

A PORTRAIT OF GLENN MILLER



Alton Glenn Miller
(1904-1944)

Produced by:
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Alton Glenn Miller, 1904-1944

Produced by Dennis M. Spragg for the University of Colorado Glenn Miller Collections, with commentary from the George T. Simon (1912-2001) Collection and Papers, Edward F. Polic Papers, and Christopher Way Collection.

Dedication

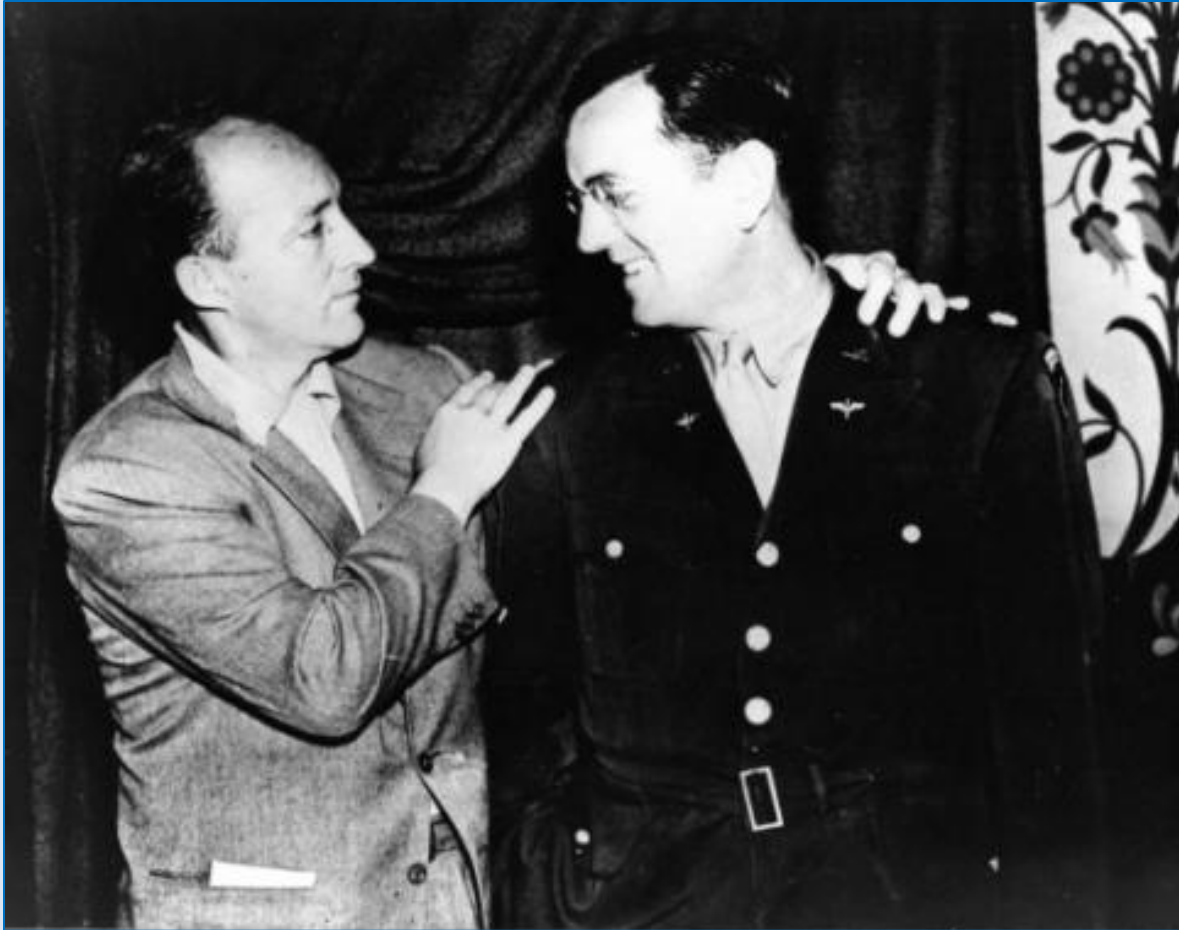
To Alan Cass, Curator, Glenn Miller Archive, 1969-2015, beloved friend and mentor.

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. 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 the great AAF Orchestra. 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 lifestyle 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 foreword of Simon’s 1974 book “Glenn Miller and his Orchestra” (Thomas W. Crowell, New York). The manuscript and research notes are among the GMC George T. Simon Collection and Papers.



Bing Crosby and Maj. Glenn Miller, London, August 31, 1944
(Courtesy of Edward F. Polic)

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 string bass player Trigger Alpert. They had been talking about Glenn's civilian band, in which these two sergeants had played such vital 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 days to come when the band would fly to the Continent, entertain the troops, and ultimately return to America. Glenn would settle on his California ranch, and the band would work hard for six months out of the year, relaxing for the other six. Everyone would make a lot of money and be very satisfied. 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 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. Originally, Haynes had been slated to fly to Paris ahead of the group to find accommodations for the men. But Glenn was facing serious deadlines with the preparations for broadcasting facilities and his commanding officer, Lt. Col. David Niven, had ordered Glenn to come ahead of the band instead of Don to complete the arrangements. Haynes would come over with the band a few days later. The weather was miserable on both December 13 and December 14 when Glenn attempted to travel on the daily Air Transport Command passenger service for VIPs from Bovingdon to Paris Orly aerodrome. The flights were canceled due to the weather on the continent, and Glenn could not obtain a seat until at least December 17. On the afternoon of December 14, an impatient Miller accepted an invitation to accompany an acquaintance, Lt. Col. Norman F. Baessell, on an Eighth Air Force Service Command flight from RAF Twinwood, near Bedford, to Villacoublay aerodrome near Paris. The plane was a single-engine Noorduy C-64 Norseman liaison and utility aircraft, piloted by Flight Officer John R. S. Morgan. The weather was wet and cold, but acceptable for local flights in England. The pilot was not cleared for an IFR (instrument) flight above the weather to France because the Paris area forecast was problematic. Lt. Col. Baessell, a senior official, directed the pilot to proceed via CFR (contact or visual) flight below the weather. The overcast cloud cover would drop considerably by the time the aircraft reached the English Channel, exposing it to severe icing conditions. As the C-64 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 apprehensive major, "Do you want to live forever?"

