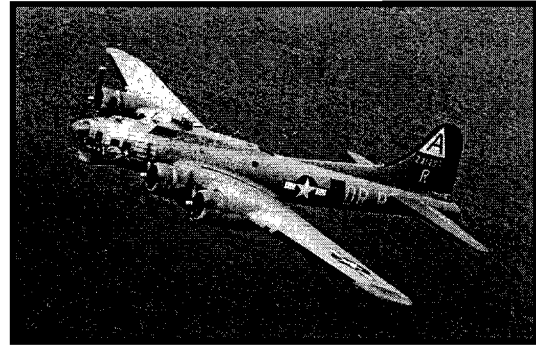


EXPERIENCES

of a
WORLD WAR II VETERAN



A. P. Miller, Jr.

Pilot and Airplane Commander
of a B-17 Flying Fortress Crew



Eighth Air Force

1944 -- 1945



News Article published in the *Active Age*
supplement to the *Texarkana Gazette* in
July, 2006, plus related information

B-17 Pilot gets face to face with Nazis

By Greg Bischof

Active Age

It has been more than 60 years, but former Texarkana, Texas, Mayor A. P. Miller can still remember diving from the escape hatch, feet first, of his B-17 Flying Fortress before it exploded.

"I'm 84 years old now, but I can remember it like it was yesterday," he said. "As I was falling, I saw the parachute ripcord handle in my hand with a piece of wire attached to it and I thought, 'A. P., you pulled it too hard and broke it.' But fortunately, about that moment, it (the parachute) opened."

As a B-17 pilot stationed with the U. S. 8th Air Force in England during World War II, Miller experienced a harrowing brush.

"I can still remember saying to myself as I was getting ready to bail out that morning (November 26, 1944), 'A. P., you are fixing to die this morning, but you aren't mad at anyone -- you are just a victim of circumstance.'"

Miller's military service began September 20, 1942, when he was inducted into the U. S. Army Air Corps at age 20.

"My first assignment was to radio school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota," he said. "After graduation in March of 1943, instead of being sent to gunnery school, which was the normal procedure, I was fortunate enough to be sent to pilot training at Santa Ana, California."

Although he was just a private first class, the Army later allowed Miller to take the written exam given at the aviation cadet's school in Santa Ana.



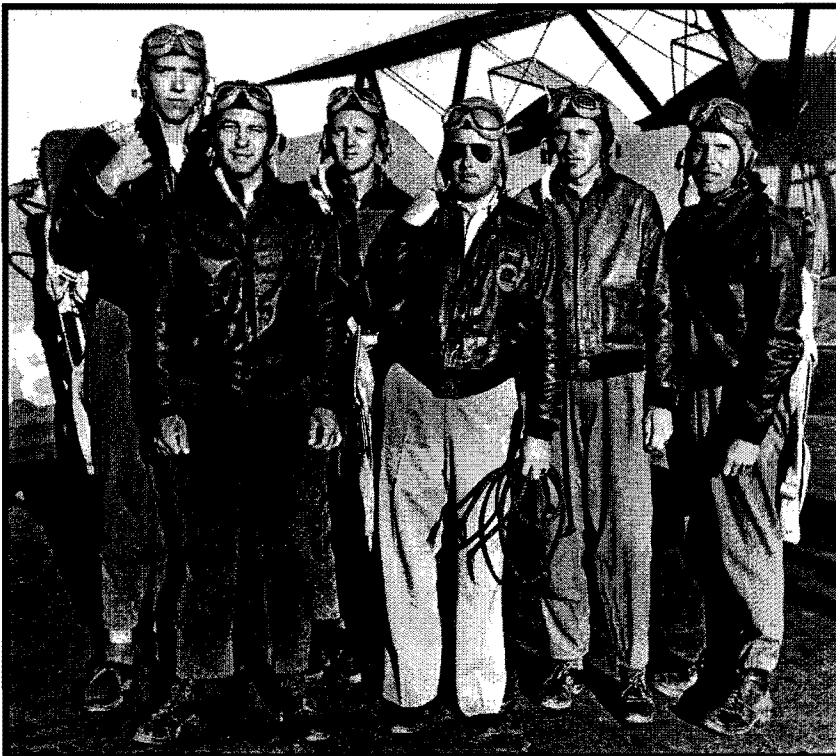
U. S. Army Air Force 2nd Lt. A. P. Miller, Jr. poses after receiving his wings in February, 1944.

