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JULY 1, 1943 - I WAS IN THE ARMY NOW.

FEBRUARY 21, 1944 - CASABLANCA, NORTH AFRICA

MARCH 19, 1944 - ANZIO BEACH HEAD

MAY 23, 1944 - WOUNDED ON ANZIO

JUNE 17, 1944 - RETURN TO DUTY

JULY 17, 1944 - WOUNDED NEAR FAUGLIA, ITALY

DECEMBER 11, 1945 - DISCHARGED FT. DIX, NEW JERSEY

PFC John Miller
3244440
34 INF Div.
168 Regt.
1st Bn Battalion
Co. B
Weapons
Platoon
Machine Gunner

MEDALS AWARDED

- ⌘ PURPLE HEART WITH OAK LEAF CLUSTER
- ⌘ BRONZE STAR MEDAL
- ⌘ COMBAT INFANTRY BADGE
- ⌘ EUROPEAN THEATRE MEDAL WITH FOUR BATTLE STARS
- ⌘ VICTORY MEDAL
- ⌘ GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL

FOUR BATTLE STARS

- ★ ANZIO
- ★ ROME ARNO
- ★ NORTH APPENINES
- ★ PO VALLEY

In June 1943, I, John P. Miller, Graduated from Amsterdam High School. I graduated in the morning, and by that afternoon I was in possession of a letter stating, "Greetings and salutations you will be a member of The Armed Forces".

In July, I arrived at camp Upton, NY. We came in late at night and were served spaghetti. An Italian man asked the cook, "You call this shit spaghetti". This person spent the next three days, about eighteen hours a day, scrubbing pots in the kitchen. We were loaded onto a train with a coal-burning engine, no one had an idea where we were heading.

A few days later we arrived at Fort McClellan, Alabama. We were covered with soot from the engine and looked like black men. For the next sixteen weeks I was in the 19th Battalion Co. C., Training for heavy weapons, thirty caliber machine guns, and eighty one-millimeter mortars.

I had been in Ft. McClellan about two weeks when one evening a Corporal came in our barracks, he said, "Miller get down to the CP (Command Post) on the double there is an MP waiting for you". I thought that maybe I had committed treason or something. What a relief it was to see Bill Townsend from Tribes Hill. He was at the fort delivering German POW's and found out I was there so he come to visit me.

We had calisthenics everyday; we learned to fire the mortar, machine gun, and our rifles. We had a demonstration of one hundred fifty five artillery. After the shells had hit out in the pinewoods an officer asked if we thought anything could live through that. About that time five or six deer came barreling out of the woods.

The last week of training we went on maneuvers, dug foxholes, and all that. Returning to the fort, which was twenty miles away, we marched with a rifle and full field pack. Our kind sergeant told us if we collapsed he would bring our rifle in.

When I left the fort I was given a delay in route, so I could stop of at home for a few days. I then went to Ft. Meade, Maryland. After a short stay I was sent to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. We shipped out to Newport News on the USS Buttner, a large troop ship that sailed alone.

Several thousand GI's and I landed in Casablanca, North Africa on February 21, 1944. We went to Camp Lion Mt. A few days later we were on a train with forty plus eight box cars (forty men or eight horses). We stopped for a short time in Sidi Bell Abbies, the home of the French Foreign Legion. Finally, arrived in Oran, and loaded on a ship, The Val Dam, a Dutch ship taken over by the British. A group of Goumlers also loaded on with their goats and their women. (The "Goumlers were trained for mountain warfare.

They were colonial troops of France coming from North Africa.)

We finally arrived in Naples Harbor; Mt. Vesuvius was erupting and at night you could see streams of lava glowing red. The German Air Force greeted us with an air raid. At night the sky was full of tracers, searchlights, and exploding flack.

I went with my many recruits to the 34th infantry area. A Sgt. Helms was with us- more about him later. We went to sleep in pup tents, and the next morning the tents were lying on top of us along with about eight inches of snow. We went to the command post, I was told to report to Co. B. 1st battalion 168th Regt. 34th Inf. Div. I was assigned to the weapons platoon of Co. B in a machine gun squad. The 34th was back in rest at St. Angelo de' Life when I joined them. While I was there I could see the American bombers in a distance bombing the Abby at Casino.

In a few days we were loaded into some trucks and taken to the Port of Naples. We got on LST's (landing ship tanks) not knowing where we were going. All the Italians said you are going to Anzio: they were right!