Early Years

"I couldn't stand the name Alton. I can still hear my mother calling for me across the field, 'Alton,' '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 tiny 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 became 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 a great deal about style, grooming, and presentation from Moyer, a World War I Navy veteran; lessons that he would put into practice with his 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 receive the break that was to transform his entire musical career and his life. Bandleader Ben Pollack hired him. 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 for his skills as 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 Helen Dorothy Burger, a woman he had met and courted at the University of Colorado. Helen was a member of a pioneer and prominent Boulder family, whose relatives were among the first graduates of the 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 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 resume touring. Glenn Miller was Helen Miller."

The first musician I 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 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.



Helen Dorothy Burger, University of Colorado Boulder, 1923



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 bands, Glenn accepted an offer from British band leader Ray Noble. Miller would organize an American band for Noble because the musicians' union would not allow Noble to bring his musicians over to the United States. Noble would be joined by his legendary South African vocalist, Al Bowlly. Matched to their suave demeanor was the top-flight band that Miller organized for them, which would produce many memorable Victor recordings. These recordings featured future band leaders 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 refused to accept 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. Even though Glenn received an offer to join the music department at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios in Hollywood, they decided to take the risk. One can only imagine what might have happened if Glenn Miller had moved to California at that time to score music for motion pictures. But such was the respect that the music industry already had for the gifted arranger and organizer.

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra began rehearsals in February 1937 and soon started 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, starting on May 17. 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. They returned to the Raymor in Boston and recorded four more Brunswick records in November. Glenn was frustrated with his booking agency, Rockwell-O'Keefe, which would soon become General Amusements Corp. He had lost approximately \$30,000 and was frustrated by the lack of radio time and consistently better bookings. Glenn accepted a loan from Tommy Dorsey, who advanced the money on the condition that his agent Arthur Michaud would become Glenn's agent. Tommy's ulterior motive, in addition to ownership, appears to have been a desire to move Glenn's representation to his agency, which was the Music Corporation of America.

The band was a talented, if free-spirited, group with several prima donnas and evident substance abuse issues. There were also issues with Kathleen Lane that made their way into the trade press. Faced with a decision to switch agencies and locked into a ninety-day cancellation notice, 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. In addition, Helen Miller had become seriously ill and needed a major operation that would prevent her from bearing children.

The Breakthrough

Glenn's account manager at Rockwell-O'Keefe was Mike Nidorf, who strongly believed in Glenn and fought to retain his account., Nidorf successfully brought in Boston ballroom operator Simon "Cy" Shribman as an investor to provide substantial seed money and to help pay off what Miller felt was a loan from Tommy Dorsey, rather than an ownership stake. Dorsey disagreed. Although Miller had taken a break because of Helen's health and to give himself the ability to switch agencies, Nidorf retained Miller's account. Meanwhile, Miller free-lanced for Dorsey on the NBC Raleigh-Kool cigarette broadcasts while he worked out plans for a second band that he would style and staff differently.

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. 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, yet one that 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 fundamentally mathematical 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 GMC. 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 mathematical 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, moving forward 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

With the guidance of Nidorf and Schribman, Miller found the support to start over, with greater discipline, using a sound he had developed back in his Ray Noble days —a sound that would rely on precise musicianship from his band and his elegant arranging style. He paid off Tommy Dorsey and broke free from the brief grasp of Arthur Michaud, which greatly irritated "the Sentimental Gentleman."

The so-called “clarinet lead” was a key element of Miller’s new approach. He brought back Hal McIntyre and hired 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 singer, Bob Eberly), Wilbur Schwartz (clarinet), and Paul Tanner (trombone). The band’s first significant engagement was at the Paradise Restaurant in New York in June 1938, where they received significant national exposure through NBC radio broadcasts, spotlighting both the band and its vocalists, Ray Eberle and Gail Reese.

In addition to Nidorf and Shribman, Miller acquired another key ally during this period, RCA Victor recording chief Eli Oberstein. Miller signed a contract with the leading recording company, and in September 1938, the band recorded its first tracks for RCA Victor’s Bluebird label. It would be the start of one of the most successful recording runs in musical history.

Glenn Miller was now financed, had a recording contract, and he was appearing on national radio broadcasts over NBC. He 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 enhanced the Miller band’s on-stage appearance, and she brought an infectious enthusiasm.

The band began gaining a following among college students in the Northeast through campus appearances. Nidorf and Iona College student Tom Sheils brought the band to 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 Nidorf booked the band with the confident DeZutter to play the entire summer season of 1939 at the Glen Island Casino. This garnered substantial coast-to-coast airtime on NBC almost daily. 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, 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, Rehearsal at the Glen Island Casino, 1939

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 established themselves 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 undoubtedly arrived. How? Why? The answer was that the band was excellent, 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 airtime.

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 influential black band leaders, Count Basie and Jimmie Lunceford. It was Lunceford who recommended Glenn hire Durham on a free-lance basis. The working relationship and friendship between Miller and Lunceford have 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. Durham may have been the reason. Miller (RCA Victor-Bluebird) and Lunceford (Decca-Columbia) duplicated some of the same tunes for their record labels to a notable degree. However, Miller also admired and employed Basie’s “4/4” style rather than Lunceford’s “2/2” style, which Tommy Dorsey adopted when he hired Lunceford’s other ace arranger, Sy Oliver, on a full-time basis.

During July 1939, Marion Hutton collapsed at Glen Island from exhaustion. Young singer Kay Starr briefly replaced her. 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 appeared for 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, and they were ready to "dig" the newly popular Miller band. Their hopes were not dashed. The Miller band appeared with the newly popular black vocal group, The Ink Spots. Miller took a chance as a white band leader appearing with the group, given the social prejudices of the day. There was no need to worry. Miller directed Eddie Durham to write several dozen arrangements for the Ink Spots at no charge, which helped the group blend compatibly with the Miller band. The grateful Ink Spots presented Glenn with a diamond-studded gold watch at the end of the engagement, which helped solidify their popularity. The stage had been set for even more remarkable achievements and fame.