THIS PICTURE WAS IN THE NEWSPAPER STORY

"I passed the test with flying colors," he said.

After graduating flight school as a second lieutenant and receiving his wings at Stockton on February 7, 1944, Miller was assigned to B-17 Heavy Bomber School at Hobbs, New Mexico.

"From Hobbs, I was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska to be assigned a crew," he said. "From Lincoln, we went to Alexandria Air Force Base in Louisiana for our final phase training. Now we were ready for overseas deployment. We returned to Lincoln,



A. P. Miller, Jr., Aviation Cadet Student, (far right) from Texarkana, Texas with four other students and their flight instructor, Paul B. Johnson (holding rope), from Tulare, California during their Primary Flight training at Tulare. John J. Mathis (second from left) was Miller's best friend during their Aviation Cadet flight training. The PT-13, a single-engine bi-plane, the airplane in which they took their Primary Training is shown in the background.

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course with you," Miller said. The ME-109s would fly both directly at us from in front, as well as dive on us from above."

His next bombing mission took him to Hamburg. He found enemy flak under the pilot's seat upon returning to base after the mission.

Miller's next three missions took him to Metz, France, and twice again to Merseburg. Because the B-17 was a high altitude bomber, the flight crews had to wear oxygen masks once the aircraft flew above 10,000 feet. Miller's plane usually flew at 28,000. Add to this that the warplane was not pressurized and the crew had to wear heated flying suits in the subzero temperatures.

Nebraska to pick up a new B-17 airplane to fly overseas. From Lincoln we flew to Manchester, New Hampshire, then to Goose Bay, Labrador, across the southern tip of Greenland, and landed at Iceland. From Iceland to Valley, Wales where we delivered the B-17 to the Eighth Air Force."

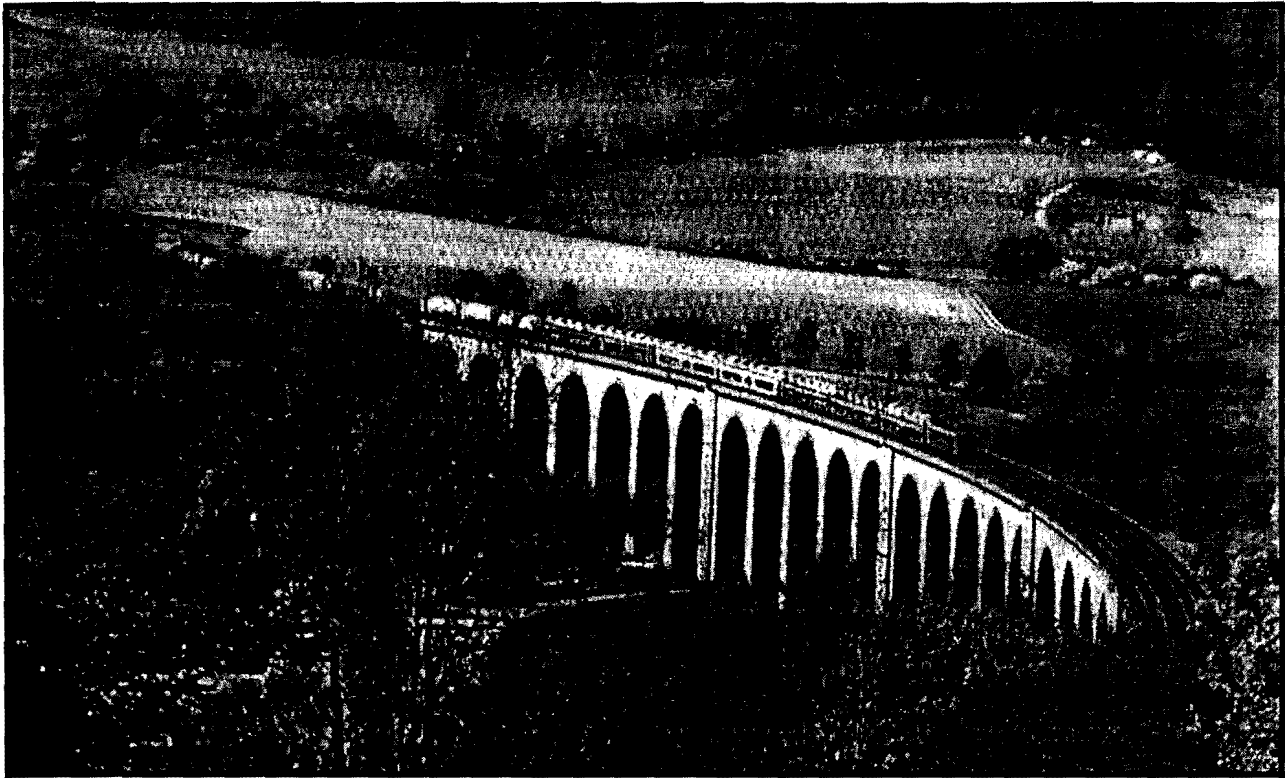
Miller flew his first mission on November 2, 1944, to Merseburg, Germany. Thirteen planes were downed on the mission.

