

# Remember them all

Curtis Miller was your typical mid western American boy. Born in El Dorado, Kansas in 1924; he was the middle of three brothers. His oldest brother had graduated two years before him and had gone to work at Beechcraft in Wichita. He would go on to join the Army Air Force and end up as a sheet metal mechanic. Curtis skipped part of his junior year to serve his country in the Civilian Conservation Corps. After his services were no longer needed he returned to El Dorado High School to finish his schooling.

Looking through Curtis' yearbook we see that he was a lettered member of the football team, the Wildcat Gridsters. He was also apparently quite the ladies man. His intent to join the army is apparent with at least one classmate well wishing him to be a "good sergeant", he was also a "swell" guy. In May 1943 Curtis graduated with a diploma specializing in industrial arts. He joined the Army that summer and was sent to Camp Roberts and then to Fort Ord for training. Following his stateside infantry training he was shipped to the South Pacific where he joined his new unit the 161st Infantry Regiment.

The 161st had seen its first combat of WWII in January of 1943 during the Guadalcanal campaign. Following that campaign the 161st fought in the Northern Solomon Islands. After that they went to New Zealand to replenish their ranks, it is here that Curtis joined his new unit. From New Zealand the 161st went to New Caledonia to begin training for their next battle. By early fall they were receiving amphibious training in anticipation of their participation in the liberation of the Philippines. In December the unit shipped out heading for Luzon, the second of the Philippine islands to be chosen for liberation. The American invasion started on January 9, 1945 and the 161st initially held in reserve, joining the battle on the 17th.

On January 22nd the 161st was tasked with liberating the town of San Manuel. The fighting was fierce with the Japanese well dug in and supported by close to 40 tanks. After five days of back and forth fighting the 161st began their final attack to push the Japanese defenders from the town. Fighting was intense and Curtis' company came under intense fire from Japanese tanks. Private First Class Curtis Miller Jr was struck by machine gun fire from a tank and killed instantly. He had been in combat for ten days, and was 20 years old.

In the days following his death, his mother would receive the telegram feared by so many. Undoubtedly she was struck with grief as she read the haunting words, "The secretary of war wishes me to express his deepest regrets that your son PFC Curtis Miller was killed January 27, 1945 in the South West Pacific." In the following weeks she would receive his last letters, his life insurance and a certificate from the president that paid tribute to him and his sacrifice. In the summer of 1948, Curtis, along with thousands of others, would begin their final journeys home. First by ship, and then by train, he would be returned to his family. On August 21, 1948 Curtis was laid to rest at

the Sunset Lawns cemetery in his home town of El Dorado Kansas. He was carried to his final resting place by friends and former teammates, while veterans from the last great war played taps and provided an honor guard. The final correspondence his mother would receive was a check for \$61 to cover his funeral.

It is said that one death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic. War time casualties are almost always looked at through the lens of statistics not the individual. As a result the sacrifice made by each of the individual fallen and their families tends to be lost. Throughout our nations history the above story has played out hundreds of thousands of times. And while each individual's story is different, they are all the same in that they gave their life for our country. Their family's all grieved and suffered a loss and pain that can never be forgotten.

This Memorial Day I leave you with words far more profound than I could ever come up with. These are the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt printed on the bottom of the certificate loved ones would receive honoring their fallen loved one during WWII. "...he stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live, and grow, and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives. In a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."

Please remember them all

Tom Saluzzo



"A happier time" The 1942 Wildcat Gridsters. Miller #28, along with Kelly #50 and Page #51. Two team mates who would serve as pallbearers in 1948.