

A PORTRAIT OF GLENN MILLER



Alton Glenn Miller

Alton Glenn Miller, 1904-1944

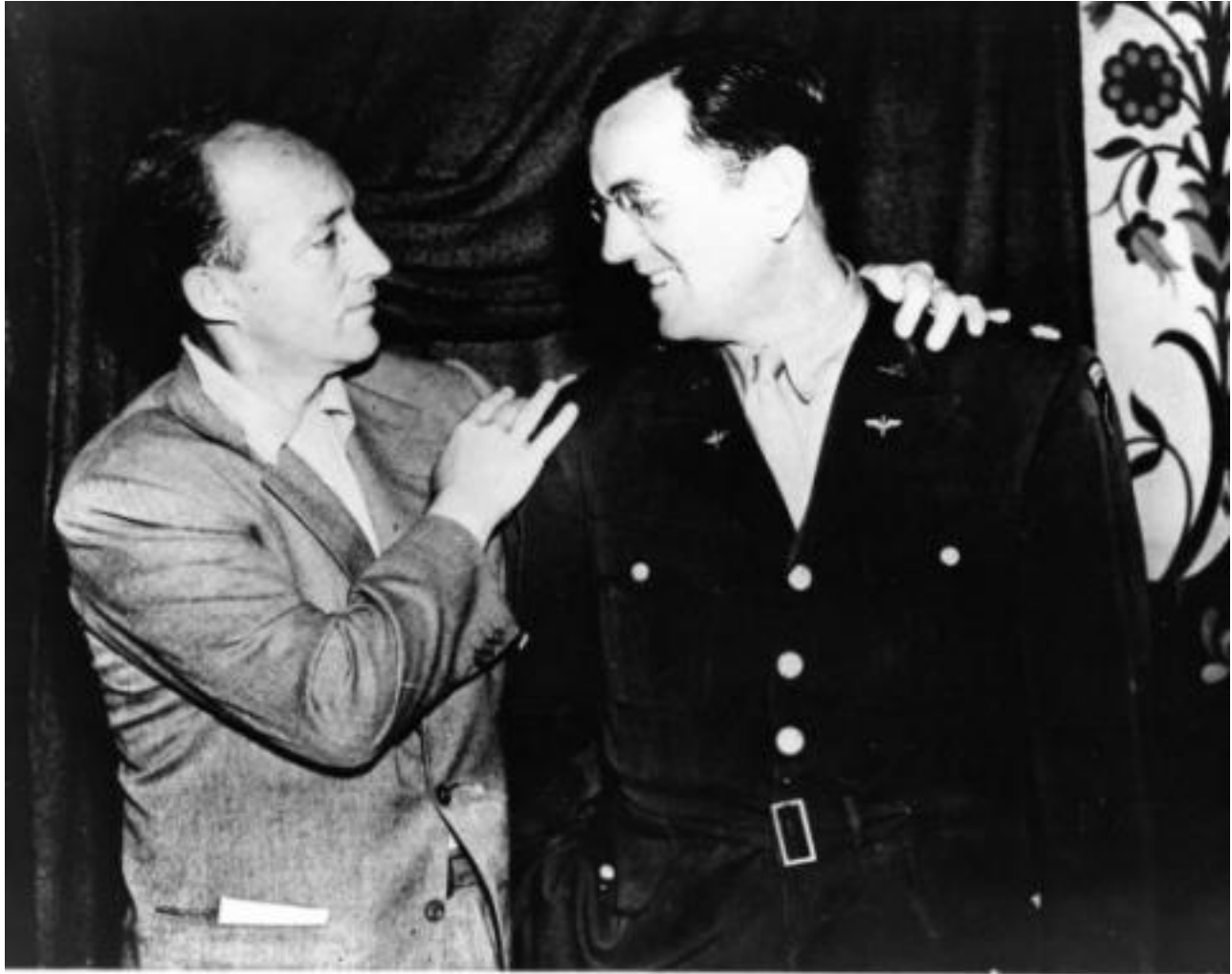
Composed and edited by Dennis M. Spragg, with commentary in part from the GMA George T. Simon (1912-2001) Collection and Papers, Edward F. Polic Papers and Christopher Way Collection.

Foreword

By Harry Lillis "Bing" Crosby (1904-1977)

"As the years go by, I am increasingly grateful that I was a tiny part of the era of the great swing bands. This was the golden age of popular music for me. They were all great, but I have to think that the Glenn Miller band was the greatest. Unlike so many of the others, Glenn was not a virtuoso instrumental soloist. And so instead of his horn he did it with great personnel and innovative harmonic experiments producing a sound that was his and his alone. Glenn employed a harmonization that was new and vastly different. If I even attempted a description of what he did, I would be immediately adrift. I think it was the way he voiced his instruments. It was just beautiful. And when you heard the sound, it was recognizable and memorable. It was just Glenn Miller. Glenn as a person was just as memorable. He was a very good personal friend, from the early days on, ever since he performed on some of the records I made with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra during the early stages of my career. During World War II we were united for the last time, when I sang in London with his great AAF Orchestra. About the best thing I can remember about Glenn, personally, was his innate taste and class. He loved good things, musically, and in his personal life. Although he came from Colorado, I believe his taste in clothes and life-style was definitely Ivy League. A most attractive man, and, of course, tremendously gifted. I have no doubt, had he lived, he would have been a tremendous force in the popular music in the years to come, not that he wasn't already. It is unfortunate that he isn't with us here today."

Bing Crosby wrote a letter of recommendation for Glenn Miller to the United States Navy in 1942 when Miller applied for a commission as an officer. Miller would ultimately join the United States Army and be assigned to the Army Air Forces. George T. Simon's biography and Bing's comments about Glenn Miller are included in the forward of the 1974 book "Glenn Miller and his Orchestra," by George T. Simon (Thomas W. Crowell, New York). The book, manuscript and research notes are among the GMA George T. Simon Collection and Papers.



Bing Crosby and Maj. Glenn Miller, London, August 31, 1944

Introduction

Late one cold and wet evening in an attic room of an old house in Bedford, England, fifty miles north of London, Major Glenn Miller was visiting with two of his bandsmen, arranger Jerry Gray and bassist Trigger Alpert. They had been talking about Glenn's civilian band, in which these two sergeants had played such important roles. And they were talking about the new days, the "now" days in which they were playing for the Allied troops in England, and the "to come" days when the band would fly over to the Continent and entertain the troops and then return to America, where Glenn would settle on his California ranch and the band would work hard for six months out of the year and relax for the other six and everybody would make plenty of money and be very happy. Major Miller returned later that evening to the Mount Royal Hotel in London, where he was billeted. He spoke with his executive officer, Lt. Don Haynes, who had been Glenn's personal manager during their civilian careers.

They, too, talked about the future; more specifically, about the immediate plans for moving their sixty-two soldier aggregation to Paris, and who was going to do what. Originally, Haynes had been slated to fly to Paris ahead of the group to find accommodations for the men. But Glenn had been growing so impatient, what with Army red tape constantly postponing the move, that he finally told Haynes that he himself would fly over and make the arrangements and Haynes would come over with the band a few days later. The weather was miserable the day Glenn was supposed to fly (on authorized, scheduled transport) and the day after. The third day, Friday, December 15, 1944, Glenn accepted a ride with Lt. Col. Norman Baessell. The plane was a single-engine C-64 Norseman. The pilot was Flight Officer John R. S. Morgan. The weather was wet, foggy and cold. The lightly equipped plane could not fly above the weather nor could it fly in the weather. Therefore, it would be forced to fly below the weather, close to the English Channel's choppy surface. As the aircraft was about to depart, Miller yelled to Baessell (over the noise of the idling engine) "where the hell are the parachutes?" "What's the matter, Miller," retorted the gung-ho, extroverted colonel to the obviously apprehensive major, "do you want to live forever?"

The Early Years

"I couldn't stand the name Alton. I can still hear my mother calling for me across the field, 'Al-ton', it was never 'Awl-ton.' I just hated the sound of that name. That's why I've always used Glenn instead." That is how Alton Glenn Miller, born March 1, 1904 at 601 South 16th Street in Clarinda, a very small town tucked in the southwest corner of Iowa, would explain why the country's number one band was not Alton Miller's. Miller was the second born child of Lewis Elmer Miller and Mattie Lou (Cavender) Miller. His older brother was Dr. Elmer Deane Miller (1901-1971). His younger siblings were John Herbert Miller (1913-1987) and Emma Irene (Miller) Wolfe (1916-1999). At the age of five, Glenn's family moved to Tryon, Nebraska. His father worked in nearby North Platte. In 1913 the family moved to Grant City, Missouri. In 1918, the family moved to Fort Morgan, Colorado. Glenn played football in high school, played trombone and had unimpressive grades, except for Math and Latin. Upon his 1921 graduation, he had become so immersed in music that he skipped the ceremonies and traveled to Laramie, Wyoming for a band job that failed to materialize. His mother accepted his diploma from the principal, who commented "maybe you are the one who should get this anyway; you probably worked harder on it than he did."

Twenty months after high school graduation, Glenn matriculated to the University of Colorado, with an engagement as trombonist in the band of Boyd Senter in between. In Boulder, Glenn spent a great deal of time with a band led by Holly Moyer, a fellow student. Glenn learned much about style, grooming and presentation from Moyer, a World War I Navy veteran; lessons that he would put into practice with his own bands. Glenn would leave school to tour with the popular southwestern band of Jimmy Joy (Maloney); he returned but then dropped out for good, working with Moyer again, as well as Tommy Watkins, touring south to Mexico and west to California. Eventually he landed in Los Angeles and went to work for Max Fischer's band at the Forum Theatre. It was there that he would get the break that was to change his entire musical career and his entire life. He was hired by bandleader Ben Pollack. The Pollack band was one of the most influential and idolized bands of its day. The band was filled with young, jazz-oriented musicians, including Bix Beiderbecke and Benny Goodman, who became Glenn's roommate. Pollack hired Glenn Miller as much for his interest in arranging as to be a trombone player. The Pollack band would work primarily in Chicago, where it was a smash at the Blackhawk and recorded for Victor records. In March 1928, the Pollack band went east to New York where its success continued.

During this period, Glenn maintained a long-distance friendship with a woman that he had met and courted at the University of Colorado, Helen Dorothy Burger. Helen was of a pioneer and prominent Boulder family, whose relatives were among the first graduates of the infant University of Colorado. Her father was Boulder County Clerk, Fred W. Burger. Glenn learned that Helen was dating someone else and "practically engaged." He asked her to come to New York. She did. On October 6, 1928, they were married. Years later, one of Glenn's closest friends, Mike Nidorf, echoed the sentiments of practically everyone who was close to the couple, "the greatest thing that ever happened to

Glenn left Ben Pollack to settle in New York, working for recording studios, radio and with Broadway productions. He would gain invaluable experience with a wide range of musical influences, jazz and beyond, with important figures such as George Gershwin, where Glenn played in the orchestra and wrote parts for Gershwin's "Girl Crazy." Glenn played with jazz trumpeter and leader Red Nichols, in addition to his other work which included studio conductors Victor Young, Carl Fenton and Jacques Renard. In 1932, Glenn accepted an invitation from singer, Smith Ballew, to form a band and return to the road. Glenn Miller was Helen Miller."