"The enemy (fighter planes) had to fly on a near collision



A. P. Miller, Jr., Pilot, (bottom row, far left) and his crew members during final phase of B-17 training at Alexandria Air Force Base, Louisiana in preparation for overseas deployment.

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The Railway Viaduct at Altenbeken, Germany before it was bombed by the 91st Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force on November 26, 1944. The B-17 airplane being flown by A. P. Miller, Jr. and his crew was shot down by German fighter airplanes about five minutes before dropping its bombs on the target. The co-pilot was killed by fighter fire, but Miller and his other crew members bailed out and after parachuting to ground were taken prisoners by the Germans. Miller survived as a POW, and after the war ended on May 8, 1945 he arrived back in the United States on June 14, 1945.

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"Your face mask would freeze and develop ice on the inside of it, and you would have to pull it off from time to time just to shake the ice out into your lap," Miller said. "It was customary after the fifth combat mission to receive a 72-hour pass and a promotion for crew members, but at our debriefing on November 25, we were told that November 26 would be a maximum effort, which meant that all four of our squadrons would participate."

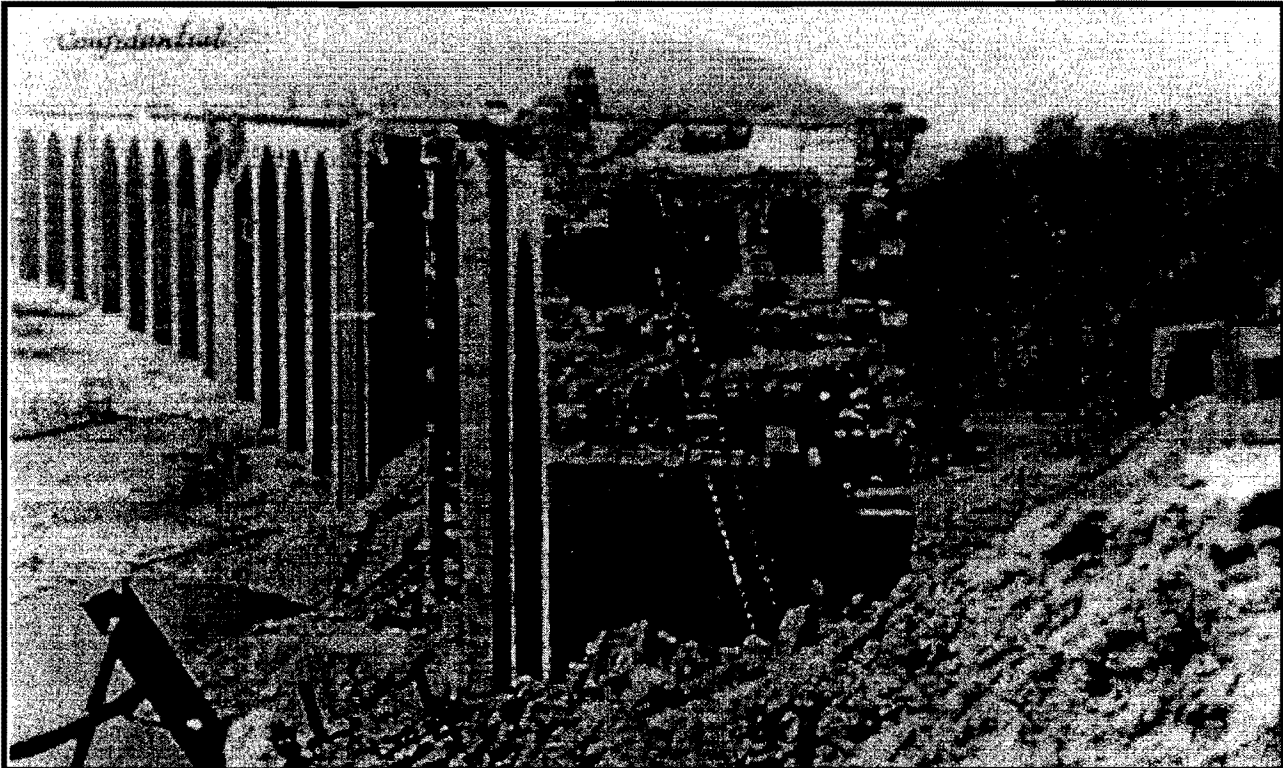
Although Miller and his flight crew were told this mission would be a "milk run" lasting only six hours 10 minutes, they would be in for an unpleasant surprise. Having flown to Merseburg in eight hours and 45 minutes flying time on three of their first five missions, the crew felt confident.

After the usual early morning briefing and formation assembly over England, Miller and his crew were on their way in a B-17 named Dear Becky to the railway viaduct at Altenbeken, Germany, a vital point on the railway line between Kassel and Hanover.

"After leaving the initial point at Lengin, we were struck by a wave of ME-109s coming in a line abreast, approaching from our right," Miller said.