America's Number One Dance Band

In November 1939, Artie Shaw disbanded his band and fled to Mexico for a rest, only to reform it in 1940. Shaw's talented chief arranger, Jerry Gray (Generoso Graziano), was suddenly available. In a decision that would have a profound impact on the history 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 is almost endless. This decision, which paid dividends for Miller, did not sit well with Shaw or Miller's incumbent arranger, Bill Finegan, both of whom in their later years were critical of Miller. In addition to Jerry Gray, Shaw trumpet ace Johnny Best 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, and their advertising agency, Newell-Emmett, produced a popular CBS radio program that starred the famed "King of Jazz," Paul Whiteman, who was leaving the program. "Pops" 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" premiered on December 27, 1939, during the former Whiteman half-hour time slot. The following week, the series became a three-times-per-week, fifteen-minute program that aired on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings at 10:15 p.m. Eastern Time over CBS. When the band was home in New York, the announcer was Paul Douglas, who would later become a 20th-century film star at 20th Century Fox. The Andrews Sisters left the program after thirteen weeks, when it became evident that the Miller band could carry the program on its own.

Miller continued with 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. Newell-Emmett also recorded programs for rebroadcast with World Transcriptions and New York's Mutual network flagship station WOR. Most of the programs have survived and are the property of the Miller Estate. By 2025, a series of compact disc releases, produced by the Estate and Collections for the Glenn Miller Birthplace Society, will demonstrate the continued vitality of the broadcasts.



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

Another significant development for Glenn Miller at the start of 1940 was the band's first engagement at the Café Rouge of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, as well as another coast-to-coast "sustaining broadcast" on 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. They were hosted by a cross-section of NBC announcers including Hugh James, Al Robinson, Bill Abernathy, Lyle Van, Jack Costello, George Hicks and Ed Herlihy.

Miller worked hard to format the Chesterfield programs to maximize music and minimize talk within the format. 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 in 1940.

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.

Upon his newfound success, Glenn received a congratulatory letter from Dale Carnegie, the era's number one success advisor, whose "How to Win Friends and Influence People" had topped the bestseller 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 expanded significantly in the first half of 1940. Among the additions was a tune 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" Caceres (saxophone and clarinet), Ruben "Zeke" Zarchy (trumpet), and Herman "Trigger" Alpert (string bass). Miller would also take on Donald Haynes as manager, who traveled with Miller, later married Polly Davis, and was Glenn's constant partner during his escape while on the road with his band, particularly in 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 an 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 stay at Café Rouge 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 significant milestone for the ever-evolving Miller, who continued to refine and evolve his music. He added a trumpet chair, hiring a young player named Ray Anthony and, most importantly, Charlie Barnet arranger and trumpet star, Billy May, who had 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 went on to become successful band leaders in the 1950s, and May, of course, was an important composer and collaborator for many leading singers.

Hollywood Beckons as War Clouds Gather

America watched as World War II progressed in Europe and trouble brewed in Asia during 1940 and into 1941. President Franklin Roosevelt had won an unprecedented third term. The music industry was waging its war. 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 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 typically featured in films for musical segments only, with minimal relevance to the plot. Miller insisted on and secured a more integral role for himself and the band in the movie. Work on the film was scheduled to start in March and finish in May. The band started the year with two significant 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. The problem was that Claire never quite hit it off with the band, and Byrne had not wanted to let her go. He sued Miller, and they eventually settled, with Claire returning to Byrne.

On a more permanent note, Glenn added the vocal group the Modernaires, which included Hal Dickenson, Bill Conway, Ralph Brewster, and Chuck Goldstein. They recorded the theme of influential WNEW disc jockey, Martin Block, "Make Believe Ballroom Time" with Glenn in the fall of 1940. The group was part of Paul Whiteman's orchestra, and Whiteman was ready to disband 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 highly innovative and hip group for their time, immediately making a strong impact as a key element of the Miller band. Miller worked hard to integrate the Modernaires' sound with that 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.



Helen Miller and beloved Boston Terrier "Poppo", 1941



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.

During 1941 the military draft began to make inroads into the dance bands. The first member of Miller's band to be drafted was Trigger Alpert, replaced by Doc Goldberg from the Will Bradley-Ray McKinley band. Mindful that many young people were now going into the service, Glenn dedicated music on his commercial radio program to military installations. He went one step further in August 1941, convincing NBC to air a one-hour Saturday afternoon feature at 5:00 p.m. Eastern time called "Glenn Miller's Sunset Serenade." The program would feature a contest involving five service installations. Each base would pick its favorite tune. The general public was invited to write in during the following week and vote for its favorite of the five songs. The winner received a new RCA radio-phonograph console and 50 recordings by America's favorite artists. Glenn paid for the prizes out of his pocket. "Down Beat" magazine figured that each show cost Glenn \$1,000.00.



"Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" rehearsal, CBS Vine Street Theater, Hollywood, California, 1941

During 1941, Glenn financed three of his friends with new bands that were managed from the Miller business office. Charlie Spivak, Claude Thornhill, and Hal McIntyre were launched with Glenn's support. These bands, along with Miller's Mutual Music, Inc., greatly expanded the scope of his business interests. Although Glenn continued to be booked by General Amusements, he retained his former General Amusements account manager, Don Haynes, as his manager. Haynes also managed the three bands that Miller invested in. In 1942, he added the new Sam Donahue band to the stable before Donahue went into the Navy.

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 permanent residence. With film commitments and the lure of good weather, many band leaders and musicians were also contemplating permanent relocation to the West Coast.

The Miller band opened their third engagement at the Café Rouge in October 1941. Glenn featured a new addition to the band, his friend and legendary cornet virtuoso, Bobby Hackett, who would be soon be featured on the famous Jerry Gray composition "A String of Pearls," 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 band's "intelligence and good writing" and contributed greatly to many top recordings, thanks to the intimate sound of his playing, which Miller generously featured and admired. When not performing cornet solos, Hackett doubled in the guitar chair of the Miller band.

