

Hoosier Hero: Bud Miller from the Doolittle Raid

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Bombardier Bud Miller survived the Doolittle Tokyo Raid, but his luck ran out in North Africa.

Skimming low above Tokyo's roof-tops, the crew of B-25B No. 40-2292 didn't have time to climb to 1,500 feet, the minimum distance considered safe for bombing. First Lieutenant Travis Hoover leveled off at 900 feet, and bombardier 1st Lt. Richard "Bud" Miller manually released his ordnance—three 500-pound demolition bombs and one incendiary cluster. It was impossible to see the results from either the flight deck or the "greenhouse," Miller's position in the nose, but the flight engineer, in his dorsal turret, reported: "Yes, Sir. All four hit close together, and there's smoke all over the area. We got it all right!" With that, Miller, a member of Crew No. 2 of Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders, earned his place in history.

Born in Fort Wayne, Ind., in 1916, Miller graduated from high school in 1933 and attended Indiana University for two years before enlisting as a flying cadet. When he washed out of flight school, he was discharged from the U.S. Army Air Corps, but reenlisted in May 1941 as an aviation cadet. He trained to be a bombardier at Barksdale, La., receiving his commission as a second lieutenant on December 16, 1941.

Miller was assigned to the 37th Bomb Squadron, 17th Bomb Group, based at Pendleton, Ore. In early February 1942, the group was transferred to Columbia Army Air Base in South Carolina for patrol duty on the East Coast. While the men were in the process of moving, however, they learned volunteers were needed for a special assignment, an extremely hazardous mission that would require great skill. Bud Miller was among those volunteers. The airmen selected trained at Eglin Field, Fla., where Miller was assigned to Hoover's crew. On April 18, 1942, Hoover's B-25B Mitchell was launched from the deck of the aircraft carrier Hornet at 0827 hours, directly behind mission leader Lt. Col. James Doolittle. Hoover followed Doolittle all the way to Tokyo before breaking off to attack his target.

"We went in at a fearful speed and were almost on our objective before we realized it," recalled Miller. "Our pilot saw it first. Soon as he yelled, I saw it too. I opened the bomb bay doors and let fly." As Miller closed the bomb bay doors, Hoover banked hard and headed for China.

After making a wheels-up landing in a rice paddy near Ninghai, the crew was picked up by local guerrillas. In Ninghai they met with aeronautical engineer Tung Sheng Liu, who spoke English and served as their translator. Hoover told him they needed to get to Chuhsien, 100 miles distant, site of the nearest major airfield in Free China. Traveling mostly at night, the Chinese carried the Americans in sedan chairs. There was a contest among the bearers every day, with the losers having to carry Miller, the heaviest man at more than 200 pounds.

The journey took almost a week, but when they reached the Chuhsien airfield they linked up with other Raiders who had assembled there. After another week the men traveled by train and bus to Hengyang, where several days later a USAAF C-47 arrived to take them to Chungking. On May 14, the Raiders were invited to a dinner at the home of Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek and his wife. As secretary-general of the Chinese air force, Madame Chiang presented each man with a medal.

When Miller returned home to Indiana in late June for a two-week leave, he was the guest of honor at Fort Wayne's Fourth of July celebration. "I wouldn't mind going back," he told one reporter. "It was interesting in spite of all the tension and strain we went through. I feel the war has changed me some. Not to the point of sheer killing. Nothing like that. But it's made me feel how serious this whole thing really is. Up in the sky there is little frenzy for war since there is no actual grappling with an enemy. The Japs have never done anything to me personally, so I can't hate them for themselves, but only for what they have done to us as a nation. This air-fighting is a cold-blooded business—it's a job, and that's where those long hours of training pay off."

Miller returned to Barksdale to rejoin the 17th Bomb Group near the end of July, but he was soon reassigned to the 438th Bomb Squadron, 319th Bomb Group, flying B-26 Marauders. That November the 319th began operations at Maison Blanche, Algeria. During the group's first combat mission, on November 28, Miller served as the bombardier/navigator on a Marauder piloted by Captain Randy Holzapple (who later became the 319th's commander). Nine B-26s from the group set out to bomb the airdrome at Kairouan, Tunisia, and the harbor in Sfax. When the crews reached Kairouan, they saw no aircraft or hangars worth targeting, so they continued on to Sfax. Miller's element was first to arrive, approaching the harbor at 1,000 feet.

"We just about raised hell," Miller recalled. "We gave them a little work to do before they can use that port again. I saw one warehouse simply go to pieces, but there were so many bombs going down I couldn't tell all we hit." Despite intense flak, all the 319th's aircraft returned to base.

On January 22, 1943, six B-26s took off at 0940 hours, escorted by 12 P-38s from the 14th Fighter Group, to conduct a sweep of shipping north of the Gulf of Tunis. During the bomb run, the Marauders lost contact with the P-38s. After Holzapple's B-26 dropped its bombs, it was jumped by Messerschmitt Me-110s and Me-109s. A running fight ensued, resulting in two Me-109s and two Me-110s destroyed, with another 110 damaged.

The B-26s continued their sweep, spotting an enemy convoy consisting of a large freighter, a cargo liner and a smaller freighter, escorted by five small vessels, possibly destroyers. Holzapple's Marauder, with two others, attacked the big freighter. Holzapple's bomber was struck by at least three 20mm rounds, seriously wounding Miller in the head and shoulders. Despite his injuries, he remained at his post, dropping the bombs and closing the bomb bay doors. The bombardier's last action—closing the bomb bay doors—was credited with

saving the lives of his fellow crewmen. If he had failed to do so, the Marauder would have been at serious risk, as it couldn't have kept up with the rest of the formation.

Holzapple's B-26, along with two others, returned to Telergma, where Miller died later that night. He was buried in El Alia Cemetery at Algiers. On February 8, his family received a telegram saying that their son had died of wounds "received in action in defense of his county." Bud Miller would be posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Indiana Congressman George W. Gillie memorialized the ultimate sacrifice made by the 26-year-old airman, saying: "Indiana is proud and saddened over the loss of this heroic bombardier—three times decorated for bravery since the outbreak of war. The people of America—the free people of all the world—owe a debt of gratitude to Richard E. Miller and to the thousands of young men like him who are fighting and dying in defense of freedom and democracy."