

September 17, 2009

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Finding My Father's War
Revelations from the Red Cross Diary
of an American POW in Nazi Germany
By Robert H. Miller

Paperback available: October 1, 2009

299 pages, \$18.99

Hardback available: December 15, 2009

299 pages, \$24.95

Ordering information: www.roberthmiller.com

Robert Miller's father, World War II veteran Herbert Henry Miller, died in 1994. A month later, Robert and his mother, Eleanore, discovered the Red Cross diary he had kept while a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany. It became the catalyst for Robert's quest to learn more about his father's war.

The result of that quest is this remarkable book, a story of terror, horrific despair, and Nazi depravity. But it is also a tale of survival against astonishing odds, of the deep bonds that develop between men at a time of war, and of choosing to leave hate behind.

Finding My Father's War, By Robert H. Miller

The story of Herbert Miller's war sheds needed light on issues that remain today at the forefront of our public discourse: the torture and treatment of POWS and the high psychological cost to individual soldiers of going to war.

In Robert Miller's Words:

My father, Herbert Henry Miller, was drafted into the army in August 1942. Dad was twenty-one in February 1944 when he boarded the *S.S. Argentina* in Boston Harbor with the 30th Infantry Division bound for the European war. He left behind his parents, his brother, two sisters, and the lovely young woman, Eleanore Kurowski, he had fallen in love with only months before. A photo of Eleanore taped to the inside of his undershirt sustained him throughout the ordeals to come.

Dad landed on Omaha Beach on June 11, five days after the mass assault of D-Day. The 30th moved inland, suffering horrific casualties in three major operations, including the gruesome battles of St. LO and Operation Cobra. Captured by the Germans at Mortain on August 6, Dad endured a punishing fifty-four-day march to Moosburg, Germany, where he survived for seven months in Stalag VIIA, the largest POW camp in Nazi Germany. Originally designed to hold 10,000 prisoners, the camp was bursting at the seams by spring 1945, with over 70,000 human souls. The overcrowded conditions led to an increase in dysentery, a mass outbreak of typhus, and widespread death. Stalag VIIA bore no resemblance to the fun-loving place depicted in the 1970s American TV show *Hogan's Heroes*.

While a prisoner of Nazi Germany, Dad was starved and forced to participate in work details in the city of Munich. Placed on trains and locked in for the three-hour ride, the men experienced frostbite, unsanitary conditions, and almost constant strafing by friendly fire. Early in his time at Stalag VIIA, the work-detail train took a direct hit from American bombs, and my father narrowly escaped death. Several of his buddies were not so lucky.

During his stay at the prison camp, my father became good friends with a Nazi guard named Heinz. Ironically, Heinz had been the German soldier who'd originally taken him captive in France. One day near the end of the war Heinz disappeared from the camp. My father and his friends never saw him again. They came to believe that Heinz had been murdered by his fellow Nazis. Heinz had given my dad a photo of himself, and I found it in my father's war journal. My father's friendship with this kind and decent German man haunted him for the rest of his life.

Twice my father planned an escape from Stalag VIIA with his close friend and fellow West Virginian Bert Cottrell. After their first escape both were recaptured in short order, landing in solitary confinement for five days with no food and just enough water to survive. Their second escape involved five other POWs, and it too was a failure. Recaptured by the Nazis, my father's group included two Russian prisoners who were promptly executed in cold blood. My dad, along with the others, was immediately transferred to another camp south of Salzburg, Austria, called Stalag XVIIIIC. Bent on revenge, the Nazis placed their captives back

Finding My Father's War, By Robert H. Miller

in solitary confinement, this time putting each man in his own hole in the ground lined with sharp-pointed branches. The POWs were forced to stand in place for twenty-four hours while deprived of food and water.

Shaken but not broken, Dad endured six more grueling weeks of captivity. Finally, on May 12, 1945, he and the others were liberated by the Allies and the Red Cross and returned to the U.S. Army, becoming free men once again.

My dad married my mother two and a half months after returning to America, on August 25, 1945. But the war was never really over for him. My father suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for the rest of his life. The week before his death, in 1994, my father had his last nightmare about the war.

I've spent countless hours in search of my father's war, visiting European sites, meeting historians, and talking with people who are knowledgeable about World War II. My research also included hours of interviews with my mother, the only person my father ever confided deeply in about his war experiences and the only person who knew of his nightmares. Because I travel to Europe every month for my work, more than half of the book was written on location in England, France, and Germany. I was able to visit all the places where my father spent time during the war. This has given me a special perspective, bringing me much closer to my father and his experiences.

When I was a child, I often pestered my father with questions about the war. It has taken me my whole life to fully understand why my father always avoided telling me the nitty-gritty details of his war experiences. If he had chosen to do that,

especially when I was very young, I believe I might have grown up continuing a cycle of hate. After all, it was *my* father who those bastard Nazis were abusing. He was very wise and skillful at handling my questions. He'd convince me it was no big deal and that we had plenty of other things to discuss together. Thinking back, I am very impressed that he had the foresight and sensitivity to respond in this way.

Because of his experiences, my father understood life and its purposes better than most. Several years ago I came upon a quote by Marie Beyon Ray that perfectly sums up my father and captures the essence of the way my parents raised me: "Begin doing what you want to do now. We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand and melting like a snowflake."

The day my father was liberated from the POW camp he left hating behind and began living. This is the legacy he has left to his children and grandchildren.

##