Helen Dorothy Burger, University of Colorado, 1923

The first musician contacted was Fort Worth, Texas native and drummer, Ray McKinley. Another musician that they hired was Bunny Berigan (trumpet). As he had with Ben Pollack, Glenn basically managed and rehearsed the band himself. In 1934, Miller joined the Dorsey Brothers band. Glenn recruited several members for the band during his final days with Smith Ballew in Denver. The "Colorado contingent" included Roc Hillman (guitar), Skeets Herfurt (sax), Don Matteson (trombone) and girl singer, Kay Weber. Glenn became music director for the ever-battling brothers Tommy and Jimmy. He soon tired of being caught in the middle.



The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, 1934

The above photo of the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, 1934, includes, (standing, l-r), Bobby Van Epps, piano; Delmar Kaplan, bass; Tommy Dorsey, trombone-leader; Kay Weber, vocalist; Jimmy Dorsey, sax/clarinet; Glenn Miller, trombone-arranger; and Jack Stacey, alto sax; (kneeling, l-r) George Thow, trumpet; Roc Hillman, guitar; Don Mattison, trombone; Skeets Herfurt, tenor sax; and Ray McKinley, drums

Before the Dorseys broke up to form their own bands, Glenn accepted an offer from British bandleader Ray Noble. Miller would organize an American band for Noble because the musicians union would not allow Noble to bring his own musicians over to the United States. Noble would be joined by his legendary South African vocalist, Al Bowlly. Matched to their suave demeanor would be the top-flight band that Miller organized for them, and which would wax many memorable Victor recordings, which included future bandleaders Will Bradley (trombone), Charlie Spivak (trumpet) and Claude Thornhill (piano).

As the Noble band was forming, on April 25, 1935, Glenn Miller recorded for the first time under his own name. The band for the Columbia recording session included Bunny Berigan, Eddie Miller (sax) and Johnny Mince (clarinet). The Noble band then had a successful start, playing at the Rainbow Room atop the RCA Building in Radio City. Glenn wrote a tune around this time that would eventually come to be titled "Moonlight Serenade." During 1936, Miller's relationship with Noble began to ebb. He led a walkout of musicians from the Noble band who would not agree to a pay cut. To mark time before starting his own band, he played record dates with the bands of Vincent Lopez, Freddy Rich and his old boss, Ben Pollack. In late 1936 and early 1937, Glenn began looking for musicians and discussing with Helen the risks and rewards of changing their lifestyle and forming a road band under Glenn Miller's name. They decided to take the risk!

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra began rehearsals in February 1937 and were soon recording for Decca records. The band played its first engagement on May 7 at the Terrace Room of the Hotel New Yorker, and cut several more records for the Brunswick label. Its first steady engagement was at the Raymor Ballroom in Boston, on Huntington Avenue near Symphony Hall. Among its musicians were Hal McIntyre (sax), who would play a key role in Miller's future, and girl singer, Kathleen Lane. The band traveled to the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans where it opened on June 17. Glenn was operating at a loss but gaining exposure. They moved on to the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas on August 27, and, by all accounts, the band hated to leave New Orleans. From Dallas, the band traveled to the Hotel Nicollet in Minneapolis. The financial situation did not improve. The band returned to Boston and the Raymor. In November, they recorded four more Brunswick records. However, the situation continued to deteriorate from a financial standpoint and on December 31, 1937, Miller gave the band notice in York, Pennsylvania. He had worked very hard, driving himself to a state of nervous exhaustion. He returned to New York, broke, depressed and not knowing what he was going to do or if he would ever lead a band again.

The Breakthrough

Glenn and Helen Miller realized that as an arranger and sideman, Glenn could make a comfortable, if unexciting, living. But they had contributed so much, emotionally and financially, to the band that they couldn't reconcile themselves to giving it up completely. They and close friends felt that Glenn could and would succeed. For the moment, he had to work and began to call up old friends. Glenn paid the rent by working with Tommy Dorsey on Dorsey's Raleigh cigarette program. At the same time, Miller began to plan for a second band that would be styled and staffed differently. He decided not to compete against his friends Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey with a "swing" band. He would form an essentially "sweet" band with a unique and identifiable sound but which could also play the swing that young people wanted to hear.

During the mid-1930s, Glenn Miller had been a student of the famed instructor, Dr. Joseph Schillinger (1895-1943). Schillinger taught a basically mathematic method for music composition. His students included Miller, George Gershwin and pianist, Oscar Levant. Miller's notebooks and exercises with Dr. Schillinger are housed in the Miller Family Collection of the GMA. These notebooks are a priceless insight into the discipline and understanding that Miller developed as a student of Schillinger. All the lessons and music involved serious music of the classical era and the famous composers, mostly German. Miller had a mathematic mind; his best grades in school had been in math. His contemporary bandleader friends, Dorsey and Goodman, had dabbled in lessons with Schillinger but Miller was the serious and committed student. The Schillinger period of Miller's development as a serious arranger, composer and musician cannot be overstated. Armed with this perspective, Miller was prepared to take a balanced view of music ahead toward both his standard 16/18 piece "swing" band and ultimately to his large concert orchestra in the military.

The big band world had exploded by 1938. Benny Goodman would appear at Carnegie Hall and was neck-and-neck with Tommy Dorsey in popularity polls. Count Basie burst onto the scene and Artie Shaw was gaining popularity. Others, such as Jimmy Dorsey, Bob Crosby, Larry Clinton, Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington and Chick Webb were also capturing the public's imagination. A new Miller band was entering the crowded field of swing bands such as these, as well as the sweet bands led by Hal Kemp, Kay Kyser, Sammy Kaye and Guy Lombardo, among dozens of others

Miller would find the backing to start over, with greater discipline, using a sound he had molded back in his Ray Noble days, a sound which would rely on precise musicianship from his band and his elegant arranging style. The so-called "clarinet lead" was a key element of the approach. He would bring back Hal McIntyre and hire old friend, John C. "Mac" ("Chummy") MacGregor (piano). A core group of young talent would come aboard for the second try, including Gordon "Tex" Beneke (sax/vocal), boy singer, Ray Eberle (brother of Jimmy Dorsey singe, Bob Eberly), Wilbur Schwartz (clarinet) and Paul Tanner (trombone). The first major engagement for the band was at the Paradise Restaurant in New York during June, 1938, where the band received important national exposure on NBC radio broadcasts, spotlighting the band as well as its vocalists Ray Eberle and Gail Reese.

In September of 1938, the band would make its first records for RCA Victor's Bluebird label. RCA Victor was the leading recording company. Miller acquired three key allies during this period, including RCA Victor recording chief, Eli Oberstein, and ballroom operator, Cy Shribman, of Boston. Miller's band was booked by Mike Nidorf of the Rockwell-O'Keefe agency. These three men all had great faith in Glenn's ideas and potential. Finally, Miller would have a fighting chance to be financed and get on a solid footing to have the time and exposure to become well known and competitive. Regular radio broadcasts continued from both Boston and New York venues.

Miller then found the girl singer he was looking for, Marion Hutton, one of the Hutton sisters. Marion had been working with her sister, Betty, and for bandleader, Vincent Lopez. Marion had a tremendous on-stage presence and enthusiasm, which greatly benefitted the Miller band.

The band started gaining a following among college students in the northeast from campus appearances. It caught the attention of Michael DeZutter, manager of the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York, a very influential potential venue. The band had also hired a talented young arranger named William "Bill" Finegan, whose innovative arrangements greatly added to Miller's own work. Further RCA Bluebird label recording sessions were scheduled and the band was booked by the confident DeZutter to play the entire summer season of 1939 at the Glen Island Casino, which carried substantial air time over NBC with it. Not to be outdone by this new "find", competitive ballroom operator Frank Dailey booked the Miller band into his Cedar Grove, New Jersey Meadowbrook ballroom for an engagement in March and April of 1939. The Miller band was about to take off and explode onto the national scene, which by 1939 was being dominated by the newly popular "King of the clarinet", Artie Shaw, and the reigning "King of Swing", Benny Goodman.

The kids at the Meadowbrook loved the Miller band and Frank Dailey picked up its option even before the end of the first week, extending the band's four week engagement to seven. RCA Victor, aware of the band's growing potential, offered it more recording dates. During April, 1939, it recorded a dozen sides, including the all-time Miller hits "Little Brown Jug", "Sunrise Serenade" and the Miller theme, "Moonlight Serenade." Before going into the Glen Island Casino, Miller hired Dale "Mickey" McMickle, a serious trumpet player who would solidify and strengthen Miller's trumpet section at a key moment. Another important addition was drummer, Maurice "Moe" Purtill, another mainstay who would join Miller as the band embarked on that fateful summer gig "along the waters of Long Island Sound."

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra opened at the Glen Island Casino on May 17, 1939. By the time they closed on August 24, 1939, they had become established as one of the leading bands in the United States if not among the top two or three. It was a remarkable feat! Never in the history of Glen Island Casino had any band been so successful. Glenn Miller had certainly arrived! How? Why? The answer was that the band was very solid, well organized, innovative, romantic and it could "swing" enough to excite the imagination of young people in the New York area and across the nation via the generous NBC air time.



Glenn Miller, Rehearsal at the Glen Island Casino, 1939

Instrumental to the success of Glenn Miller during 1939 was the collaboration of the African-American composer and arranger, Eddie Durham, who wrote and arranged many famous and memorable key “swing” instrumentals for Miller’s band, including probably “In the Mood”, which was recorded for RCA Bluebird on August 1, 1939. Durham was employed by the famous and powerful black bandleader, Jimmie Lunceford, and Lunceford had agreed to Durham working for Glenn as well. The working relationship and friendship between Miller and Lunceford has been somewhat unappreciated by the jazz and popular music experts. Most have commented that Miller’s band played and performed in a style that sometimes resembled Lunceford. There may have been a reason. Miller (RCA Victor-Bluebird) and Lunceford (Decca-Columbia) did duplicate some of the same tunes for their respective record labels to an interesting degree.

The RCA Bluebird records made during 1939 would hit the top of the charts and would, along with the frequent national radio exposure, help establish Miller among the leading bands. During July, 1939, Marion Hutton would collapse at Glen Island from exhaustion and be replaced briefly by young singer, Kay Starr. Hutton recovered, and the band returned to the Meadowbrook in November, 1939. On October 6, 1939, the band appeared at Carnegie Hall for an ASCAP Anniversary Concert and Broadcast, introduced by Paul Whiteman.



