1945 at which time she was informed by our government that he had been killed in action on December 18, 1944 near Radscheid, Germany.

The time lapse puzzled the entire Miller family. For all of these 50 years, we have wanted to know the details of what happened. Finally, I have found them! So here is the story.

Robert G. "Bob" Miller was known in IZARD County in the late 1930's and early 1940's as a rising political "star". He had served two terms as IZARD County Treasurer and was finishing his second term as IZARD County Circuit Clerk when he entered the U.S. Army after volunteering at the local draft board in

Melbourne, Arkansas. He entered the U.S. Army in April of 1944 and was sent to Camp Robinson in North Little Rock, AR for his basic training as an infantryman. He was there until late summer. He received a ten-day furlough to spend time at home before traveling by troop train to Fort George in Meade, Maryland.

He left Little Rock at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, August 14th and arrived at 5:30 a.m. on Tuesday, August 15th. While there he visited Washington D.C. and sent us all postcards showing the historic places. He left Fort George by train on Wednesday, August 30th for Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and arrived about 10:00 a.m. on August 31st.

At Camp Atterbury, my father became a part of the 106th Infantry Division. While he was there, Mother and I went by train to visit him. We stayed at a boarding house out of town. I remember it very well. It was only for a few days, but the time was so precious! This was in September of 1944. He left Camp Atterbury on October 8th or 9th and traveled either by train or truck. It appears to have been more likely by truck. He was already assigned to Weapons Platoon or Fourth Platoon, Company G, 423rd Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 106th Infantry Division. He arrived at Camp Myles Standish on October 10th and was there until October 16th. They boarded a ferry at Hoboken, New Jersey and arrived at Pier 94 on 47th Street in New York City. They were greeted there by the American Red Cross, and were treated to doughnuts, coffee, and candy bars as a band played music for them at the dock. They then boarded the Queen Elizabeth and spent the

night at the dock as they prepared to sail. They saw the Statue of Liberty as they sailed out on the Hudson River to the Atlantic Ocean on October 17th.

On the voyage across, the soldiers alternated shifts with twelve hours on deck and twelve hours in the staterooms below which were furnished with bunkbeds. Baths were taken in salt water which did not lather well. Paperback books were passed out for those who wanted to read. Dad wrote us that he "fed the fish" only once and did not get seasick again. They were fed two meals per day, and greasy mutton stew was the main course. A blimp followed them out to sea for two days, and then they were all alone.

Dad wrote Mother practically every day from the time he was at Camp Robinson in North Little Rock, until it became impossible to send out mail. Very often, he would also write each of us three children. Mother and Dad worked out a code so that he could send her messages indicating his location. She could pick the first letter of each paragraph and it would spell the name of the town that he was in at that particular time. I have every letter that he wrote. One of his letters written in early November, 1944, codes out the word "Toddington".

The ship docked on October 22, 1944 at Firth of Clyde, Scotland. Dad got off the Queen Elizabeth and boarded a train on October 24, 1944. The Red Cross again passed out doughnuts and coffee. The train made two stops enroute to Toddington, England where they arrived on October 25th. Coffee and doughnuts were passed out to them at each of the stops. They were quartered in

quonset huts with bunkbeds.

Dad's company was shown a truckload of G.I.'s dressed up in German uniforms during this time. The German weapons were also demonstrated to them. That was when Company G realized the seriousness of the matter at hand. They left Toddington on December 1st by train enroute to Southampton, England and arrived the same day. At Southampton they set sail on a liberty ship manned by an English crew. Then they crawled down a rope ladder onto a landing craft called an LCI. This boat came within about 45 feet of the shore and the front end ramp lowered so that the troops could wade in to shore. This was about December 2, 1944 at Le Havre, France which was a bombed-out, deserted town.

The troops were loaded into trucks and driven across France in one week to Belgium. The weather was such a shock to them! They cut pine branches and piled them on top of the snow so they could lay out their sleeping bags at night. It was so cold that they slept two men to a single sleeping bag to keep warm.

They arrived at a small village called Born, Belgium about December 9, 1944. We received our mail from my father for the last time while he was billeted in a home at Born with three other men. The people who lived there owned nine cows, four pigs, and had a barn attached to the house.

Dad wrote Mother and each of us three children a short letter dated December 12, 1944. Again, the secret code worked, and the first letter of the first four paragraphs spelled Born, so we knew where he was.

About one mile from where Dad was staying was a town named

Malmedy where the Germans had already murdered over one hundred American prisoners. After about two or three days in Born, Dad's company moved to the front, known as the Siegfried line, on Friday, December 15th, at night. His unit relieved other soldiers. Things were quiet, and nothing unusual was expected from the opposition. What a shock! On the morning of December 16th, the panzers attacked! Company G was right in the onslaught. The troops brought up three Sherman tanks, and they were all knocked out by the superior German tanks. They tried again with another Sherman tank, but it, too, was knocked out. Two ammunition trucks were blown up, and artillery shells were exploding all around our troops. Shells sometimes would explode in midair. Our troops fought back gallantly, but the Germans had them outnumbered! By Sunday, December 17th, our troops were completely surrounded.

Dad was a machine gunner. That position was a "hot spot" because the machine gunners were the main targets. On the morning of December 18th, Dad's division, the 423rd, was ordered to attack the little village of Schornburg, Belgium. It was just like a suicide mission. Our troops were trying to blast out tanks with 30 caliber shells. There was no chance. During the day, the machine gunners were trying to hold off the Germans while Dad's unit tried to retreat. A mortar shell exploded near my father, and the concussion killed him. A medic was called for and arrived shortly in a Jeep with a red cross on it. His body was picked up then, but had no visible marks at all.

The next day, December 19th, the remainder of the entire

regiments of the 423rd and 422nd surrendered. Over 7000 men surrendered that day.

The following are quotes from some of my father's comrades:

Sgt. Norman J. Kolbaba said, "Bob Miller was always writing letters back home to his family. He would lay pictures of his family out on the table while he wrote the letters. We called him "the old man" because he was 34 years old, and most of us were about 21 or so. He was very strong and a leader. He was a very gung-ho soldier and patriotic. He never shirked his duty. He might have chosen a softer job had he so desired. When I saw the medic Jeep coming after he was hit, and he was lying on a stretcher on the hood, I asked the medic how he was and he told me that Bob was dead. I do not know where he was buried."

George Edward Guth says, "We were on line in position with Bob as ammunition carrier and myself as messenger. One day a shell burst too close and the concussion caused Bob to lose consciousness and a short while later to pass away in a manner so frequently denied most soldiers--peacefully, quietly, and without pain. I held him in my arms and, please, believe me, he did not suffer. Bob was more to me than a friend; he was an ideal to admire. He had such a calm acceptance of life and was the kindest, most generous and thoughtful person I have ever known."

During this summer of 1994, the telephone has been my instrument in getting all these dates and facts through information from Dad's comrades. This information should settle the issue.