

Clarion Review

Biography

I Kept My Word: The Personal Promise Between a World War II Army Private and His Captain About What Really Happened to Glenn Miller

Clarence B. Wolfe as told to Susan Goodrich Giffin

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Four Stars (out of Five)

War is waged by men; not by beasts or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime. — Frederic Manning

Clarence B. Wolfe was born the youngest of eleven on a farm in Clay City Indiana. By the time the Great Depression was winding down in 1939 having done its work of suppressing the price of crops by 40-60 young Wolfe aged 15 was headed to Detroit and the minimum wage guarantees of a manufacturing job. Four years later he was drafted into the army.

One of nearly 700 serving in the 134th Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) Wolfe was sent to Scotland after basic training then on to “Buzz Bomb Alley” near Dover on the English Channel. Wolfe was in charge of the computer that directed the gunners to shoot down the V-1s Germany was raining down on London.

Glenn Miller was also born a “hayseed” but when he joined the military in 1942 he’d turned himself into a star trombonist and a composer at the height of his Big Band career. Miller’s intention when joining up was purely spiritual. He wanted to “...put a little more spring into the feet of our marching men and a little more joy in their hearts...” The military was only too happy to make use of Miller’s talents and sent him out to raise millions in war bond drives. Then the day after D-Day the band leader received permission to take his show overseas. Three months later he was dead shot down by “friendly fire” over the English Channel on his way to Paris. And the only guns shot that day were those of Wolfe’s 134th AAA.

While Wolfe’s explanation of the cause of this incident is interesting it’s the effects that fascinate. Rushed out of England the battalion ends up in the Ardennes region on the border between Belgium and Germany — the site of the four-week long Battle of the Bulge the costliest ever in terms of loss of lives. From the idyllic green hills of the English coast to

fighting alone hand-to-hand the gun-shot dead the crawling through the mud and snow and working by the light of the “rocket’s red flare.” A “Hollywood” rescue from behind enemy lines and the spectacular end to the Ludendorff Bridge are two highlights in Wolfe’s memoir.

But it’s his contemplative and paced storytelling combined with research and insights from subsequent trips to Europe make the memoir real and riveting. Add the intimate connections made in dim restaurants and bars in fox holes and crawlways the tragic romances of love and sex all told candidly often brutally and *I Kept My Word* becomes a short but unforgettable bit of eyewitness accounting. This reviewer for one is grateful Mr. Wolfe decided to tell his story. *I Kept My Word* is a highly recommended addition to all World War II libraries.