Jimmie Lunceford and Glenn Miller



The Four Ink Spots With Glenn Miller and his Orchestra, Paramount Theatre, New York, 1939

That fall, the Miller band also appeared in its first engagement at New York's Paramount Theatre, a mecca for the young audience of the day. Jitterbugs had danced in the aisles to Benny Goodman in the 30s; they were ready to "dig" the newly popular Miller band and their hopes were not dashed. The Miller band appeared at the Paramount with the newly popular black vocal group, The Ink Spots. Miller took a chance as a white bandleader appearing with the group due to the social prejudices of the day. There was no need to worry. The pairing of the Miller band and the Ink Spots was wildly popular with the Paramount audience. Miller had Eddie Durham write several dozen arrangements for the Ink Spots at no charge to them and helping them work compatibly with the Miller band. The grateful Ink Spots gave Glenn a diamond-studded gold watch at the end of the engagement, which went a long way to solidifying their popularity. The stage had been set for even greater achievements and fame. Glenn Miller was poised for greatness.

America's Number One Dance Band

In November of 1939, Artie Shaw broke up his band and fled to Mexico for a rest before reforming a band in 1940. Shaw's talented chief arranger, Jerry Gray (Generoso Graziano), was suddenly available and in a decision, which would have a profound impact on the history and achievements of Glenn Miller and his music, Miller hired Gray as his chief arranger. Gray's ultimate list of compositions and/or arrangements that became Miller hits would be almost endless and astounding. This decision, which paid dividends for Miller, did not sit well with Shaw or Miller arranger, Bill Finegan, both of whom in their later years were critical of Miller. In addition to Jerry Gray, Shaw trumpet ace, Johnny Best, also joined the Miller band.

Things had gone well in 1939, so well, that on Christmas Eve, 1939, the band gave Glenn Miller a new 1940 Buick with the license plate GM-1. Another even more monumental development would occur for Glenn Miller as 1940 dawned.

The Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company, maker of Chesterfield Cigarettes, produced a popular CBS radio program that starred the famed "King of Jazz," Paul Whiteman, along with their advertising agency, Newell-Emmett. Whiteman was leaving the program and he recommended Glenn Miller for his replacement. The sponsor, agency and network were not necessarily prepared to gamble exclusively on Miller, so to play it safe, they added the Andrews Sisters to the program for at least the first thirteen weeks. The newly renamed "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" would but on December 27, 1939, during the former Whiteman half-hour time slot. The series would, the following week, become a three-times per week fifteen minute program that aired Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings at 10:15 p.m. Eastern time over CBS. The announcer, when the band was home in New York, was Paul Douglas, who later would become a 20th Century Fox film star. The Andrews Sisters left the program after the thirteenth week as it became evident that the Miller band could more than carry the program on their own.

Miller would continue on the program until he enlisted in the Army. The final program aired September 24, 1942. Miller had just been renewed for another multi-year contract. The Glenn Miller "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" broadcasts were recorded for Glenn Miller by the Harry Smith Company via a direct feed from CBS for Miller's private use. Most of the programs have survived in storage and are the property of the Miller family and responsibility of the GMA.



Glenn Miller and the Andrews Sisters, Rehearsal at CBS, 1940

Another major development for Glenn Miller at the start of 1940 was the first engagement of the band at the Café Rouge of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, and another coast-to-coast "sustaining broadcast" radio feed over NBC. By January, 1940, between the three CBS commercial programs and the NBC broadcasts, Glenn Miller could reach American homes up to six and seven times per week. Many of the NBC broadcasts as well as a wide cross-section of Miller's NBC output from 1938 to 1942 are preserved by the GMA. They were hosted by a cross-section of NBC announcers including Hugh James, Al Robinson, Bill Abernathy, Lyle Van, Jack Costello, George Hicks, Ed Herlihy and many more.

Miller worked hard to format the Chesterfield programs to squeeze as much music and as little talk into the format as possible. To this end, he introduced a medley format he called "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue" which would become famous. The medleys were featured on Wednesday nights during 1940.

Of great assistance to Glenn Miller was his professional office staff. Helen Miller's closest and most trusted friend was a woman named Polly Davis, who had been married to Claude Thornhill, another close friend of the Millers. Following their amicable divorce, Polly went to California, only to be summoned back by Glenn to open his business office. The importance of Polly Davis to the success and security of Helen and Glenn Miller was tremendous. Her handling of the office and of people was magnificent. She was loved by everyone connected with the Miller band.

For his newfound success, Glenn received a congratulatory letter from Dale Carnegie, the era's #1 success advisor, whose "How to Win Friends and Influence People" had headed the best-seller list for months. Carnegie discovered that he and Glenn had been born in the same part of Iowa. "We still have a souvenir plate with a picture of the Clarinda State Asylum", he wrote, to which Glenn replied, "glad to know you are also a Clarinda, Iowa product." "Hardly know how to interpret your crack regarding the picture of the asylum."

The Miller musical library grew considerably in the first part of 1940. Among the additions was a tune that had been originally written for and performed by Erskine Hawkins and his Orchestra, called "Tuxedo Junction." Miller continued to add to and strengthen his personnel with additions such as Jimmy Priddy (trombone), Ernesto "Ernie" Cacaes (sax/clarinet), Ruben "Zeke" Zarchy (trumpet) and Herman "Trigger" Alpert (string bass). Miller would also take on as manager, Donald Haynes, who traveled with Miller, later married Polly Davis, and was Glenn's constant partner at his escape while on the road with his band, golf. Miller was fiercely devoted to his golf game and shot a hole-in-one at the famous Pinehurst, North Carolina course.

During April, 1940, the band moved its base of operation and Chesterfield programs to Washington, DC. The announcer when the band was away from New York was ad agency representative, Larry Bruff. By June, the band moved to Chicago and toured the Midwest. They returned to New York in August. A second Café Rouge stay commenced in October. The band had shattered attendance records everywhere; St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbus, Pittsburgh, Boston, in short, everywhere! At one point, a majority of tunes played in jukeboxes were Glenn Miller records. Miller would have more tunes in the Top 40 at one time in many months between 1940 and 1942 than any other artist in history, even to this day.

The fall of 1940 marked another ultimate milestone for the ever-innovating and evolutionary Miller, who continued to refine and modify his sound and performance quality. He added a trumpet chair, hiring a young player named Ray Anthony and, most importantly, Charlie Barnet arranger and trumpet star, Billy May, who would have a profound effect on the style and substance of the Miller sound. The band immediately loosened up and improved considerably with Billy May present. Both Anthony and May would go on to become successful bandleaders in the 1950s, and May, of course, an important composer and collaborator for many leading singers.

Hollywood Beckons and War Clouds Gather

America watched during 1940 and into 1941 as World War II progressed in Europe and trouble was brewing in Asia. President Franklin Roosevelt had won an unprecedented third term. The music industry was waging a war of its own. ASCAP and the radio networks had been unable to agree on rates for the use of songs copyrighted by the society's publishers. The networks banned all ASCAP music from their broadcasts effective January 1, 1941, and formed their own music licensing and collection agency, Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI). Bandleaders had to scramble. Glenn could not play ASCAP-licensed hits such as "In the Mood", "Tuxedo Junction", "Pennsylvania Six-Five Thousand", and even his own theme, "Moonlight Serenade", so he used a new theme, "Slumber Song", written by "Mac" MacGregor and assigned to Glenn's own BMI publishing firm, Mutual Music, Inc.

The year 1941 also opened with the announcement that Glenn Miller and his Orchestra would be traveling to California to star in a motion picture for 20th Century Fox. The film would be "Sun Valley Serenade," co-starring John Payne and ice skating star, Sonja Henie. Bands were generally included in films for musical segments only and with minimal relevance to the plot. Miller insisted upon and got a more integral role for him and the band in the film. Work on the film would start in March and finish in May.

The band started the year with two major personnel changes. Marion Hutton had married and become pregnant. She would go on leave and be replaced by Dorothy "Dot" Claire, of Bobby Byrne's band. Claire appeared to be the ideal replacement, a pert, vivacious and extroverted blonde. The problem was that Claire never quite hit it off with the band, and Byrne had not wanted to let her go. He had sued Miller and they eventually settled, with Claire returning to Byrne.



Helen Miller and beloved Boston Terrier "Pops", 1941

On a more permanent note, Glenn added the vocal group the Modernaires which included Hal Dickenson, Bill Conway, Ralph Brewster and Chuck Goldstein. They had recorded the theme of influential WNEW disc jockey, Martin Block, "Make Believe Ballroom Time" with Glenn in the fall of 1940. The group had been part of Paul Whiteman's orchestra and Whiteman was ready to give up his band and move to California. Once again, "Pops" Whiteman gave his blessing to a move that would greatly benefit Glenn Miller. The Modernaires were a very innovative and "hip" group for their day and immediately made a strong impact as a key element of the Miller band. Miller worked hard to integrate the Modernaires with the sound of his musicians. Hal Dickenson's wife, Paula Kelly, replaced Dorothy Claire as female vocalist before the band arrived in California to make "Sun Valley Serenade." She had been singing with Al Donahue's band. Along with the evolution of his musical style, the addition of the Modernaires greatly added to the depth and sophistication of the Miller musical product.



Sun Valley Serenade, 1941

The cast of “Sun Valley Serenade” included, along with Payne and Henie, co-stars Lynn Bari, Milton Berle, Joan Davis, Dorothy Dandridge and the astounding dancers, the Nicholas Brothers. Hollywood legends Harry Warren (composer) and Mack Gordon (lyrics) wrote an outstanding musical score which would include the Miller hit “Chattanooga Choo Choo.” In August, Marion Hutton returned to the band, which had returned to New York after it toured back and forth across the continent during their tour to and from the West Coast. While in California, they set attendance records at the Hollywood Palladium and the Pacific Square in San Diego.

As 1941 unfolded, the new military draft began to make inroads into the dance bands. Only Glenn and Mac were over draft age. The first to be drafted was Trigger Alpert, who was replaced by bassist, Doc Goldberg. Mindful that many young men were now going into the service and away at bases throughout the country, Glenn had been dedicating tunes on his commercial radio program to military installations. He went one step further in August, convincing NBC to air a one-hour Saturday afternoon matinee at 5:00 p.m. Eastern time called “Glenn Miller’s Sunset Serenade.” The program would feature a contest involving five service installations. Each would pick their favorite tune. The general public was invited to write in during the following week and vote for its favorite of the five tunes. The winning base would win a new RCA radio-phonograph console and 50 recordings by America’s favorite artists. Glenn paid for the prizes out of his own pocket. “Down Beat” magazine figured that each show cost Glenn \$1,000.00.



CBS "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade," Pacific Square Ballroom, San Diego, California, 1941

During 1941, Glenn financially backed three of his friends and associates with new bands that were managed from the Miller business office. Charlie Spivak, Claude Thornhill and Hal McIntyre were launched with Glenn's blessing and complete support. These bands and Miller's Mutual Music, Inc. greatly expanded the scope of his business interests.

While living in California during the 1941 film work, Glenn and Helen purchased property east of Los Angeles in Monrovia, Rancho Duarte, which consisted of a ranch and citrus groves. This would be where the couple planned to build their ultimate permanent residence. With film commitments and the lure of good weather, many bandleaders and musicians were contemplating permanently locating on the west coast.