I arrived at Anzio, March 19, 1944, and froze my ass off. Arriving at Anzio we received the same welcome from the German Air Force that we got in Naples. Leaving the ship to go to a bivouac area we saw a great morale builder a G.I. Cemetery, with thousands of white crosses. My company

relieved men from the 3rd div., on the Mussolini Canal. The Anzio beachhead was only 10 miles square. It was packed with troops, artillery ammo dumps, evacuation hospitals, supplies, etc, Landing ship tanks (LST) arrived every night with all kinds of supplies. When they left in the morning wounded guys went back to Napoli (Naples). They were loaded in G.I. ambulances and taken to various hospitals. I went to the 17th Gen. hospital.

The Germans had a powerful gun it was mounted on a railroad car. During the day it was pulled back in a tunnel so the Air Force wouldn't see it. When they fired at Anzio and the ships in the harbor the sound was like a freight car going through the air sideways. We called it Anzio Annie. One shell would disintegrate a large stone building, or sink a ship.

The Beachhead was very flat land. The German Army was in the Alban Hills over looking the Beachhead. Nothing moved during the day, at night it was like a beehive of activity.

The German observation from the hills overlooking the beachhead was very good. You didn't walk around during daylight because you would draw artillery fire and the danger of mines was everywhere. At night especially with the moonlight you employed the Anzio crouch.

German snipers had a nasty habit of shooting people. At night we were with our machine guns on the front side of the embankment on the

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canal. There was an outpost a few hundred yards in front of us. Some of the other men and I were to go out at night and relieve Sgt. Helms and his group. After dark a red then a green then another red flare lit the sky. Sgt. Helms and his men were captured. I was lucky, as we hadn't quite left to relieve Helms. Several days later we heard from Axis Sally (A program and an agent for the Germans) that Helms was enjoying himself and everyone should surrender. She stated the 34th Div. was going back to the states in a Piper Cub. While we were at Anzio we were pulled back to Pagadileone Woods for rest and training. A Major explained to us that there was no reason for us to be afraid of tanks. Several G.I.s were in foxholes, and the tanks ran fight over them. One G.I went up to look and yelled bring the shovels, the ground had caved in, but we got them out. This was an exercise with American tanks.

On May 23, 1944 the breakout from Anzio was planned. At the break of dawn shells were screaming over our heads, some kind of close. Harry Lewis and I were in our machine nest. A German Mortar Shell landed very close; a hunk of it went through my right leg. I thought that someone had hit me with a baseball bat. Harry and I sprinkled some sulfa powder and wrapped it up while yelling for medics. I was loaded on a jeep and went to an evacuation hospital at Anzio.

When I recovered it was back to my outfit Co. B. In a short time I was first gunner on my squad again. Advancement was very fast, as gunners were very attractive to the enemy.

The 5th Army and of course the 34th Div. were chasing the Germans north of Roma (Rome). As we were moving out one night I remember Anderson, our radioman, stepping on a shoe mine. It blew his foot off, and he died from shock.

On July 17, 1944 we were in an olive orchard getting ready to attack Fauglia, a little mountain town. As we were stopped and it was quiet, I opened a can of beans to eat. This olive orchard was all terraced. In a flash of a second 20mm shells were exploding in the trees. I jumped over a terrace and lay close to the stone wall. I felt wet on my right cheek (ass) and left ankle. I had collected some more shell fragments. Back to the hospital to have them removed.

In a short time I rejoined my Co. B. machine gun squad. Along the way north to the Appenines we saw plenty of dead German Soldiers who had been lying there for a few days. They were so bloated that the buttons on their shirts were popping off, and the maggots were crawling out of their mouths, noses, and wounds. About this time we were going down a little streambed

on the side of a hill, of course we were all ten yards apart so one shell wouldn't hit us all. We heard the pop of mortars when they are dropped down the barrel. One shell hit in back of me, but I didn't even get a scratch. My ammo bearer, Gibson, got hit bad. I yelled for medics, but when I noticed him turning gray within moments I knew it was too late. Gibby asked if he was going to die, but I lied to him and said, "No, Gibby you will be looking at all the pretty nurses soon"

We finally got near the foothills of the Alp Mts. We moved up at night to relieve the 135th Rgt. Why I will never know, we were told to dig in directly across a valley with the Germans on the other side. Day light came and we were discovered the 88's were whistling in. Several men in the company were killed and wounded. It isn't very pleasant to see your men's intestines and parts hanging from olive trees.