One of the bomber's four engines burst into flames immediately and soon the whole plane was on fire and full of smoke on the inside.

"My co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Richard Prunty, was struck by fighter fire and killed on the



The Railway Viaduct at Altenbeken, Germany after it was bombed by the 91st Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force on November 26, 1944.

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first pass the fighters made," Miller said. "I put the plane on autopilot as the aircraft took a steady downward descent. The bomb bay doors wouldn't open, the communication system was out, and fire was raging everywhere."

Miller said he hoped the crew members in the rear of the aircraft realized that parachuting out was the only option.

"I got out through the forward hatch along with Tom Bottomly, the navigator, and I pulled my ripcord immediately after exiting the aircraft. I estimated I was somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 feet."

Although other aircraft were shot down, Miller said he saw what he knew to be Dear Becky explode before hitting the ground.

"It was a beautiful descent, although scary with the battle continuing all around," he said. "I could tell there were

other planes hit because I counted 19 parachutes during the trip down."

Miller said he later found out that the raid knocked out the railway viaduct for the rest of the war.

"My next concern was landing and it was my hope that I would be captured by soldiers rather than civilians because the military people had orders to bring prisoners of war in, while civilians might just kill you."

Miller didn't quite make it to the ground because he got dragged through tree tops and stuck in one of them.

"Immediately, I realized that quite a crowd had gathered below my landing place," Miller said. "Some had guns and others had clubs, hoes, and rakes; but my real concern was to get down before someone used me for target practice."