The Miller band opened their third engagement at the Café Rouge in October, 1941 and Glenn featured a new addition to the band, legendary coronet virtuoso, Bobby Hackett, who would be soon featured on the famous Jerry Gray composition "A String of Pearls", which was recorded for RCA on November 3, 1941. Hackett felt that Miller's trumpet section was brilliant and did not need him. However, he admired the "intelligence and good writing" of the band, and contributed greatly to many top recordings with the intimate sound of his playing that Miller generously featured and admired.

In late October, 1941, ASCAP and the radio networks settled their differences. For the first time, the band could play “Chattanooga Choo Choo” on the air. On one “Sunset Serenade”, all five bases picked it as their favorite and Glenn was stuck for five radio-phonographs. The tune became the first million-selling record since Gene Austin’s “My Blue Heaven” in 1927. To commemorate Glenn’s feat, RCA awarded him a gold record in February, 1942, live on a Chesterfield program. Later, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) began awarding official gold records to artists who had sold a million copies of a recording.

At the Café Rouge, Miller would earn \$41,750 for the 14-week engagement. Several years earlier, Glenn would gladly have worked the room at a loss just to get the valuable air-time.

Sunday, December 7, 1941, America would forever be changed by the Japanese attack on the military and naval installations at Pearl Harbor and the island of Oahu, Territory of Hawaii, Midway, Wake, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Philippines, as the nation was formally plunged into the war.

A Surprise Decision

The day after Pearl Harbor, the Miller band found themselves at the RCA studios in New York for a scheduled recording session as President Roosevelt went before a Joint Session of Congress to ask for and receive a Declaration of War against Japan. The band produced several successful records including the best-selling “Moonlight Cocktail.”

Wrapping up at the Café Rouge and following another successful stay at the Paramount Theatre in New York in early 1942, the Miller band would head west to make another Fox feature film to follow their popular “Sun Valley Serenade.” The film would eventually be titled “Orchestra Wives.” Glenn Miller’s popularity continued undiminished but with America’s entry into the war he was becoming visibly restless. Another arranger was added, George Williams. Miller’s Chesterfield program was briefly rescheduled for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights, but it would be put back to Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday by April with the time changed to 7:15 p. m. (Eastern) and a second program to be broadcast for the west coast, in a move calculated to attract even more of the younger audience.



Glenn Miller is awarded the first "gold record" by W. Wallace Early of RCA Victor for "Chattanooga Choo Choo," as announcer Paul Douglas looks on, Chesterfield "Moonlight Serenade", February 1942

The band arrived in Hollywood on March 17. The new film dwelt on band musicians and their wives. George Montgomery would play the male lead and Ann Rutherford the female lead, supported by Cesar Romero, Lynn Bari, Carole Landis and Jackie Gleason. The Nicholas Brothers were back with their awesome routines. Harry Warren and Mack Gordon again provided a memorable musical score that included the huge Miller hits "At Last", "Serenade in Blue", and "I've Got A Gal in Kalamazoo."

While in California, Glenn and Helen welcomed the opportunity to start working on their 55-acre ranch in Monrovia.

Patriotic themes became an ever-increasing part of the Miller recordings and broadcast programs. On April 2, they waxed the creative "American Patrol" at RCA studios in Hollywood. The Miller band had been upgraded from the RCA Bluebird label to the higher-priced RCA Victor label.

Glenn was becoming more convinced that he could do more for the war effort by offering his services to the government, as some in the entertainment industry management and performers had already volunteered. Music, radio and film were important to the United States in the dissemination of domestic and international information, and for entertaining service personnel who would be scattered all over the globe.

The band would wrap up its work in Hollywood on May 24 and travel east, playing at many service installations. In June and July, activity centered around Chicago. Ray Eberle departed from the band and was replaced by Skip Nelson (Scipione Mirabella).

It was a big secret. On June 20, 1942, Glenn Miller submitted an application for a commission in the United States Naval Reserve. One of the recommendations was from Bing Crosby (see foreword). He had become among the wealthiest entertainers and had many business obligations to consider, including contracts with personnel, a new Fox movie deal for at least three more films for 1943, 1944 and 1945; a Chesterfield radio renewal for three more years and a new, long-term RCA recording agreement. Glenn Miller was a very secure and successful man who did not need to suspend his career and lifestyle for the duration of the war.

The bands were rushing to make records before August 1, when the musician's union and their chief, James Cesar Petrillo, embarked on what would become a twenty-eight month ban against Victor and Columbia records. The Miller band waxed thirteen sides in three days, July 14-16, in Chicago, including their top-selling version of Johnny Mercer's classic "That Old Black Magic." The band had recorded a top-selling version of Mercer's equally popular "Skylark" earlier in the year. Another hit recorded before the recording ban was the popular "Juke Box Saturday Night." Among the final recordings before the ban was Bill Finegan's gorgeous arrangement of a portion of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue", which Ira Gerswhin had given Glenn exclusive permission to record.

On August 1, the Navy rejected Glenn Miller's application for a commission, in part, as follows: "you have not established to the satisfaction of the Navy Department that your particular qualifications fit you for a mobilization billet in the Naval Reserve." It was a decision that the Navy was soon to regret even more than the deeply disappointed Glenn.

On August 12, Glenn sent a detailed letter, offer of his services and outline proposal to General Charles D. Young of the United States Army, who returned a prompt and encouraging reply, citing Glenn's "willingness to make personal and patriotic sacrifice for the duration of the war." Miller was summoned to Washington where he was interviewed and filed an official application. In Washington, he met officials who would later play a key role in his future activities, including Lt. Col. Edward Kirby, a broadcasting executive who was organizing armed forces radio activities, and officers of the Army Air Forces. Miller took his physical examination on August 24. Meanwhile, he continued his regular activities without comment. On September 10, an official telegram arrived at Glenn's office at Room 3001, RKO Building, 1270 Sixth Avenue, New York: "Capt. Glenn Miller, your appointment announced, reporting date October Seven, full details reach you with orders, congratulations and good wishes, Howard C. Bronson, Music Officer."

During a Chesterfield rehearsal, Glenn ordered everyone out of the studio except the band and made his announcement. The band's final Chesterfield program aired September 24. Due to a prior booking, the final performance by the band was September 26 at the Central Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey. The band appeared on a "Coca Cola Spotlight Bands" program as its final actual broadcast from the stage in New Jersey.

By mid-1942, Harry James and his Music Makers had moved into a virtual popularity tie with Glenn Miller as number one band in the land. During Miller's final Chesterfield program, the audience was surprised during the final tune, "Juke Box Saturday Night", by hearing Harry James actually playing the imitation of Harry James that was included in the tune. Glenn told his radio listeners that Harry James would be his successor as he was joining the Army. Harry James remained grateful for the rest of his life that Glenn recommended him as his replacement. Glenn had recommended his top competitor over the three bands that he owned.

And thus, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra passed into history, but the best may have been yet to come.



Glenn Miller Enlists, September 1942



Captain Glenn Miller

Glenn Miller was assigned to the Army Specialist Corps after being inducted October 7, 1942. He reported for duty at the 7th Service Command in Omaha, Nebraska and was immediately transferred to Fort Meade, Maryland for officer training. On November 23, Glenn received a formal commission as a Captain in the regular Army of the United States, replacing his appointment to the Specialist Corps. Most newly-minted officers right out of civilian life were commissioned as reserve officers. Glenn was also immediately assigned to the Army Air Forces and ordered to report to Maxwell Field, Alabama. It has often been believed that the Army Air Forces were able to secure Miller due to a clerical oversight with regard to his first name, Alton. However, the Army Air Forces knew exactly who Miller was all along and had a specific role in mind for him from the day he had interviewed in Washington.

Glenn remained at Maxwell Field until early 1943 when he was assigned to the Army Air Forces Technical Training Command at Knollwood Field, North Carolina. His plans were to organize a group of outstanding AAF bands to boost morale. Each would contain musicians especially selected from the draft. Each would be trained to play both inspiring marching music and outstanding dance band music. He envisioned himself as a morale and band builder. While working to achieve his objectives, Miller encountered frustrating opposition from some officers within the military bureaucracy. He did, however, have powerful allies in Washington, who helped him to circumvent red tape. Gen. Charles Yount gave Miller carte-blanc permission to use his name and authority to transfer personnel. Gen. H. H. Arnold, the Commanding General of the AAF, was keenly interested in communicating to the public the purpose and needs of the Army Air Forces and to recruit young people into the aviation service. In early 1943, an entity the size and scope of the Army Air Forces, and its requirements, was a completely new and immense concept. Capt. Glenn Miller would play an important role in the ability of the AAF to communicate with the American people as well as to build morale.

Miller was appointed Director of Bands, Training, for the AAF Technical Training Command. He assigned himself to duty at Atlantic City, New Jersey, an induction station where many musicians from the New York area were being inducted. During his travels emanating from Maxwell Field and Knollwood Field, he had been able to ascertain the top talent already serving in the AAF from bases in Florida to Texas and everywhere in between. He gave instructions to musicians yet to be drafted on how to get themselves assigned to him, as he did with men already inducted or serving. Miller was able to get a hold of some key men who had worked with him in civilian life, such as Jerry Gray, Trigger Alpert, Zeke Zarchy and Jimmy Priddy. He could essentially get almost anyone he wanted to form both a 'super' band to be based in New York and other AAF bands which would staff key radio performance units in other locations.

The procedure was simple. A draftee would send a letter to Glenn, giving him all the details about his induction, whereupon Glenn would request, through channels, his assignment to his command. These men would eventually report to Atlantic City for their basic training. Frank Sinatra, who would be classified 4-F, was among the musicians and singers who were in contact with Glenn. If Frank Sinatra had been drafted, he would have been assigned to Miller.

Some men that were sent to and auditioned at Atlantic City joined the “super” band which would be directed by Miller and others were sent around the country. One future musician and composer sent elsewhere was Henry Mancini. Miller had a wealth of talent available to him.