We pulled back for rest in the resort town of Montecatini, its like Saratoga with springs and baths. While we were there we went to an outdoor movie, the Army set it up. The location was like an outdoor amphitheatre. Apparently, some German fighter pilot did not care for the show. When, tracer bullets from the plane zipped through the screen, we all got the hell out of there. There were a few broken bones and busted glasses.

Well, now back at the front, we relieved the 133 Regt. 34th Div. I am

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in the back of a 6x6 truck and we are traveling black out. I stand up at the wrong time and my helmet is knocked off my head. There was no way to retrieve it. The next morning Lt. Felts says, "Miller, Where the hell is your helmet"? I tell him what happened and he tells me to get one from some place. As we are sneaking along, chasing the Germans I spot an American helmet. I guessed that some poor GI was wounded and left his helmet. I wiped the blood out of it and had a helmet again. It was about this time I got yellow jaundice and went back to the 17th Gen. Hospital, in Naples. The ward I was in looked like the Chinese Army, as we were all as yellow as can be. At night we would see all the men who died being wheeled out covered with sheets.

Well back to Co. B., we went from the Port of Naples to Livorno (Leghorn) by boat. Then we went by truck to the supply area for the 168th Regt. Since Co. B was on the front we went up with the mule train which was bringing food and ammo. It was so black that night, while climbing the mountain you grabbed a mule by its tail to guide you. Replacement for Co. B also came this way. On more than one occasion the new men were wounded or killed before morning. I didn't even have a chance to see them let alone get to know them.

I was truly lucky enough to be able to leave for a week and go to

Allasio, which is on the north east coast of Italy. Allasio was right on the Tyrrhenian Sea, a nice sandy beach. I also received a weeks leave in Roma. I went to The Coliseum, St. Peters, and where the 1940 Olympics were going to be held. We got beer rations and I tasted the various Italian wines. The serious soldiers there did not chase around with all the pretty girls, but there were some troops that did.

We are now north of Firenze (Florence) Italy. While there I saw the magnificent churches. Now on to the gothic line(German defenses). In the vicinity of Mt. Grande there is the little village of Castle Del Rio. We were going to try to take this town. It is a foggy rainy morning and the Germans are shelling us pretty good. About noontime it cleared up and the sun came out. The guys are happy to hear that our fighter planes are approaching, as we know that the German artillery will not fire and give away their positions. We got a big surprise when the fly boys started strafing and bombing us. We threw out yellow smoke grenades to call them off, and it worked.

A few days later we went into a small village; there didn't seem to be anyone there. The weapons platoon went in to a stone house. We draped a shelter half over the door so no light would show and then we made a fire in the fireplace. Harry Lewis and I went upstairs for some rest. A buddy, by the name of, Komer is downstairs. Someone pushes by the shelter half and

Komer yells, "Jerries". Then he grabbed his carbine and the clip falls out. The Germans were running down the streets. Nobody fired a shot. We were lucky that they did not flip a grenade in the room.

The idea was to capture Bologna and break in the Po Valley. While we were moving up a Colonel notified us we were going to Bologna. Several months later we did. It was a very severe winter with lots of snow. The Army finally got parkas for us. One side was white and the other was green. No one wore the hoods over their helmets because it cut down on your hearing. They issued us sleeping bags and we cut holes in them; to make our arms available to handle our guns. We spent the winter in the Paso del Futa (Futa Pass) near the town of Loiano. We were in a little stone house on highway 65. We would sleep all day and pull guard at night. Of course there were some men that had to be alert during the day. One guy in my squad, Pardu, was looking out of a window and was shot right between the eyes by a sniper.

Finally spring came, all the ice and snow was gone and we were done freezing our asses off, we were glad in one way, but we knew we would be attacking soon. We then began to push to Bologna. We spotted signs, actung minen (attention mines), we had just passed through, luckily. We broke in to the Po Valley. I was in Milano (Milan) and I saw where Mussolini and Clarrisa were hung upside down in a gas station. Italian partisan had captured

and killed them.

In Dongo, which is near the Swiss border. I was in Parma, Verona, Torino (Turen), and Trieste on the Yugoslavia border. The war is over and we are going to Cava de Predil, on the French border. The French and the Italian's are ready to do battle over the boundary line. Next we are shipped to Italian Navy ammunition storage dump near Trieste to guard it. Some civilians were dumping powder increments and saving the cloth bags. Smoking cigarettes were hazardous to your health under those conditions. One of the powder magazines was blown flat to the ground, that's why we were sent there. To keep civilians out.