Fortunately for Miller, some German soldiers at the scene took charge.

"They asked for my pistol -- I had none because our CO wouldn't let us fly with side arms," Miller said. "He told us no one could fight their way out of Germany with just a pistol."

After taking Miller's fleece-lined flying suit, his watch, and rings; the soldiers dismissed the crowd and started walking him to the woods.

"Not speaking German, I had no idea what their game plan was," Miller said. "I thought at first they might be taking me into the woods to shoot me. However, such was not the case because we soon came upon a farmhouse used by their military."

From there, Miller's captors took him to a small town, then to an airfield.

"I stayed there two days and nights before being taken to the interrogation center at Oberursel," Miller said. "But an interesting thing happened on the way to Oberursel. It was at night and two other POWs and I were being walked through Frankfurt when the air raid warning sirens sounded. We were ushered into the air raid shelter along with the local residents, but lucky for us, Frankfurt was not the target that night."

Upon arriving in Oberursel, Miller's captors took his shoes from him and placed him in a small cell with only a straw mattress in it.

"The window in it was small with shimmering glass, which only let you know whether it was day or night," he said. "For rations, I was given a jug of water and two slices of black bread a day. After six days, I was taken for interrogation and asked multiple questions, to which I gave only my name, rank, and serial number."

Miller said his German interrogator's name was Ulrich Haussman.

"He told me he was a graduate of Columbia University in New York and had a girlfriend in Dallas," Miller said. "He had a clipping from my hometown newspaper, the *Texarkana Gazette*, announcing my graduation from pilot training." During the questioning, Miller said Haussman seemed to place great emphasis on his (Miller's) name -- Adolph Paul Miller.

"He kept asking, 'Are you of German descent with many relatives in Germany?' and I only replied that I was an American. His response was, 'If you are not (German), it is a waste of three good German names,'" Miller said.

After the interrogation, military guards took Miller back to his cell. He was interrogated the next day.

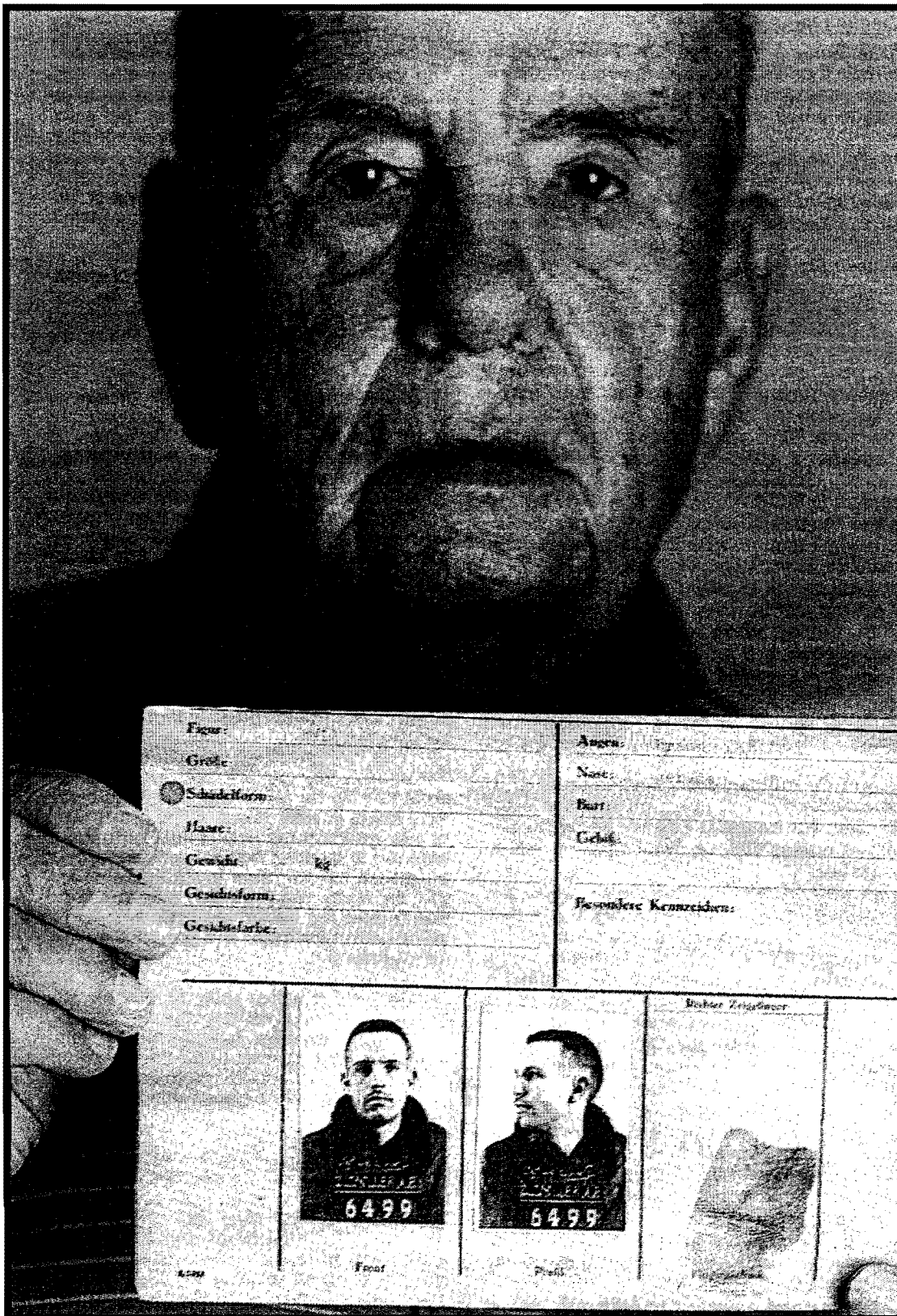
"Haussman said I was lucky because they were shooting us down in such high numbers that I was being sent to my permanent POW camp known as Stalag Luft at Barth, Germany.