Not all the musicians and technicians that Miller and his staff were selecting came from the dance band or jazz communities. The AAF bands and Miller’s New York-based unit, especially, would include a full concert orchestra staffing, including a complete string section. Miller’s band would be stationed at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

“I Sustain The Wings”

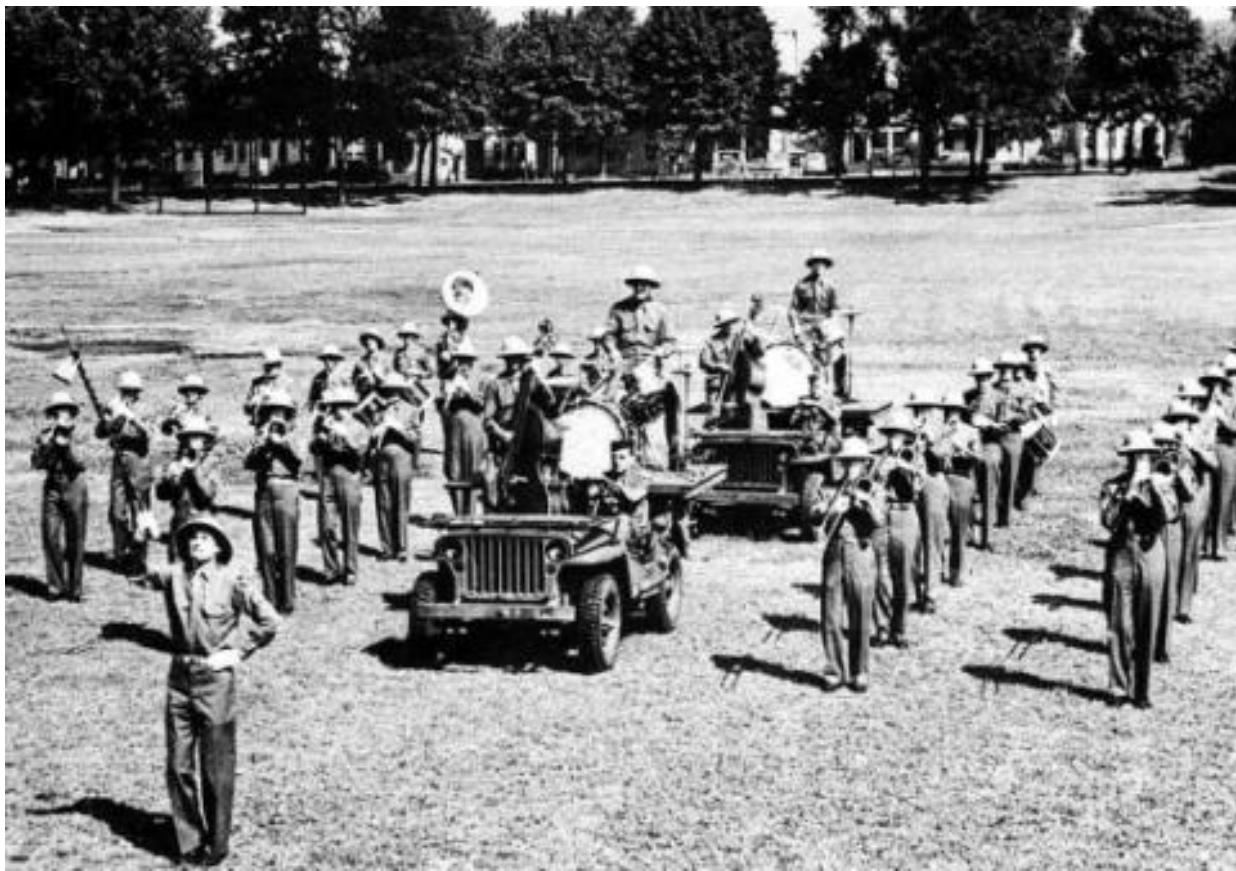
Culled from the immense talent available to him, the “Band of the Training Command of the Army Air Forces under the direction of Capt. Glenn Miller” began to take shape. Glenn did not necessarily select the most veteran among the musicians available to him, but, as his habit, he carefully crafted a mixed veteran and youthful organization. Because of the resources now available to him, he could beef up the sections of his orchestra with extra trumpets, trombones and saxophones, as well as a full string section. The 16/18 piece Miller dance band had become a much larger concert orchestra that had jazz and dance band elements within it, now greatly expanded in scope and intent. This would be a very different and greatly advanced musical entity which delved into jazz, popular music and light classics.

Key personnel included the energetic, imaginative drummer and old Miller friend, Ray McKinley, who had led his own band; “Mac” would lead a 16/18 piece dance band that was embedded within the full orchestra. Sgt. George Voutsas had been the producer of the NBC Symphony Orchestra broadcasts (Arturo Toscanini and Leopold Stokowski) and would be in charge of producing the Miller AAF radio programs. Sgt. George Ockner was master of the string section. His men came from the Cleveland, Philadelphia and other major symphony orchestras. Ace arranger and pianist, Mel Powell, came from Benny Goodman along with Chuck Gentry (sax) and Steve Steck (trumpet). Bernie Privin (trumpet) and Hank Freeman (sax) came from Artie Shaw. Jack Ferrier and Gabe Gelinias (saxes) came from Jan Savitt. Carmen Mastren (guitar) came from Tommy Dorsey. Perry Burgett (arranger), Jack Steele (trumpet) and Jim Harwood (trombone) came from Ray McKinley. Michael “Peanuts” Hucko came from Will Bradley. Bobby Nichols (trumpet) came from Vaughn Monroe.

Of course, there were the Miller alumni. and so on. Joining Jerry Gray as arrangers were Ralph Wilkinson, from the CBS Andre Kostelanetz "Pause That Refreshes on the Air" program and, in 1944, Norman Leyden from the "Winged Victory" AAF Broadway production and motion picture.

Stationed at New Haven, the band first focused on pulling together its format and makeup for their eventual radio broadcasting and recording activities, which would be centered in New York at NBC. Meanwhile, a marching band from within the unit was formed to perform at official activities in New Haven. The marching band became legendary with jazz-oriented marching versions of popular tunes such as "St. Louis Blues", "Blues in the Night", "Jersey Bounce" and "Buckle Down Winsocki." A famous, if exaggerated, story soon circulated wherein a military official scolded Miller for ruining traditional Army marching music, saying that Sousa marches were as perfectly fine in 1943 as they had been in 1917, to wit Miller reportedly replied, "Tell me, Major, are we still flying the same airplanes that we did in 1917?" Time Magazine would even run an article about the incident and Miller's activities called "Afro-Saxon in the Woodpile." In this article, John Philip Sousa's successor Edwin Franco Goldman lambasted Miller. The "March of Time" newsreel would run a feature including the marching band performing on the New Haven Green. The newsreel showed off what was called the "jeep band." That is, the marching band's big drum sets and drummers that were carried aboard jeeps and driven alongside the musicians as they marched on the Green or at the Yale Bowl. The AAF apparently thought Miller was doing the right thing because he simply kept on doing it, much to the delight of the young people in the services who were marching and listening to Miller's "updated military music." Today, Miller is considered by the United States Department of Defense to be "the father of modern military music."

Perhaps the best looking soldier of the men originally selected for the AAF band was singer, Tony Martin, who had already achieved fame as a film, radio and record star. The men in the band and Glenn were all very fond of Tony. When Martin had the opportunity to apply for there AAF Officer Candidate School at Miami Beach, Florida, Miller wholeheartedly approved. Martin left the Miller unit in September 1943. He was replaced in October by singer Pvt. Johnny Desmond, who had come into the service after working for Gene Krupa.



The "Jeep Band," Yale University, New Haven, 1943 (GMA)

Once transferred to the Miller unit from another AAF band, Johnny Desmond thought that he was doing just fine. So when Glenn told him after his third weekly radio program that he wanted to talk with him, Johnny was filled with confidence. Then the ax fell! "Tell me, Desmond", Glenn said. "Whom are you going to sing like next week?" Johnny didn't know what Glenn was driving at, so Glenn explained. "Look, first you sounded like Bing Crosby. Next it was Tony Martin and last week you sounded like Frank Sinatra. Now if I wanted Tony that much I would have kept him. If I wanted Bing, I'd have kept Bob Houston (one of the original singers assigned to the band), who sounds just like him. And if I want Sinatra, I can get him because I understand he is about to be drafted (Sinatra was rejected because of a perforated eardrum). Your trouble is that you are not singing like Johnny Desmond. I sent for you because I want you, not a carbon copy of somebody else. Remember this, as long as the real thing is around, people will never buy an imitation." From then on, Johnny Desmond sang like Johnny Desmond.

In June 1943, Miller and his AAFTC Orchestra tested a series of programs from Yale and broadcast over the Boston CBS station WEEI called "I Sustain the Wings." The program combined the music of the full orchestra with dramatic sketches describing the role of various AAF units, jobs and activities to the public. The purpose was to inform the public and to entice volunteers into that branch of the service. By mid-July, the program was broadcast over the full CBS network on Saturday afternoons. "I Sustain the Wings" would move to the full NBC network on September 18. It would eventually be broadcast at both 6:00 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. Eastern time every Saturday. The program would be a prime showcase for the AAF, who was involved in about a half-dozen network radio programs over several networks, and including several of the bands that Glenn Miller had helped to staff.

The announcers and actors assigned to the Miller unit for "I Sustain the Wings" included Lt. Donald Briggs and Cpl. (later Sgt.) Broderick Crawford. Briggs was a well known network radio actor and announcer, who would become the Executive Officer of the AAFTC orchestra. Crawford was an established Hollywood film actor (and character). Later, when the Miller unit was sent overseas and replaced on "I Sustain the Wings" by the AAFTC Orchestra directed by Sgt. Harry Bluestone, the announcing role was assumed by Lt. William Holden. The "I Sustain the Wings" broadcasts are preserved by the GMA.

Having been associated with many of the world's leading conductors of serious music, Sgts. George Voutsas, George Ockner, arranger Ralph Wilkinson and the assorted "fiddle players" assigned to Glenn Miller, had every right to be skeptical of Glenn's conducting ability and grasp of the classics. But once they saw Glenn in action, their collective skepticisms turned to admiration. Voutsas would later remark, "I would put Glenn on a par with the great symphony conductors of our times." "He had a tremendous ability to get the most out of his men and the arrangements. In his conducting, he was especially good at producing just the right shadings. He would study every score very carefully until he knew just what he wanted from it and then he would go out and get it. Even the arrangers themselves, who wrote the scores, could not come close to him."

Of course, Glenn had a magnificent group under him. The strings contained top symphony musicians. The brass section was powerful, clean and accurate, with very experienced section leaders. The sax section was equally strong, and the entire orchestra was carried forward by the propulsive drive of a "dream" rhythm section including Ray McKinley (drums), Mel Powell (piano), Trigger Alpert (bass) and Carmen Mastren (guitar). In addition, the unit had a brilliant French horn player named Addison S. Collins, Jr., and a fine vocal quartet called the Crew Chiefs.