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 on the February 10, 1942, 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 have gladly worked the room at a loss just to secure the valuable airtime.

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 10, 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 incredible routines. Harry Warren and Mack Gordon again provided a memorable musical score, which included the huge Miller hits "At Last," "Serenade in Blue," and "I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo."

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 increasingly convinced that he could contribute more to the war effort by offering his services to the government, as some in the entertainment industry, including management and performers, had already volunteered. Music, radio, and film were essential 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 completed its work in Hollywood on May 24 and traveled east, playing at many service installations. In June and July, activity centered around Chicago. Ray Eberle departed from the band, and Skip Nelson (Scipione Mirabella) replaced him.

It was a big secret. With the support of musician and World War I veteran Lt. Cdr. Eddie Peabody, Glenn Miller submitted an application for a commission in the United States Naval Reserve on June 20, 1942. He had become one of the wealthiest entertainers and had numerous business obligations to consider, including contracts with personnel, a new Fox movie deal for at least three more films in 1943, 1944, and 1945; a three-year renewal with Chesterfield radio; and a new, long-term RCA recording agreement. Miller was a very secure and prosperous 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 musicians' union and their chief, James Cesar Petrillo, embarked on what would become a twenty-eight-month recording ban. 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 recorded a top-selling version of Mercer's equally popular "Skylark" earlier in the year. Another hit made 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 Gershwin 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 would soon regret even more than Glenn, who was deeply disappointed.

On August 12, Glenn sent a detailed letter offering his services 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 had already met confidentially in the spring of 1942 with officials who would play a key role in his future activities, including Lt. Col. Edward Kirby, a broadcasting executive organizing armed forces radio activities, and officers from the Army Air Forces' public relations and radio office, Maj. Howard Nussbaum and Capt. Sy Bartlett. 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 band's final performance was scheduled for 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 tie for popularity with Glenn Miller as the 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 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 in which he owned a stake.

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



Captain Alton Glenn Miller
United States Army Air Forces

Glenn Miller was assigned to the Army Specialist Corps after reporting for duty on October 7, 1942, at the 7th Service Command in Omaha, Nebraska. He traveled to Fort Meade, Maryland, for an abbreviated officer training course. 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. He was immediately assigned to the Army Air Forces and ordered to report to Maxwell Field, Alabama. It has often been speculated that the Army Air Forces were able to secure Miller due to a clerical oversight regarding his first name, Alton. However, the Army Air Forces knew exactly who Miller was, and they had a specific role in mind for him from the day he had interviewed in Washington.

Glenn remained at Maxwell Field until January 1943, when he was assigned to the Army Air Forces Technical Training Command at Knollwood Field, Southern Pines, North Carolina. He planned to organize a network of outstanding AAF bands. Each would contain musicians especially selected from the draft, trained to play both inspiring marching music and fantastic dance band music. He envisioned himself as a morale and band builder—the commander of the AAFTC, Maj. Gen. Walter R. Weaver gave Miller “carte blanche” authority to cut through red tape as he requisitioned personnel and resources. 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 wholly new and immense concept. Capt. Glenn Miller would play a crucial role in the AAF's ability to communicate with the American people and build morale.

Miller was appointed Director of Bands and Training for the AAFTTC. He was assigned for duty at AAF Basic Training Station #7, Atlantic City, New Jersey, where many musicians from the New York area were routed to attend basic training. 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 around the country. He sent instructions to musicians yet to be drafted about how to get themselves assigned to him. Miller was able to obtain some key men who had worked with him in civilian life, including Jerry Gray, Trigger Alpert, Zeke Zarchy, and Jimmy Priddy. He could assemble almost anyone he wanted to form both an elite radio production unit based in New York and the other AAF bands, which would staff key radio performance units in different 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 fundamental training. Frank Sinatra, who was ultimately 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.

Miller had a wealth of talent at his disposal. Some of the men who auditioned at Atlantic City were earmarked for the elite unit which Miller would direct, although most of them were sent around the country to the other new bands. One future musician and composer sent elsewhere was future composer Henry Mancini.

Not all the musicians and technicians that Miller and his staff selected came from the dance band or jazz communities. Many AAF bands and Miller's New York-based unit would include a full concert orchestra staff, including a complete string section.

“I Sustain the Wings”

During 1943 the AAF Technical Training Command and the AAF Flying Training Command merged into the unified AAF Training Command (AAFTC), based in Fort Worth Texas under the command of Maj. Gen. Barton K. Yount, a West Point classmate of Gen. Arnold. Capt. Glenn Miller was reassigned to the AAFTC with permanent station at Fort Worth. He was detached for duty to the AAF Technical School at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut and relieved duties as Director of Bands so that he could focus his attention on his new elite radio production unit and concert orchestra. Yale was the most convenient and practical AAF installation to midtown Manhattan and the network radio and recording facilities.

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, it was his habit, he carefully crafted a mixed group of veterans and relative newcomers that blended well together as a team. He also had the network of base bands available to him for backup and replacements when necessary. Because of the resources available to him, he could beef up the sections of his orchestra with extra trumpets, trombones and saxophones, as well adding a large string section. The 16-to-18-piece dance band had become a much larger concert orchestra that had jazz and dance band elements within it. 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, T/Sgt. Ray McKinley, who had led his own band; “Mac” would lead a 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 he would be in charge of producing the Miller AAF radio programs. T/Sgt. Paul Dudley had been producer of the Coca-Cola Spotlight bands series and Andre Kostelanetz CBS orchestra broadcasts. Well-known violin virtuoso 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 (reeds) and Steve Steck (trumpet). Bernie Privin (trumpet) and Hank Freeman (reeds) came from Artie Shaw. Jack Ferrier and Gabe Gelinas (reeds) came from Jan Savitt. Carmen Mastren (guitar) came from Tommy Dorsey. Perry Burgett (arranger), Jack Steele (trumpet) and Jim Harwood (trombone) came with Ray McKinley. Michael “Peanuts” Hucko (reeds) came from Will Bradley and Charlie Spivak. Bobby Nichols (trumpet) came from Vaughn Monroe.