In November of '45 I was able to visit Switzerland. I saw the Bear Pits and the Berne Town Clock. It's unbelievable what happens when this clock strikes the hour. I went to Lausanne and stayed in the Gulf Hotel. The country was so clean and beautiful. Many of the inhabitants spoke English and seemed glad to see us.

I returned to Italy and was sent to Naples. Several thousands of GI's loaded on the USS Wasp then on to Newport News, Virginia. I was sent to Ft. Dix. there I received my discharge and went home. This was the December of '45.

Anyone, who has never been involved in combat, it is totally indescribable. When bullets are whistling by, if you hear them crack, then they are damn close. When 88 shells whistle in the ground and it vibrates, you wish your foxhole was deeper. Anyone who has ever claimed they weren't scared, they are damn liars!

Shortly after the hostilities were over the Colonel told us that men do not liberate things, as you are use to. No more shooting a hole in a vat of wine to fill your canteen.

In Bagdolia, a suburb of Napoli, painted on a stone wall were these words: "AND WHEN HE GOES TO HEAVEN TO ST. PETER HE WILL TELL. ANOTHER DOG FACE SOLIDER REPORTING SIR, I HAVE SPENT MY TIME IN HELL."

P.S when I was assigned to the 34th Infantry Div. I immediately started to earn big money. When you are being shot at in combat, you earn an extra ten bucks per month.

We acquired a new Lt. from the states, a ninety day wonder. Instead of consulting people who had been in combat, he knew it all. He was referred to as Lt. Meathead! Luckily for him a group of Germans surrendered. They all rushed up to Lt. Meathead. One of the prisoners told him they surrendered to him because they had spotted the gold bars on his collar. Officers with

intelligence did not want any saluting or identification showing, knowing they would be the first target.

When the mule train brought ammo and rations up to the front line for the combat personal, on the way back they took the GI's who had been killed. They were placed in mattress bags and put on mules. The mules did not like what they were carrying and they became bulky. They sensed what was in the mattress bags.

When our outfit was on the attack and you were chasing the enemy you carried all you owned. Most important was your weapon, ammo, and helmet. You always had water in your canteen and on some occasions you filled it with vino. We also had a toothbrush and half of a towel, you hoped that the co. jeep was bringing your blanket and shelter half. There were sometimes though, it was not available.

While your moving up after the enemy, you saw dead Germans lying in Grotesque positions. I became somewhat callous to this. When a squad member or a GI was killed it made us sad, very angry, and then we wanted to get even. Now when I think about it I say German soldiers were some mother's sons. While chasing the enemy we walked some ten to fifteen yards apart. Every minute you were looking for a ditch or depression to dive in. You never knew when a machine gun or mortars or even 88's artillery would

start blasting away. One had to be alert at all times. The reason for being separated was so one shell would not kill everyone.

In Co. B we had a cook whose name was Nunn. We were always telling him any cook is better than Nunn!

During the summer of 1944, while pursuing the Germans North of Rome, we came under heavy artillery fire. Fortunately, for us a badly damaged stone house was nearby. We raced in there to avoid the Shrapnel and get some cover. On the bad side though, there were dead German Soldiers inside the house. The old timers thought this would be a good time to eat some C rations. The new GI's were asking us how we could eat with that awful smell. It was about that time another bunch of shells landed in that vicinity. We informed the new guys that was why we were able to eat in the house.

When the 34th Div. went to Anzio Beach my unit relieved the 3rd Div. The outfit next to us was General Frederick's Elite 1st Special Service Force. They were made up of Canadians and American troops. The Mussolini Canal, where we were in the line, must have looked like a silver ribbon to the German pilots who were flying low over it during the night. The 1st SSF did not go for this. They set up on a 50 caliber machine gun and opened up on him the next night. The plane zoomed out of there real quick. However, he was not through with us. A few minutes later the plane returned and dumped

a load of personal bombs on us. Fortunately, not to many of us were wounded.

On some occasions while we were chasing the Germans we would set our 30 caliber machine guns in a barn or in buildings. By the next morning usually you were covered with body lice and your cloths were walking around on you. The troops got DDT powder, which we sprinkled in our shirts and our pants. Now I hear how bad DDT is.

When we pulled off the line back for a rest it usually wasn't for several weeks. The army had to set up a portable shower unit, although, no one stayed in too long because the water was cold. We were then issued a new clean pair of underwear, pants, socks , and shirt.

During the summer of 1944 we were off the line for a rest period. A USO show was in the vicinity, and we were trucked over. There was a portable stage set up. Here there were hundreds of GI's sitting in the rain. The Andrews Sisters were the headliners. Those girls stood on the stage in the rain with mascara running down their faces, but they stayed and sang. Needless to say none of the GI's got up and left.