"I Sustain the Wings" Broadcast, 1944, NBC, Vanderbilt Theatre, New York (Time-Life Photo, GMA)

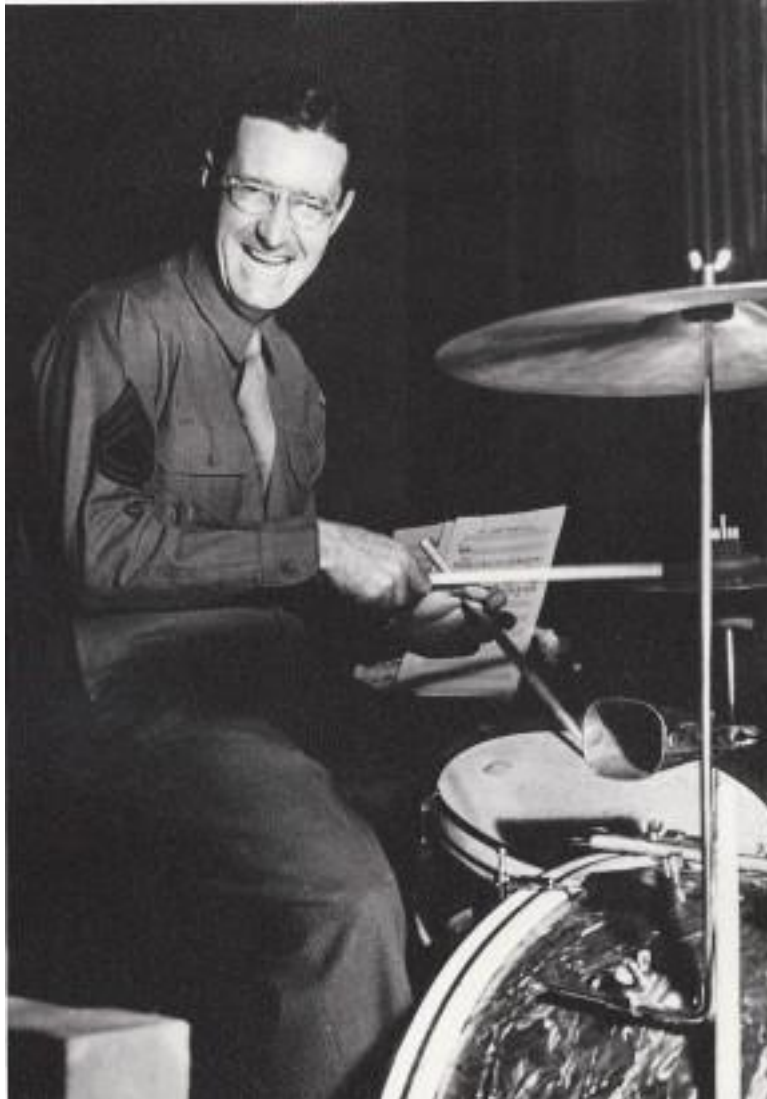
The orchestra would travel weekly from New Haven to New York for the purpose of broadcasting their network radio program. Once they moved to NBC, "I Sustain the Wings" was broadcast from the NBC Vanderbilt Theatre studio. In addition to their network program, the orchestra also had other important recording responsibilities.

Starting in October, 1943 and continuing until January, 1944, they recorded "V-Discs" at RCA Victor studios. V-Discs were recordings made by the Army and distributed to military personnel around the world. Since the musicians' recording ban had continued with Victor and Columbia, the V-Discs were a special exception made by the musicians and the industry in order to get current recordings to the forces. After January, 1944, the V-Disc program opted to take recordings directly from the Miller unit's broadcasts to put on V-Discs. The AAFTC Orchestra would be one of the most-issued artists that appeared on V-Discs, along with Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, the NBC Symphony and Andre Kostelanetz. The GMA preserves several complete sets of the Glenn Miller V-Discs.

During World War II the United States Office of War Information (OWI) was responsible for government communications with both the foreign and domestic audience. Among its duties was international broadcasting, and the infant "Voice of America", which operated stations around the world, including ABSIE, in London (the American Broadcasting Station in Europe). The OWI broadcast both in English and numerous languages. The Miller AAF unit was a major contributor to OWI programming. Every Saturday before their NBC network broadcast, the orchestra recorded a weekly 15-minute OWI musical program at NBC called "Uncle Sam Presents." It was broadcast in English with Lt. Briggs announcing and Capt. Miller hosting. The program was formatted for allied service personnel worldwide and answered their requests for favorite tunes. The Miller unit also recorded a series of programs for OWI at NBC on Friday afternoons after being bused from New Haven to New York. This was "Music from America", which was aimed at foreign audiences. The programs were recorded without announcements so that OWI local announcers could introduce the tunes in various languages. OWI "Uncle Sam Presents" and "Music from America" recordings are preserved at the GMA along with the NBC "I Sustain the Wings" programs.

The United States Treasury Department aired various programs for the American public that were syndicated to local radio stations for the purpose of selling defense bonds to finance the war. Almost every popular artist participated. Several major bandleaders including Tommy Dorsey and Duke Ellington hosted their own Treasury programs. A major department program that featured different artists was the "Treasury Star Parade." The Miller AAF unit recorded for a number of these syndicated programs, which are preserved at the GMA.

Other programs involving the full orchestra or groups culled from the Orchestra included "Wings for Tomorrow" (Ray McKinley and a dance band), "Strings with Wings" (the string section with light classics), "Home Base" (the full orchestra), "Partners in Victory" (for women considering enlistment) and other appearances. The orchestra was also featured on the Armed Forces Radio Service programs "Command Performance", "G. I. Journal", "G. I. Jive" and many more. Examples of these radio and recording appearances are also preserved at the GMA. The AAFTC, under the direction of Capt. Glenn Miller, had set a new and exciting musical standard during its history. The orchestra was a very different organization than the Miller civilian dance band. It is often misunderstood that in the AAF, Miller simply played his civilian music library, although some of the Miller favorites were carried over to the AAF orchestra with great effect. Not one to stand still, Miller had, at government expense, taken advantage of the situation to greatly expand his musical horizons and quality. The AAF orchestra played current top 40 tunes during 1943 and 1944 on all their broadcasts. Their programs kept Miller very much in the public consciousness.



T/Sgt. Ray McKinley "at the drums"1944 (GMA)

The jazz output of the orchestra was arguably far superior to anything Miller had offered before enlisting. The full string section provided a lush backdrop for the traditionally popular Miller romantic arrangements. Miller's AAF orchestra delved into light classics with great success. The Miller music library greatly expanded with charts written by Jerry Gray, Mel Powell, Ralph Wilkinson and Norman Leyden, including what are now considered evocative or exciting classics, such as "Mission to Moscow", "Flying Home", "920 Special", "Anvil Chorus", "Jeep Jockey Jump", "Stealin' Apples", "Star Dust", "Holiday for Strings", "Poinciana", "Long Ago and Far Away", "My Heart Tells Me", "I Love You", "Speak Low", "Now I Know", "Time Alone Will Tell", "A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening", "Beautiful Blue Danube", "Stormy Weather", "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes", "Summertime", "Rhapsody in Blue", "Body and Soul" and many other tunes now firmly established in the American songbook.



Capt. Glenn Miller and arranger Sgt. Jerry Gray (Time-Life Photo, GMA)

Glenn Miller was totally immersed in the war effort. He wanted to do more. Specifically, he wanted to take his orchestra overseas. However, he had become invaluable to the AAF as a fund raiser and a morale booster. His bond tour appearances were exceedingly impressive, raising \$4 million in pledges per night at rallies in cities including St. Louis and Chicago. As much as he wanted to play in person for the troops overseas, Glenn had reservations and new family responsibilities. After years of trying to have children of their own and then hoping to adopt, in 1943, Helen and Glenn were able to bring to their home in Tenafly, New Jersey their new son, Steven. Their affection and deep love for their new son was obvious to all. By the time Steve reached his first birthday, Helen and Glenn had started the process of bringing home a sister for Steve.



Two Loving and Adoring Parents with their son Steven (GMA Miller Family Collection)

The American Band of the AEF

In the spring of 1944, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered Gen. Raymond F. Barker, Deputy Commander of SHAEF in England (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) to begin discussions with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London and the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) in Los Angeles toward his plan to create a new, fully-integrated SHAEF Broadcasting Service for allied personnel that would incorporate American, British and Canadian programming. The plan was resisted by both sides, who wanted to maintain their independent programming, although the AFRS English-based service, American Forces Network-Europe (AFN) was dependent upon BBC engineers for transmission facilities. Eventually the AFRS chief Col. Tom Lewis would fly to London and give his reluctant approval for the service. The BBC remained adamant in their opposition. Eisenhower asked Prime Minister Winston Churchill to intervene. A compromise was reached with the BBC. The new radio service would be called the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme of the BBC (AEFP). It would report to Gen. Barker but would be run by a prominent BBC executive, Mr. Maurice Gorham. He, in turn, was assisted by BBC producer, Cecil Madden, and Lt. Col. David Niven, the actor who had been serving in a combat unit and recently removed for radio duties. An American deputy was chosen for Mr. Gorham in the person of Lt. Col. Edward Montague Kirby, the head of Army broadcasting in Washington who had been instrumental in creating the "Army Hour" and "Command Performance" programs.

In organizing AEF, the staff made several determinations. First, that programming would reflect the relative size of each nation's troop component or 50% American, 35% British and 15% Canadian. Announcers would be representatives of all three. News programming would come from the BBC. Entertainment programming was heavily dependent upon AFRS transcriptions of American network radio programs which were flown on a priority basis by the AAF Air Transport Command from California to London. Programs could be put on the air over AEF within a week of being recorded. However, the new service sought live programming to fill their schedule. Cecil Madden recalled that he could get any entertainer who was traveling to Europe for USO shows and other tours, but that was not enough. The idea was presented that AEF would be staffed with full orchestras and singers from each country. Thus, the British Band of the AEF was conceived, and would be directed by RSM George Melachrino. The Canadian Band of the AEF would be sent over and consist of the Canadian Army band and signers then touring west to Vancouver and directed by Capt. Bob Farnon. Kirby did not have to think too hard to imagine who he and SHAEF would want as the American Band of the AEF.

Gen. Eisenhower of SHAEF sent a letter to Gen. "Hap" Arnold of the AAF requesting Capt. Glenn Miller and the AAFTC Orchestra be transferred to England to become the American Band of the AEF (the title was originally the American Band of the Supreme Allied Command). The AEF would be going live and "on the air" D-Day +1, June 7, 1944. The AAF reluctantly granted their permission, under the condition that they retained "ownership" of the orchestra and that their star attraction would be returned to them following their assignment overseas.

In late May 1944, word reached New Haven that at least 62 members of the AAFTC orchestra and staff would soon be heading for England. Administrative Officer Lt. Don Haynes, Miller's former civilian manager, began to make preparations. The orchestra itself was on a war bond tour in the Midwest. Their final "I Sustain the Wings" broadcasts would be aired from Chicago on Saturday, June 10, 1944. Glenn Miller departed New York by air for England accompanied by Sgt. Paul Dudley on June 18. The Air Transport Command C-54 arrived at Prestwick, Scotland following intermediate stops at Gander, Newfoundland and Reykjavik, Iceland. Upon arrival, Miller and Dudley traveled directly to London to meet the AEF management and staff.

The band followed by sea June 19, aboard the troop transport and former ocean liner "Queen Elizabeth." Following a rough six-day crossing, the members of the orchestra arrived at Scotland's Firth of Clyde and were met by Miller. They proceeded by rail south to London. Glenn filled the men in on where they were going and that London was currently experiencing a terrible blitzing from the frightening German V-1 "doodle bug" or "buzz bomb" flying bomb attacks. The initial quarters for the band were located at 25 Sloane Court. Many V-1 flights came over this location and were dropping into surrounding neighborhoods when their engines cut out, causing serious damage and

casualties. This greatly worried Glenn. On Saturday, July 1, Miller was able to relocate his unit 50 miles north of London to the town of Bedford. Many of the BBC broadcasting activities had been moved up to Bedfordshire during the war, including Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony. Miller, accompanied by David Niven, had gone up and made arrangements for the move, including setting up broadcasting facilities. On Sunday, July 2, one day after the Miller unit moved out, a V-1 landed and exploded a few feet in front of 25 Sloane Court, killing almost 100 people. It had been a very close call! Glenn was shocked and relieved. For some time he had come to believe in what he called "the Miller luck." The Sloane Court escape fortified Glenn's optimism.