Joining S/Sgt. Jerry Gray as arrangers were S/Sgt. Ralph Wilkinson, from the CBS Andre Kostelanetz “Pause That Refreshes on the Air” program and, in 1944, M/Sgt. Norman Leyden from the “Winged Victory” AAF Broadway production. M/Sgt. Zeke Zarchy (trumpet) became First Sergeant of the unit.

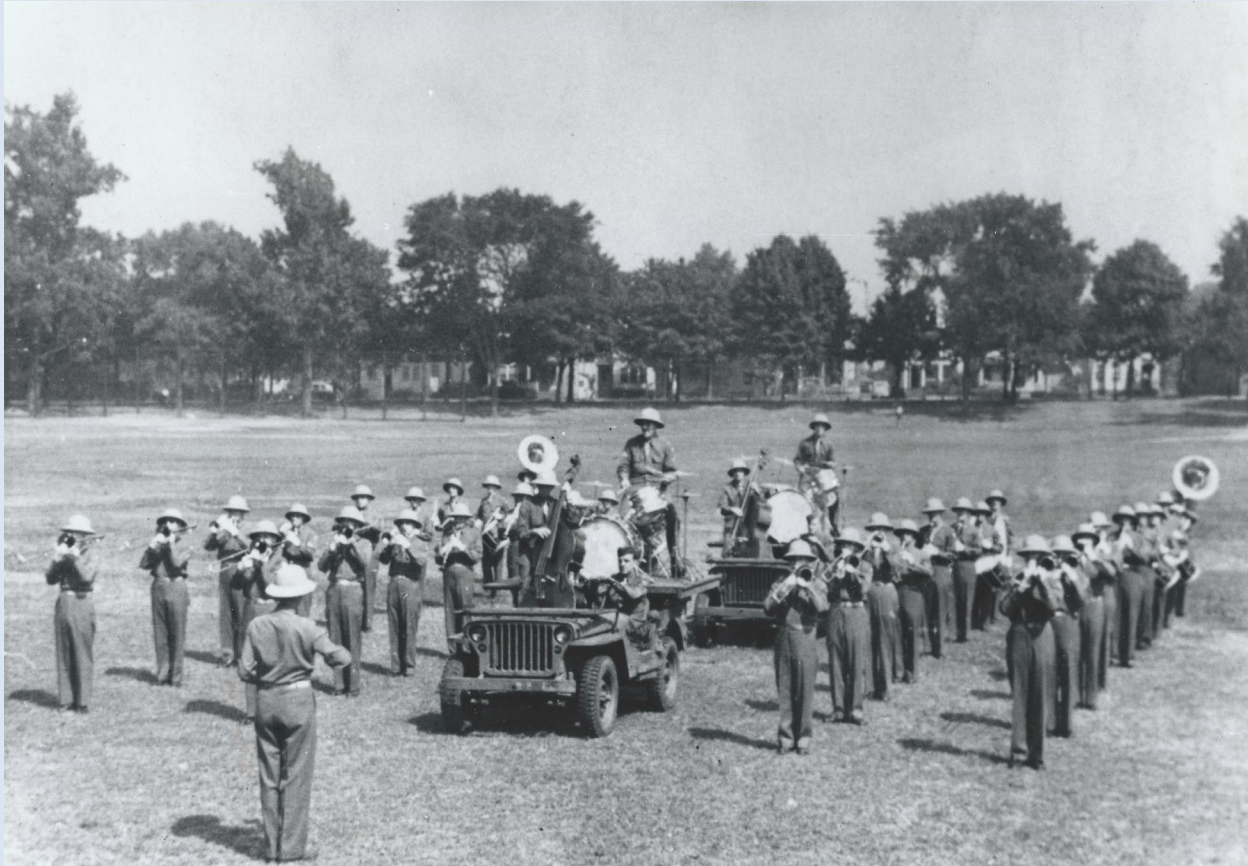


"I Sustain the Wings" Broadcast
Vanderbilt Theater
New York
November 1943

Stationed in New Haven, the band initially focused on refining its format and lineup for its eventual radio broadcasting and recording activities, which would be based in New York. Meanwhile, a marching band within the unit was formed to perform at official activities in New Haven, as per military regulations and protocol. The marching band became legendary with jazz-oriented marching versions of popular tunes such as “St. Louis Blues,” “Blues in the Night,” “Jersey Bounce,” “Deep in the Heart of Texas,” 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 ran a tongue-in-cheek article about the Miller’s activities, unfortunately titled “Afro-Saxon in the Woodpile,” wherein John Philip Sousa’s successor Edwin Franco Goldman lambasted Miller., who was quoted as saying “anyone can improve on Sousa.” Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall also complained, prompting the AAF HQ to request that Miller write a letter asking for a retraction. The “March of Time” newsreel featured a segment showcasing the marching band performing on the New Haven Green. The newsreel showcased what was called the “Jeep Band.” The marching band’s big drum sets and drummers were mounted aboard jeeps and driven alongside the musicians as they marched on the Green or at the Yale Bowl. The AAF believed that Miller was doing precisely the right thing to “modernize military music” because he continued to do so, much to the delight of the young people in the services who were marching and listening.

Perhaps the best-looking soldier of the men initially 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 the 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 Johnny Desmond from one of Miller’s network of base bands. Desmond had entered the service after working with Gene Krupa.



The "Jeep Band," Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, July 1943

Once transferred to the Miller unit, 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 had 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 whole orchestra with dramatic sketches that described the roles of various AAF units, jobs, and activities to the public. The purpose was to inform the public and encourage volunteers to join that branch of the service. By mid-July, the program was broadcast nationwide on the CBS network on Saturday afternoons. "I Sustain the Wings" moved to the entire NBC network on September 18. Within several weeks, it was broadcast at both 6:00 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. Eastern time every Saturday. The program was showcased on the AAF, in addition to a half-dozen other nationwide radio programs broadcast over several networks by the First AAF Production Unit on the West Coast and the AAFTC radio production unit in Fort Worth, Texas. Maj. Eddie Dunstedter, M/Sgt. Felix Slatkin and M/Sgt. Harry Bluestone directed the other large AAF radio units.