When Co. B was attacking if any of the GI's were wounded or killed the closest soldier to them would call for the medics. The attack kept going forward with no stopping. Unfortunately, there were no counselors to help

those with their shattered nerves. When Co. B was on the line we always removed the fifth bullet in the machine gun belt. The fifth shell was painted red and was a tracer bullet. We replaced the fifth with a regular bullet. The reason was the tracer would give away your position.

One time when we were fighting north of Rome it so happened we were going through a cemetery. A barrage of German artillery shells were coming to close. A mausoleum in the cemetery had some of the sealing plates blown off. The GI's and myself included, pulled out some caskets and crawled in (where the caskets had been) to get away from the flying shrapnel.

This is some of the things that happened when I was in the service. Some of the other things I don't wish to think about or even write down.

German soldiers were referred to as Jerries or Krauts. A shelter half was a pup tent. With a buddy you could make one full size pup tent.

My buddy, Harry Lewis, told me what happened after he helped me back to the medics, when I was wounded at Anzio. The Engineers had cleared a path through the mine field and marked it with white tape. Harry told me, when we went back to the medics, we had walked in the uncleared portion of the mine field. Harry was sent back to get to the machine gun. He saw where the mortar shell that hit me was about two feet from our foxhole. The flash hider on our gun was blown off and was very beat up. Harry also

reminded me about the time when we broke into the Po Valley. He and I met some Italian Partisans, they asked us to come to their village. We asked them how far away the Tedesco (Germans) were. They said they were about five kilometers away, but the village was only three kilometers away. They got us bicycles and rode into town, we were the first American troops they had seen. We were pelted with flowers and forced to drink vino (wine). The liberators had arrived. Boy were we stupid and also lucky. I now realize it was a dumb thing for us to do.

In Co. B weapons platoon there was a GI named Sharp. We had been pulled back to a rest area. Late one afternoon the Sgt. told us to get our gear together because we were going up to the front. We heard a shot and then some yelling for medics. Sharp was cleaning his 45 and by accident he shot himself in the foot. A few months later Sharp came back to the outfit. We were about to go back to the front again, when Sharp disappeared.

Several months later, we were in winter positions, before the Gothic Line the Co. Capt. told Harry Lewis and I we were to leave that night to go to Loiano. We were going to testify at Sharp's court martial. We entered the court room one at a time. The defense lawyer for Sharp asked us each the same question. He asked if we would want to put Sharp back into the Co. We both answered yes, sir. When Sharp came out of the court room, under guard,

we asked him how he made out. He told us that his sentence was seventy-five years. Don't ask me to be a character witness after this happened.

In April of 1945, we finally broke through the Gothic Line and entered the Po Valley. After all the time spent fighting in the mountains it was really unbelievable. The German army was trying to escape north to Austria, but we blocked them off. Sometimes there was a lot of shooting before they surrendered. The 34th Div. captured the German 34th Div. We relieved the POW's off their watches and their other personal things: cigarettes, letters, etc. For a short time I was a guard at a POW cage. One Jerry prisoner still had his concertino and was playing songs. I was amazed when he played Lili Marlene, the song is in German, French, and English. The 168th was then sent to Cava de Predil a little town on the French and Italian border. It seemed that there was a border dispute and we were there to keep the peace. There were some nice streams that contained trout, so we went fishing with hand grenades. We would throw the hand grenades in the upper reaches of the pool and then collect the fish as they floated down. The kitchen cook prepared them for us. I also visited Nice France for a few days. I strolled up the Promenade Anglaise and hung around the beach. The outfit was next sent to the other coast of Italy. The Yugoslavians and Etyeties were about to battle over the city of Trieste. We were there to keep the peace, though. While

there I went on leave to Switzerland. I was in Zurich, Montreaux, Berne, and other cities. There was a door on the Berne city clock that opened and a little figure of a little man emerged with a mallet and struck the hour. Then another door opened and three little bears kept spinning around. Then a rooster came out and crowed, plus many other things. Switzerland was a beautiful place. It was clean and the people were very friendly. When I returned to the outfit from Switzerland I was told to saddle up, I was going home. I returned to Napoli by train and got on the USS Wasp. The bunks were about six high, and if you put your knees up you bumped the guy above you in the ass. The ship was about three football fields long.

The one thing I remember was they served us hot dogs. It was the first one I had in two years, and it really tasted great!