Barth was in far northeastern Germany on the Baltic Sea, where it was cold, snowy, and miserable. Twenty-four men were kept in one room, sleeping on three-tiered bunks in the rough wooden barracks surrounded by barbed wire fence.

"Each day was only a repetition of the previous one," Miller said. "We had an old iron stove in the middle of the room to keep warm by when we had some coal to burn."

Through March and April, 1945, a food shortage hit the camp.

"We received no Red Cross parcels and had to survive on one bowl of 'Gerry' (wartime slang for German) stew per day and one-sixth loaf of black bread," Miller said. "On April 13, we first heard rumors, then we received word that President (Franklin) Roosevelt had died."



A. P. Miller, Jr. holds up a prisoner-of-war document made by the Germans after his B-17 Flying Fortress was shot down on November 26, 1944 over Germany. He survived a freezing winter in a Nazi camp. He said he will never forget his identification number they assigned him -- 6499.

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By this time, the weather started to warm, and by April 28, Miller and the other POWs were sweating out liberation by the Russians because they could hear gunfire in the southeast.

Miller was freed on May 1, 1945, one week before the war ended.

"The Germans had left the night before (April 30) and our colonel went out to meet the Russians," Miller said. "The Germans had left their lookout towers the night before so no one was guarding the place and we were free to ramble around, go outside and look around town."

By that time, the Army Air Force was delivering Red Cross parcels by truck to the city, Miller said.

"There was a small concentration camp near Barth that housed Polish civilians and that camp was also liberated, but the Polish just stayed there," he said. "The Russians also put on a USO type of show for us. On May 12, about 900 Allied POWs were flown out since they were all hospital cases."

Miller flew in the tail section of a B-17 on May 13 to Reims, France.

"I took a shower, de-loused and got issued new clothes that day," he said. "I was very thankful to be out of Germany and on my way home."

The next day Miller flew in a C-47 from Reims to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre, which was a French seaport of embarkation for reclaimed Allied servicemen.