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 film and radio actor who became the Executive Officer of the Miller radio production unit. Crawford was an established Hollywood film star. 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.

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 skepticism 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 team. 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). Additionally, the unit featured a brilliant French horn player named Addison S. Collins, Jr., and a fine vocal quartet known as the Crew Chiefs.



"I Sustain the Wings" Broadcast, November 1943, NBC, Vanderbilt Theatre, New York

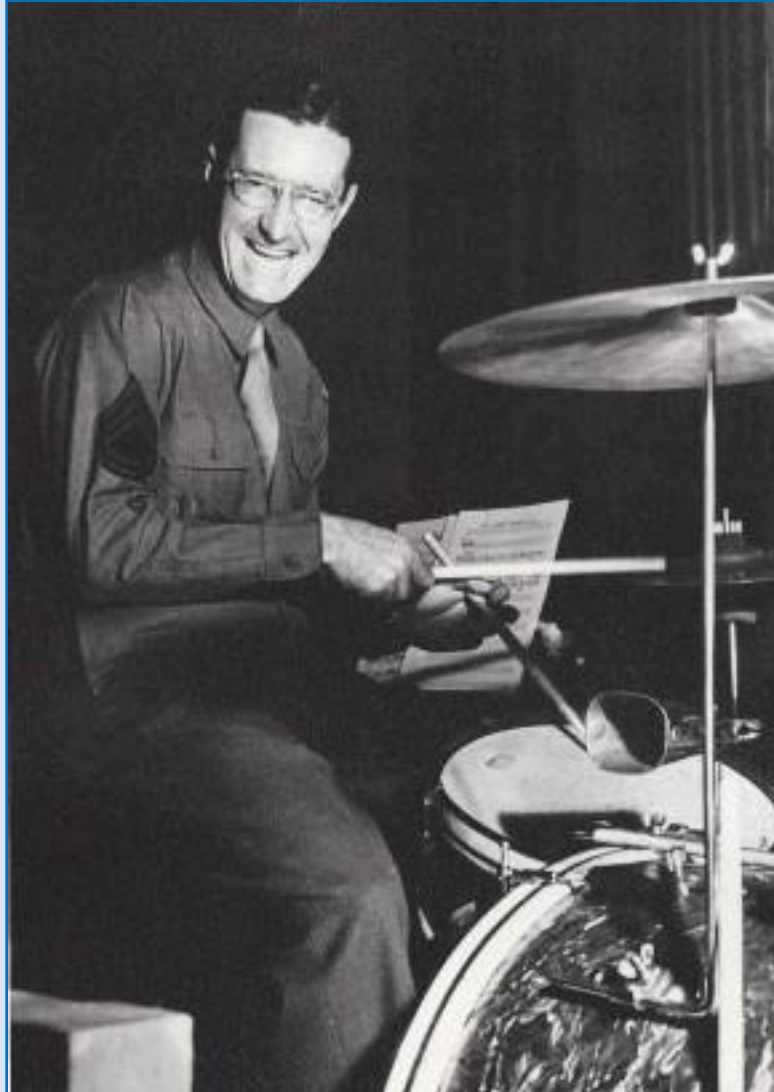
The orchestra commuted weekly from New Haven to New York to broadcast their network radio program. Once they moved to NBC, "I Sustain the Wings" was broadcast from the NBC Vanderbilt Theatre studio. In addition to their network program, the orchestra also had other essential recording responsibilities.

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 worldwide. Since the musicians' recording ban had continued with Victor and Columbia, the V-Discs were a notable exception made by the musicians and the industry to provide current recordings to the forces. After January 1944, the V-Disc program began to record directly from the Miller unit's broadcasts for inclusion on V-Discs. The AAFTC Orchestra was one of the most frequently issued artists to appear on V-Discs, alongside Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, the NBC Symphony, and Andre Kostelanetz. The GMC 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 foreign and domestic audiences. 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, titled "Uncle Sam Presents." It was broadcast in English with Lt. Briggs announcing and Capt. Miller hosting. The program was designed for allied service personnel worldwide and catered to their requests for favorite tunes. The Miller unit also recorded a series of programs for OWI at NBC on Friday afternoons after commuting from New Haven to New York. This was "Music from America," which was aimed at foreign audiences. The programs were recorded without announcements, allowing OWI local announcers to introduce the tunes in various languages. OWI "Uncle Sam Presents," and "Music from America" recordings are preserved

The United States Treasury Department aired various programs for the American public, which were syndicated to local radio stations to sell defense bonds and finance the war. Almost every popular artist participated. Several major band leaders, 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 several of these syndicated programs, some of which are now preserved.

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) and "Partners in Victory." (formatted for women and about women in uniform). The orchestra was also featured on the Armed Forces Radio Service programs "Command Performance," "G.I. Journal," and "G.I. Jive." Examples of these radio and recording appearances are also preserved at the GMC. The AAFTC, under the direction of Capt. Glenn Miller had set a new and exciting musical standard during his lifetime. The orchestra was a very different organization than the Miller civilian dance band. It is often misunderstood that in the AAF, Miller played his civilian music library, although some of the Miller favorites were carried over to the AAF orchestra with significant effect. Not one to stand still, Miller had, at government expense, taken advantage of the situation to significantly expand his musical horizons and quality. The AAF orchestra played current top 40 tunes on all their broadcasts from 1943 to 1944. Their programs kept Miller very much in the public consciousness.



T/Sgt. Ray McKinley

The jazz output of the orchestra was far superior to anything Miller had offered before enlisting. The entire 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 Pvt. (later S/Sgt.) Jerry Gray

Capt. Glenn Miller was 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 home their new son, Steven, to Tenafly, New Jersey. Their affection and deep love for their little Steve were evident to all. By the time the boy reached his first birthday, Helen and Glenn had started the process of bringing home another child.



