

HISTORY OF THE GLENN MILLER ORCHESTRA

Alton Glenn Miller was born in Clarinda, Iowa on March 1, 1904. But it was in North Platte, Nebraska, several years later that Glenn actually got his musical start when, one day, his father brought home a mandolin. Glenn promptly traded it for an old battered horn, which he practiced every chance he got. In fact his mother worried, "It got to where Pop and I used to wonder if he'd ever amount to anything."

In 1923, Miller entered the University of Colorado, although he spent more time traveling to auditions and playing where and whenever he could. After flunking three of his five courses one semester, Glenn dropped out to concentrate on his career as a professional musician. He toured with several orchestras and ended up in Los Angeles where he landed a spot in Ben Pollack's group, a band that included a guy named Benny Goodman. Arriving in New York City, he soon sent for, and married his college sweetheart, Helen Burger in 1928, and for the next three years, earned his living as a free-lance trombonist and arranger.

Miller played and recorded with the likes of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and Gene Krupa. In 1934, Miller became the musical director of the Dorsey Band, and later went on to organize The Ray Noble Orchestra. In April 1935, Glenn Miller recorded, for the first time, under his own name. Using six horns, a rhythm section and a string quartet, he recorded "Moonlight on the Ganges" and "A Blues Serenade" for Columbia. But selling only a few hundred records, he continued his position with the Noble Orchestra.

In 1937, Glenn Miller stepped out to form his own band. There were a few recordings, a couple of week-long stints in New Orleans and Dallas, and many one-nighters, but it was not to be. Though the group would play one more date several days later in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Glenn gave his men their final notice on New Year's Eve at the Valencia Ballroom in York, Pennsylvania. Broke, depressed and having no idea what he was going to do, he returned to New York City. It was during this disheartening interim, that he realized his unique sound -- produced by the clarinet holding the melodic line while the tenor sax plays the same note, and supported harmonically by three other saxophones -- just might be the individual and easily recognizable style that would set his band apart from all the rest.

Formed in March 1938, the second Glenn Miller Orchestra soon began breaking attendance records all up and down the East Coast. At the New York State Fair in Syracuse it attracted the largest dancing crowd in the city's history. The next night it topped Guy Lombardo's all-time record at the Hershey Park Ballroom in Pennsylvania. The Orchestra was invited by ASCAP to perform at Carnegie Hall.

As the World War II was starting to take its toll on many of the big bands as musicians, and the rest of country's young men, began receiving draft notices. On October 7, 1942, Alton Glenn Miller reported for induction into the Army and was immediately assigned to the Army Specialist Corps. His appointment as a Captain came after many months of convincing the military higher-ups that he could modernize the army band and ultimately improve the morale of the men. His training complete, he was transferred into the Army

Air Corps, where he ultimately organized the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Band. Miller's goal of entertaining the fighting troops took another year to be realized, but in late 1943 he and the band were shipped out to England.

There, in less than one year, the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Band engaged in over 800 performances. Of these, 500 were broadcasts heard by millions. But Glenn was not to participate in the final six months of these activities. In the Fall of 1944, the band was scheduled to be sent on a six-week tour of Europe and would be stationed in Paris during that time. Miller decided to go ahead, in order to make the proper arrangements for the group's arrival. And so, on December 15th, Glenn Miller boarded a transport plane to Paris, never to be seen again.

His favorite author was Damon Runyon. His favorite book was the Bible. Spencer Tracy and Olivia de Havilland were his favorite movie actor and actress. His big loves were trout fishing, playing baseball, listening to good music, sleep and money.

His pet peeves were bad swing, early-morning telephone calls (he liked to sleep from 4 a.m. to noon), and the phrase 'goodbye now.' His favorite quotation, one he stated, was not from the Bible, nor from Runyon, but from Duke Ellington: 'It Don't Mean a Thing If it Ain't Got that Swing!'