"From June 2, 1945, I left for the good old USA on the Jonathan Worth, an American liberty ship," Miller said. "We sailed into New York Harbor on June 14 where I saw the Statue of Liberty."

Two years after his return home, Miller received a letter from his German interrogator, Ulrich Haussman. The letter

asked for financial aid because the entire European economy was still struggling to recover from the war, but Miller questioned Haussman's sincerity.

"I thought that someone who could get a university education might be able to work the black market," Miller said as he looked at the brittle letter he has preserved for nearly 60 years.

Besides the letter, Miller also saved a drawing that a fellow POW made of him while in solitary confinement. The drawing clearly depicts the only light is daylight coming through the window.

Miller has revisited Barth three times. He made his return trips on the 40th, 45th and 50th anniversaries of the end of World War II.

When stopping off in England on one of the trips, Miller discovered he had been designated as killed in action during the war. He found his name in the Book of Remembrance while visiting St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

Miller isn't the only member of his family to serve his country. His twin brother, John Frank Miller, was a B-17 bombardier. He flew 45 combat missions, first with the U.S. 15th Air Force stationed in North Africa and Italy and later with the 8th Air Force in England.

The twin Miller brothers have two younger brothers who also served their country: W. A. "Buddy" Miller of Conroe, Texas, and Ed Miller of Texarkana.

Buddy Miller, a retired Methodist minister, served in the Korean War as a Marine. He fought in the bitterly cold battle of the Chosin Reservoir in December, 1950. He and many of the battle's survivors became known as the "Chosin Few."

The youngest, Ed, will soon be 70 years

old. He served in the Navy in the 1950s and went on to be a lawyer, Bowie County judge, and Democratic Party official.

A. P. Miller and his twin were born in 1922 in Fort Worth, where their father worked as a railway mail clerk. The family moved to Texarkana in 1924.

"We lived on Walnut Street for a while, then we moved to a house on West Ninth Street when we were growing up in the Rose Hill area of town," Miller said. "We ran around with what was known as the Jodder Gang."

While in high school, Miller attended a Citizen Military Training Camp in Lawton, Oklahoma during the summers of 1938, 1939, and 1940.

"I don't know who thought of sending us there, but it was a good idea," he said. "It was good discipline, and we trained like the regular military would train."

Miller graduated from Texas High School in January, 1940. Shortly thereafter he went to work for the Hotel Grim Drug Store, where he operated the soda fountain for a wage of 10 cents an hour.

"We sold hamburgers for 5 cents a piece, but working 59 hours a week for \$5.90 a week made me realize I needed to further my education," Miller said.

After briefly changing jobs to become a six-day-a-week local grocery store delivery man for \$12 a week, Miller started attending Bethany Nazarene College in Bethany, Oklahoma in the fall of 1940.

"We went to the Nazarene Church at West Eighth and Brown streets when we were kids," Miller said. "The pastor took us up to that college to visit one day and that's how we eventually enrolled. He was instrumental in getting us there."

While Miller was still in college, America joined the war.

"Frank wanted to fly all his life and went right into the Air Corps after Pearl Harbor, sometime in January or February, 1942, but the Air Corps wouldn't take me because I had a skull injury back when I was 5 years old," Miller said. "That's why I couldn't join the service the same time Frank did."

Nevertheless, Miller remained eligible for the draft despite his childhood injury and his number finally came up in September, 1942. Meanwhile, he quit college and came back to Texarkana to help build Lone Star Army Ordnance Plant until called on by Uncle Sam.

Looking back on his life now, more than half a century later, Miller said his most memorable moment occurred the morning he came back home to his parents after surviving his POW experience.

After a brief stop at Jefferson Barracks Military Processing Center in St. Louis, Miller got back to Texarkana at 2:30 a.m. June 19, 1945.

"I felt like I died and went to heaven when I finally got to my parent's front door, and after that we stayed up and talked the rest of the night and gave thanks that I made it back home."

(End of Newspaper Story)