Two Loving and Adoring Parents with their son Steven

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 a 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 independent programming; however, the AFRS English-based service, American Forces Network-Europe (AFN), was dependent on 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 its 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 senior BBC executive Maurice Gorham. He, in turn, was assisted by the brilliant BBC producer Cecil Madden and Lt. Col. David Niven, a peacetime Hollywood star. 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, was named to be Gorham's deputy and chief of SHEAF radio broadcasting.

In organizing AEF, the staff made several determinations. First, the programming would reflect the relative size of each nation's troop component, with 50% American, 35% British, and 15% Canadian. Announcers would represent 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 aired 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 secure any entertainer 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, consisting of the Canadian Army band and singers, and would then tour west to Vancouver, 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.

Before heading for England, Col. Kirby met with Capt. Miller and T/Sgt. Dudley to ascertain Miller's interest in being transferred to SHAEF and bringing Miller's radio production unit over to staff the AEF. Miller was thrilled with the opportunity.

On May 24, 1944, Gen. Eisenhower sent a letter to Gen. Arnold of the AAF requesting that Capt. Glenn Miller and his radio production unit were 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 go live and "on the air" on 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 the overseas assignment.

In early June 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. Donald Haynes, Miller's former civilian manager, began to make preparations. The band broadcast from their final "I Sustain the Wings" programs from Chicago on Saturday, June 10. Capt. Miller departed New York by air for England, accompanied by T/Sgt. 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 their new SHAEF and AEF colleagues.

The band followed by sea on 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 traveled by rail south to London. Glenn explained to the men that London was currently experiencing a terrible blitzing from the frightening German V-1 "doodle bug" or "buzz bomb" flying bomb attacks. The band's initial quarters were located at 25 Sloane Court. Many V-1 flights were dropping into surrounding neighborhoods when their engines cut out, causing severe damage and casualties. This greatly worried Glenn. On Saturday, July 1, Miller relocated his unit 50 miles north of London to the town of Bedford. Many of the BBC's broadcasting activities had been relocated to Bedfordshire during the war, including those of Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony.

Capt. Miller and Lt. Col. Niven went to Bedford and made arrangements for the move and to confirm broadcasting facilities. On Sunday, July 2, one day after the Miller unit moved out, a V-1 hit 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 his optimism.

With their broadcasting facilities complete, the band began its schedule on both AEF and the BBC. With his musical sense and organizational ability, Glenn created a series of programs to showcase his talent and fill AEF and BBC airtime. 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 Sextet" 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 flatbed 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

A Hunk O' 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. "Jimmy" Doolittle told Glenn at the end of a July 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 large audiences, often in big aircraft hangars. 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 wireless broadcasts regularly." Another big fan turned out to be Gen. Eisenhower. The only 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 coming up to Glenn and personally thanking him for the orchestra's significant 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 hangars wearing winter gloves and overcoats. By the end of October 1944, they had to suspend concerts. When the orchestra went to England, announcer and administrative officer Lt. Don Briggs remained behind. Cpl. Paul Dubov came along as announcer and T/Sgt. Dudley also announced broadcasts. Soon after the band arrived in the UK, Sgt. Broderick Crawford was transferred to AFN. Over AEF, British announcers were assigned to Miller's broadcasts, and British singers were featured as 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 essential and should travel 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 assisted Glenn in creating a model of the ranch home 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 Cpl. Artie Malvin, of the Crew Chiefs, performed by the dance band and sung by Ray McKinley, was titled "I'm Headin' for California."

Two prominent American stars visited England on USO tours in August and September 1944: Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore. The ABAEF completely knocked out Bing Crosby. 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. Col. Kirby arranged a war relief fundraising recording session 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 traveled 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, Piccadilly. 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 GMC.

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 a scheduled 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 a 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. After giving Smith an update about the band's activities and his upcoming meetings about future AEFP plans, Smith asked Miller if he would be interested in directing the U. S. Army Band. Miller declined the offer, much to Smith's relief, because SHAEF had no desire to lose Miller. Unknown to Miller at the time, the impression that he had made on Smith helped to win approval for a plan that SHAEF and the AEFP were about to put into motion that Miller had proposed.



"Jazz Jamboree," London, October 1944



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

Gen. Ray Barker and his staff had long agreed with a plan proposed by Col. Ed Kirby to move AEFB assets including the Miller unit to Paris once broadcasting facilities and logistics could be arranged. As Miller had discussed in his meeting with Smith, the plan was to make the band available for personal appearances with the ground troops on leave in the Paris area. Until now, the Miller band had only been available for air force units and others stationed in England. Glenn was also anxious to get closer to the front lines, but this was not possible. As early as September 1944, Barker had approved that upon the completion of AEFB broadcasting facilities in Paris that the ABAEF would move to the Continent.

Gen. Barker and SHAEF had to convince Gorham, AEFB and the BBC engineering staff. Gorham was responsible for the continuity of AEFB programming and Miller's band was AEFB's star attraction. 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. The BBC was rightly concerned about the reliability of receiving broadcasts by the band from France.

In order to secure the approval of the BBC and AEFB, Glenn agreed to pre-record six weeks' worth of programming by his full orchestra and 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 unanimously voted yes. So between November 20 and December 12, they recorded six weeks' or 84 hours of program while also working their normal AEFB and ABSIE schedule. This exhausting effort required superb discipline, and it is remarkable compared to latter-day artists, who might take weeks to complete one recording let alone an album.

There was one catch! AEFB and the BBC could not assemble enough recording discs to handle the load. The resourceful Miller contacted HMV, the English branch of RCA Victor, and AFN, and together with Maj., John Hayes of AFN and AEFB, they found the extra discs necessary to complete the job. To be safe, the BBC and AEFB 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 (as it turned out, everything worked out and they did not have to return). 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 sent onward to the Pacific Theatre. The AEFB 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 AEFB 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 band. In Paris, he 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 to be liaison for VIII AAF Service Command on the Continent. Baessell was detached to build a new strategic air depot, which was an important priority. Baessell was a frequent traveler to and from AAF facilities in France and Belgium and he had a hotel room in Paris. Haynes spent considerable socializing with Baessell, who was independently wealthy and enjoyed an active lifestyle. They became very good friends.