With their broadcasting facilities completed, the band would begin its schedule over AEF as well as the BBC. With his commercial sense and organizational ability, Glenn created a series of programs to showcase his talent and to fill AEF air time. The schedule included broadcasts by the full orchestra, "The American Band of the AEF" or "Moonlight Serenade", hosted by Miller. Sgt. Ray McKinley directed the dance band embedded within the full orchestra on "The Swing Shift" or "American Dance Band", Sgt. George Ockner and the strings performed on "Strings with Wings", Sgt. Mel Powell and a jazz combo held forth on "The Uptown Hall" or "Swing Sextette" and Sgt. Johnny Desmond had his own program along with some of the strings, Jack Russin on piano and Addison Collins' French horn, "A Soldier and a Song," or "Songs by Sgt. Johnny Desmond."

All of the programs immediately caught the attention of not only service personnel but the British public. The AEF transmitters and frequencies blanketed southern England as well as the Continent. The British public was tired of the war and starving for celebrity entertainment. They immediately embraced and fell in love with Glenn Miller and his AEF orchestra. Admirers included colleagues such as Sir Adrian Boult, who would conduct "Strings with Wings" in a special appearance and also was a frequent visitor to their broadcasts and rehearsals.

Within weeks after the Miller organization went on the air, Maurice Gorham summoned Miller to a meeting. BBC engineers were upset with the volume changes in the Miller music; they said that they could only hear the louder passages and not the softer music. They requested that Miller have his men play at a constant volume. Miller declined. The BBC pulled Miller's programs and was deluged by a listener revolt. Newspaper and magazine editorials condemned the decision. Miller's programs, which had remained on AEF, were quietly resumed over the BBC.

Soon after arriving in England, the orchestra began a series of in-person concerts at air bases throughout the United Kingdom. This focus was natural as this was still an AAF unit. The group often appeared on a flat bed truck provided by the AAF. If possible, the men were motored to their concerts in buses. For longer trips, they were flown in either C-47 transport aircraft, which could operate into RAF Twinwood Farm, a training field just north of Bedford, or, aboard B-17 and B-24 aircraft which operated from AAF Thurleigh, which was several miles further up the road. On one trip, the aircraft Miller and Don Haynes were aboard almost collided with a bomber returning from a mission. Once again, the “Miller luck” held true.



Concert, USAAF Podington (Station 109), August 25, 1944 (U. S. Air Force)

A Touch Of Home

“Next to a letter from home, Capt. Miller, your organization is the greatest morale booster in the ETO,” 8th Air Force commander Lt. Gen. James “Jimmy” Doolittle told Glenn at the end of a July 31, 1944 concert at Wycombe Abbey. Everywhere the orchestra went, it was greeted with immense enthusiasm. Service personnel reacted to their appearances with just the sort of wild cheering and yelling that Glenn had expected. Starved for real live music and “a touch of home”, they were awesome audiences, often in huge aircraft hangers. Especially touching were appearances not only for AAF and RAF aircrew, many of whom the men realized might be killed or wounded on combat missions over Europe, but also appearances at hospitals and before troops recently back from combat. The orchestra appeared for airborne (paratroop) units of the 82nd and 101st Airborne between their June 1944 drops in Normandy and September 1944 drops in Holland. One day in Bedford, Don Haynes was introduced to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, who had been visiting the local American Red Cross Club. The Queen extended her right hand, shook hands warmly, and, smiling, said, “Let me commend you and Captain Miller, and the members of your fine organization for the wonderful morale work you are doing. The Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret are avid Glenn Miller fans and listen to your nightly wireless broadcasts regularly.” Another big fan turned out to be Gen. Eisenhower. The one time Miller and his men met “Ike” was at a concert for his headquarters staff. Following the concert, the Supreme Commander made a point of going over to Glenn and personally thanking him for the orchestra’s important contribution to the morale of his troops. In August 1944, confirmation arrived of Glenn Miller’s promotion to Major. The longer the orchestra remained in England, the greater its popularity grew and the demands on its time and energy. The men maintained a constant and backbreaking schedule. As the weather turned from summer to a fall chill, they often played in hangers wearing winter gloves and overcoats. By the end of October 1944, they had to suspend such major concerts. When the orchestra went to England, announcer and administrative officer Lt. Don Briggs had remained behind. Sgt. Paul Dudley, former producer of the “Coca Cola Spotlight Bands” radio series joined Glenn’s group along with Cpl. Paul Dubov who came along as announcer. Over AEF, well known British announcers were assigned to the Miller broadcasts and British singers were guest stars on his broadcasts. As the band traveled around the United Kingdom, Glenn often commented on the condition of the aircraft that they were flying aboard. He felt that his men were important and should be flown aboard aircraft in good condition and not necessarily ones that had been pulled out of combat service. Glenn also became homesick. Carl Swanson and Steve Steck from the orchestra helped Glenn build a model of the ranch home that he planned to build in Monrovia after the war. Glenn spoke often of his postwar plans and his desire to offer any member of the AAF Orchestra a job with him in California. A new tune, written by Glenn and singer, Artie Malvin, of the Crew Chiefs, and published by Mutual Music back in the United States, was being performed by the dance band and sung by Ray McKinley, “I’m Headin’ for California.”

Two major American stars came to visit England on USO tours in August and September, 1944, Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore. Bing Crosby was completely knocked out by the ABAEF. The fond memories of the men for Bing matched those that he held for Glenn. Crosby was a major hit on his own in Britain but was greatly interested in his broadcasts and appearances with the Miller AEF orchestra. Several recordings survive to document their historic collaboration. Dinah Shore also broadcast and recorded with the orchestra. More recorded examples of their appearances together exist, including outtakes recently located in the EMI vaults by the GMA. A war relief fundraising recording session was arranged at the HMV Abbey Road Studio and the recordings of Shore performing with the orchestra are elegant. The Abbey Road Studio would later become famous as the recording studio for the Beatles.

The full orchestra started traveling into London weekly to broadcast their program, although the sub-units continued to broadcast from Bedford. The location for the London performances was the Queensberry All-Services Club, where the orchestra could appear before a live audience of allied service personnel. Around the corner from the club was Kettner's Restaurant, which Glenn (and Bing) greatly enjoyed. Miller kept a billet at the Mount Royal Hotel for his business in London along with his quarters in Bedford. The sub-units of the band appeared on Cecil Madden's "An American Eagle in Britain" program, which was broadcast both in Britain and transmitted to the United States from the American Red Cross Club in Dunker's Den, Picadilly. Another transatlantic program broadcast weekly during the war was "Atlantic Spotlight", which included announcers and performers both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Glenn Miller and the AEF orchestra appeared from London; ironically, they had appeared as the AAFTC orchestra from New York months earlier.

Another assignment for Maj. Glenn Miller and the ABAEF would come from the OWI and their ABSIE operation in London. Among their multi-lingual broadcasts, ABSIE beamed a program to the German armed forces called "The Wehrmacht Hour." The host for the program was a German-speaking female announcer identified as "Ilse Weinberger" (most ABSIE announcers used pseudonyms and not their actual names). Artists visiting London were guests on the program. Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore and even Spike Jones appeared. There is no record of the German audience reaction to Spike Jones. Marlene Dietrich was a guest and did not have any problem communicating in the German language. Maj. Miller would record up to nine "Wehrmacht Hour" programs for ABSIE in October and November of 1944. Glenn's struggle with phonetic German is most apparent. The orchestra recorded these programs at Abbey Road Studios, as they had the Dinah Shore war relief session. There is documented evidence and testimony from former German military personnel that these programs were definitely heard and enjoyed by the German forces. The ABSIE programs are preserved by the GMA.



"Jazz Jamboree," London, October 1944 (GMA)

In early November, the Marquis of Queensberry gave a party for the orchestra at Kettner's. It was a gala affair. Among the guests was A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty. During October, the orchestra had been a smash hit at a Jazz Jamboree held at the Stall Theatre in Kingsway, London. This was in response to many requests for a public concert because the orchestra had only been appearing in person before service audiences. On November 13, Glenn flew aboard the Air Transport Command European Division flight from London (Bovingdon) to Paris (Orly) for meetings at SHAEF headquarters at Versailles. He would return to England on November 18. During this trip, Glenn had one short but legendary meeting and several longer and more involved meetings. On November 14, he was summoned before Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff. General George C. Marshall, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in Washington, was aware of the success of the Miller organization. He wanted to add prestige to the United States Army Band, and ordered Smith to contact Miller. Glenn did not know why he was being summoned. When Miller entered Smith's office, the chief of staff asked him "How would you like to direct the U. S. Army band?" Miller replied "I would not, sir." Smith said "why not?" Miller answered, "I do not understand that type of music, sir." The interview ended with Smith saying "Thank you, that's all, Miller." Later, Smith reportedly said "at least that son-of-a-bitch Miller knows what he wants." Amazing what an accurate impression Glenn made in just fifteen seconds.

Glenn's other business was very important. Gen. Barker had long agreed with Miller that the orchestra ought to visit France and get closer to the front-line troops. They could hold concerts in Paris for troops on leave; Glenn was also anxious to get closer to the front lines but this was probably not possible. In fact, AEF had planned as early as September 1944 and Barker had approved that upon the completion of AEF broadcasting facilities in Paris that the ABAEF be re-located to the Continent ("Far Shore").



Maj. Glenn Miller and guest Irene Manning, ABSIE "Wehrmacht Hour" recording session, November 1944 (GMA)

While Miller had no problem moving ahead with plans for the move to Paris with Gen. Barker and SHAEF, convincing Mr. Gorham, AEF and the BBC engineering staff to go ahead with the plan was another matter. Gorham was responsible for the continuity of AEF programming. As both George Melachrino and Bob Farnon would later confirm, even they, as well as everyone else, realized that Glenn and his unit were AEF's star attraction. The ABAEF was essential to the AEF. There were a limited number of telephone transmission lines between England and France over which radio programs could be sent back to the BBC and then sent out over their transmitters. The priority for use of the lines was essential military communications, not radio entertainment programming. In order to secure the approval of the AEF,

Glenn agreed to pre-record six weeks' worth of programming by his full orchestra and their various sub-units. Because this would require a nonstop marathon recording schedule, he put it up to a vote of the men. They wanted to move to France and they voted yes. So between November 20 and December 12, they recorded six weeks' worth of programs while also working their normal AEF and ABSIE schedule. This took superb training and discipline, and is remarkable compared to latter-day artists, who take weeks to complete one recording let alone an album.