A Fateful Flight

The orchestra's schedule for traveling from Bedford to France was set for Saturday, December 16. 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. He was very frustrated that the billeting plans had not been completed and was not pleased. Lt. Col. Niven was also not pleased, and he ordered Miller to come ahead of the band instead of Haynes to work things out. Miller switched Haynes' travel so he could fly ahead, and then Haynes would accompany the orchestra several days later after Miller firmed up their arrangements.

The military had strict regulations for celebrities, in uniform or not. The policy had been necessary in dealing with Maj. Clark Gable. 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 air transportation 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 from Bovingdon aboard a scheduled Air Transport Command flight on 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 and final AEF broadcast from the Queensberry Club. Glenn received bon voyage messages from Maurice Gorham, Cecil Madden, and the Duke of York, all thanking him for a job well done and wishing him success for the orchestra on the Continent.

Glenn decided to go ahead the next day if he could get a seat. However, the weather on Wednesday, December 13 was problematic, and all flights were canceled. The same thing happened on Thursday, December 14. At lunch at Milton Ernest Hall, Baessell informed Haynes that he planned to fly to Paris the following morning and would be pleased to take Miller along with him. Haynes called Glenn in London and put Baessell on the line. As Baessell rationalized, even if the ATC service resumed on Friday, Glenn would be bumped by officers with higher priority. As it was and unknown to Miller or Baessell, ATC had already reissued Glenn's ticket for Sunday, December 17. Baessell told Miller that he authorized his own flights and there would be a break in the weather. He was confident they would reach the Paris area Friday afternoon. Baessell was as anxious as Miller to get to France because he, too, had deadlines to meet. Glenn accepted the invitation and asked Haynes to come and pick him up in London. That evening, the three men had dinner together and played poker with several other officers.



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



Maj. Glenn Miller and Guest Morton Downey
American Band of the AEF Broadcast
Queensberry All-Service Club, London, December 12, 1944

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. Haynes drove Baeseell to the aerodrome with a courtesy call at the quarters of an ailing Gen. Donald Goodrich, Baessell's former commanding officer. Miller was driven to the aerodrome separately by Sgt. Edward McColloch, the driver for service command chief Col. James Early. The weather was overcast at 2,000-3,000 feet with restricted visibility. The aerodrome was not fogged in as later portrayed in the movie "The Glenn Miller Story." The C-64 aircraft landed routinely and idled its engine. Baessell and Miller boarded. 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. Pilot F/O J. R. Stuart Morgan taxied the aircraft and departed on Runway 23 at 1:55 p.m. British Summer Time. The aircraft and its occupants were never seen again.

The comprehensive and definitive details about the events of December 15, 1944 are available in "Glenn Miller Declassified" by Dennis M. Spragg (Potomac Books, 2017).



Noorduyn C-64 "Norseman"

Aftermath and Legacy

Following several more days' delay, the orchestra arrived at Orly aerodrome in Paris, on Monday, December 18. On Saturday morning, December 16, the German army launched its 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 Air Depot Group at the 2nd Strategic Air Depot, Abbots Ripton (the air depot was located adjacent to Alconbury air base). They were unable to locate C-64 #44-70285 and pilot Morgan. They were as yet unaware of his passengers or whereabouts. Upon arrival, Lt. Haynes and the men were surprised that Capt. Miller was not at Orly to meet them. Haynes contacted SHAEF to locate Glenn. Having had no idea he had flown ahead with Baessell, they were stunned. Gen. Barker and his staff went into immediate crisis mode. They checked with airfields to see if the aircraft had made an emergency landing. They checked with anti-aircraft batteries to see if anyone had shot at anything. Barker called Eighth Air Force Headquarters, which in turn contacted the service command at Milton Ernest, who then contacted the 35th Air Depot Group at Abbots Ripton. Within hours, SHAEF came to the 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 married to Glenn's first cousin, Maude Miller Anderson. He launched a search but had no illusions. The plane and its occupants were lost. In the coming weeks, the Eighth Air Force conducted an investigation and held an inquiry, which met in Bedford on January 20, 1945. They concluded that (a.) Major Glenn Miller 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 recorded a 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. The message reached Helen after she received a telegram on December 23, delivered in person by AAF officers from Washington and a personal telephone call from Gen. H. H "Hap" Arnold.

From December 18 to December 24, SHAEF and the Eighth Air Force attempted to determine 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, his voice was being heard on the air up to 18:00 BST on December 24, when SHAEF issued a communiqué announcing his disappearance. Pre-recordings were remade with announcer Sgt. Keith Jameson being dubbed in to replace 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 until it returned to the United States in August 1945. Under the direction of S/Sgt. Jerry Gray and T/Sgt. Ray McKinley, the men went on to make even more history with their AEF radio broadcasts and personal appearances. They traveled to the French Riviera, Germany and the Alps. They would play many concerts and events, including a reception for Soviet Marshall Konev. They performed for over 10,000 American troops at the Nuremberg, Germany stadium where Hitler had made his many speeches in the 1930s.



T/Sgt. Ray McKinley directs the Major Glenn Miller AAF Band
Nuremburg Stadium, Germany, July 1945



Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Gen. H. H. "Hap" Arnold Congratulate the AAF Band
National Press Club, Washington, D. C. , November 13, 1945

The orchestra would resume the “I Sustain the Wings” broadcasts in September 1945, taking over from the Sgt. Felix Slatkin, the 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 performed at the National Press Club in Washington before a distinguished gathering, including President Harry Truman, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, General Eisenhower, and General Arnold. Before their performance, Gen. Eisenhower and Gen. Arnold went over to talk to the musicians, telling them that their work was complete and that they were officially being discharged from the army. 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 was the number one band in America for three and a half years. Glenn could have stayed here in America. He could have stayed and earned a lot more money, and then, if he wanted to, he could have retired as 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, which had gone to war. So, he disbanded his great orchestra and 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 best 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 “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 has 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 forget 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 numerous other tributes to Glenn Miller have continued to this day.

Prepared by Dennis M. Spragg
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