There was one catch! AEF and the BBC could not assemble enough recording discs to handle the load. The resourceful and focused Miller contacted HMV, the English branch of RCA Victor, and they came up with the extra discs necessary to complete the task. To be safe, AEF approved the transfer to France as a six-week trial with the orchestra then returning to England if the broadcasting facilities and transmission capabilities for broadcasts proved to be inadequate (in the event, they did not). The war was going so well at that point there was already talk of the orchestra potentially being sent back home in the spring of 1945 and then sent on to the Pacific Theatre. The AEF announced the ABAEF move to France in the AEF Edition of the BBC Radio Times weekly magazine, which had a circulation of over two million service personnel. The troops knew that Maj. Glenn Miller and the ABAEF were coming over to the Continent from England in mid-December and among their first planned appearances would be a gala Christmas Day broadcast from Paris, which would air along with the other AEF orchestras from London and also be transmitted back to the United States.

Word had come from Helen that Steve's new sister, Jonnie Dee, would soon be arriving to her home and family. Glenn was delighted and could not wait to get home and meet his daughter.

In late November, Lt. Don Haynes flew to Paris to make arrangements to find suitable quarters for the orchestra. In Paris, Haynes ran into an VIII AAF Service Command staff officer that he and Glenn had become acquainted with at their Milton Ernest Hall dining facility in Bedfordshire. This was Lt. Col. Norman F. Baessell. By November 1944, Baessell was detached from his duties as HQ Commandant at Milton Ernest for VIII AAF Service Command activities on the Continent with the USSTAF (U. S. Strategic and Tactical Air Forces, Europe). A new air depot was being built and Baessell was assigned to this important project. Baessell was a frequent traveler to and from AAF facilities in France and Belgium.

A Fateful Flight

The schedule for the orchestra to travel from Bedford to France was set for Saturday, December 16. Don Haynes was scheduled to fly ahead of the orchestra to firm up their billeting plans. Meanwhile, Glenn was trying to arrange for the orchestra's French stay to be extended, and wanted also to confirm further details of radio and concert logistics with SHAEF. He was very frustrated that the billeting plans had not been completed, and apparently was not pleased. He ordered that Haynes' travel orders be changed and that he fly ahead to firm up arrangements and conduct other business instead of Haynes, and that Haynes would accompany the orchestra.

The military had strict regulations for celebrities, in uniform or not. The policy had been necessary in dealing with Maj. Clark Gable, who was assigned to film a combat documentary about aerial gunners in England. Gable had stowed away on several B-17 missions over the Continent. The AAF was terrified that Gable might have been shot down, captured and put on display by the Nazis as a trophy. This meant that all transportation by air for someone like Maj. Glenn Miller had to be formally approved and in no event was he permitted to travel into harm's way.

Glenn's travel orders were cut, calling for him to depart AAF Bovingdon aboard the scheduled SHAEF shuttle on or about Thursday, December 14. The Marquis of Queensberry threw a going away party for the men on the evening of Tuesday, December 12, upon completion of their pre-recordings. Glenn received bon voyage messages from Maurice Gorham, Cecil Madden and the Duke of York, all thanking him for a job well done and looking forward to success for the orchestra on the Continent.

Glenn decided to go ahead if possible the day after the party. However, the weather on Wednesday, December 13 was bad and flights were grounded. At lunch the next day in Bedfordshire, Baessell told Haynes that he planned to fly to Paris on Friday, December 15, and he could take Miller along with him if necessary. Haynes called Glenn, who had been grounded once again on December 14 due to the bad weather. Even if conditions improved the next day, the SHAEF shuttle had been grounded for several days prior, and Miller would be bumped by officers with higher priority who had also been waiting. Glenn accepted Baessell's invitation over the telephone, asked Haynes to drive down to London, pick him up and take him up to Bedford. Haynes fetched Miller. They had dinner that evening with Baessell and several other officers, followed by a game of poker. The next day, Glenn waited with Haynes at Milton Ernest for word from Baessell's pilot, who was flying in from an Air Depot to pick up Baessell and their passenger. After lunch, word came, and the three drove the mile and a half over to the RAF Twinwood Farm aerodrome.



W/O Paul Dudley, Maj. Glenn Miller, Lt. Don Haynes, Queensberry All-Services Club, London, December 5, 1944

The weather was overcast at 2,000 feet with restricted visibility. The aerodrome was not fogged in as later portrayed in the movie "The Glenn Miller Story." The UC-64A aircraft landed routinely and idled its engine. Baessell and Miller got aboard. Miller's chain of command was not aware that he had accepted a ride with Baessell and aboard a single engine aircraft that had recently been serviced for a carburetor part recall. Pilot F/O J. R. Stuart Morgan taxied the aircraft and departed on Runway 27 at 1:55 p.m. British Summer Time. The aircraft and its occupants were never seen again.

For further information about the events of December 15, 1944 will be detailed in the forthcoming book "Resolved."

Aftermath and Legacy

The orchestra arrived at Orly Field, Paris, on Monday, December 18, following several more days of delays. On Saturday morning, the German army had launched their massive counterattack in the Ardennes which would come to be known as the “Battle of the Bulge.” SHAEF and all levels of allied operations had been thrown into a state of confusion. Unknown to SHAEF or the orchestra was a missing aircraft report that had been dutifully filed December 16 by the 35th Depot Repair Squadron at the 2nd Strategic Air Depot, Abbots Ripton (the air depot was located adjacent to Alconbury air base). They could not locate UC-64A #44-70285 and pilot Morgan. They were as yet unaware of his passengers or whereabouts. Upon arrival, Don Haynes and the men were surprised that Glenn Miller was not at Orly to meet them. After getting the men squared away, Haynes went to SHAEF to locate Glenn. When he arrived looking for Glenn and relating that he’d seen Glenn off, Gen. Barker and his staff went into immediate crisis mode. They checked with airfields to see if the aircraft had made an emergency landing somewhere. They checked with anti-aircraft batteries to see if anyone had shot at anything. And, of course, they called the VIII AFSC and the 35th Repair Squadron. Within hours, if not minutes, they came to a horrifying realization that the plane had gone down, probably over the English Channel. The missing aircrew report was amended to add Baessell and Miller as passengers. Gen. Orvil A. Anderson, Deputy Commander of the Eighth Air Force was a distant cousin of Major Miller. He launched a search but had no illusions. The plane and its occupants were lost. In the coming weeks, the Eighth Air Force would conduct an investigation and held an inquiry which met in Bedford on January 20, 1945. They concluded that (a.) Major Glenn Miller essentially boarded the wrong plane on the wrong day without the knowledge or approval of his chain of command; (b.) the aircraft had likely been either flown into the water due to pilot disorientation; or (c.) had experienced an unrecoverable mechanical failure flying at or below 1,500 feet, possibly due to carburetor icing or other another cause; and (d.) with marginal and deteriorating weather conditions a contributing factor in any case.

On December 6, 1944, Glenn had recorded a very touching Christmas greeting for Helen in which he expressed his desire to come home to his family and resume their life together at their future home in California. That message reached Helen after she received a telegram December 23 from Washington and a personal telephone call from Gen. H. H. “Hap” Arnold. She was devastated! Helen would move to California, raise her children, and pass away unexpectedly in 1966. From December 18 until then, SHAEF and the Eighth Air Force were trying to come to grips with how they could have lost Major Glenn Miller. The orchestra was scheduled to broadcast December 25, Christmas Day. Pre-recordings that had been made prior to the French trip had Glenn’s voice on them. As it was, he was being heard on the air up to December 24, when SHAEF issued a communiqué announcing his disappearance. The pre-recordings were either remade with announcer Sgt. Keith Jameson being dubbed in replacing Miller. The ABSIE German language broadcasts were canceled.

The December 25, 1944 Christmas AEF special went on the air as scheduled. The ABAEF would remain on the Continent on a permanent basis until it returned to the United States in August, 1945. Under the direction of Sgts. Jerry Gray and Ray McKinley, the men would go on to make even more history with their AEF radio broadcasts and personal appearances. They would travel to the French Riviera, Germany and the Alps. They would play many concerts and events, including a reception for Soviet Marshal Koniev. They performed for over 10,000 American troops at the Nuremberg, Germany stadium where Hitler had made his many rabid speeches in the 1930s.

The orchestra would resume the "I Sustain the Wings" broadcasts in September, 1945, taking over from the Sgt. Felix Slatkin AAF orchestra who had succeeded the Sgt. Harry Bluestone AAF orchestra. On November 17, 1945, at Bolling Field in Washington, D. C., the final "I Sustain the Wings" broadcast was aired over NBC. Later, the orchestra appeared at the National Press Club in Washington before a distinguished gathering, including President Harry Truman, Gen. Eisenhower and Gen. Arnold. Before their performance, Gen. Eisenhower and Gen. Arnold went over to talk to the musicians, tell them that their work was finished and that they were officially getting out of the army. Then, emcee Eddie Cantor said the following words:

"Glenn Miller was a very wonderful man who led a very wonderful band. As a civilian, he led an orchestra that for three and a half years was the number one band in America. Glenn could have stayed here in America. He could have stayed and made himself a lot more money, and then, if he wanted to, he could have retired, an independently wealthy man. But he chose not to. He was an extremely patriotic man and he felt an intense obligation to serve his country that had gone into war. So he disbanded his great orchestra, and he formed an even greater one. Still, he could have remained here in America. But again he chose not to. Instead, he chose to take himself and his orchestra overseas, to where he felt he could do the most good for our fighting men. And what a tremendous morale-building job he and his men did over there. And now this great band is back here with us this evening, but without its most important member, Major Glenn Miller himself. For, as we know all too well, he made the supreme sacrifice for his country. But he will never be forgotten, for always we will have the sound of the great music that he created. And now, it is an extreme honor for me to present to you this evening the Glenn Miller Army Air Forces Band under the direction of Sergeant Ray McKinley."

As Cantor concluded his introduction, the curtains parted and the band played the opening bars of Glenn's own composition "Moonlight Serenade." And then an amazing thing happened. With no hesitation whatsoever, President Truman, in a spontaneous gesture of appreciation for everything that Glenn and his men had done, rose to his feet to lead the entire audience in a standing ovation for the orchestra. No popular musician in the history of our country had ever received this kind of recognition from the President of the United States of America.

That night, the men of the AAF orchestra realized the magnitude of their contribution and, possibly, that the music that they had created would never die.

Millions of people around the world never forgot Glenn Miller and millions more born later want to learn about him and enjoy his music.

Miller music, recordings, bands playing in the Miller style, the Glenn Miller Orchestra and so many other reminders of Glenn Miller have continued to this day.

The University of Colorado Glenn Miller Archive is the official repository of the life, legacy and property of Glenn and Helen Miller.

Alan Cass regularly presents the audio-visual presentation "A Portrait of Glenn Miller" at public events and for many groups, including the annual Glenn Miller Birthplace Society Festival in Clarinda, Iowa.

Prepared by Dennis M. Spragg

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