

# THE WAR IN EUROPE

By Donald L. Miller, PhD



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My interest in World War II, like that of so many Americans, stems largely from how the war touched my own family. My father, Donald L. Miller, a native of Reading, Pennsylvania, entered the US Army Air Force in 1942 at the age of 19, while my mother, Frances Stofko Miller, worked for a local plant producing parts for the planes the American bomber crews flew over Nazi Germany. My grandfather, Miklus Stofko, a Slovak immigrant, worked in a steel plant manufacturing the weapons that infantry soldiers like my uncle John Steber carried onto the sands of Normandy on D-Day.

I was too young to experience the war and found it difficult to persuade WWII veterans in my family and neighborhood to talk about it. When my father died in 1995, I was a writer and historian, but my first five books had nothing to do with war. Shortly after my father's death, my young granddaughter, Alyssa, persuaded me to write a book about his war, in his memory. My aim was to tell the story of the war through the eyes of ordinary men and women who experienced it on the front lines as soldiers or civilians. In this war, far more civilians were killed than fighting men. I have since written three books about the war from this perspective.

This volume is a continuation of that effort. It explores international policy at the highest level, but deals most directly with war as it was felt and experienced by soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and civilians. This is a story of generals and privates, people from every sector of American society, from every race and nationality, for this was America's first total war, a war in which almost the entire population was mobilized for victory over tyranny. But victory was not assured. This was a war that could easily have been lost. Those who lived through it knew that.

My great hope is that students and teachers using the essays and lessons in this volume will come to think of this war in two ways: as a conflict between nations and clashing ideologies—democracy and totalitarianism, freedom and fascism—but also as a tragic experience shared by millions of human beings. It was a savagely fought war that brought out the best as well as the worst in its participants, revealing us fully as imperfect and complex. It is a subject for philosophers and psychologists as well as historians and political scientists. The war tested people of all ages as they would never be tested again, and brought many of them to their highest pitch, as when young men by the tens of thousands assaulted the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944, and set out on the road to Berlin.

Donald L. Miller is the John Henry MacCracken Professor of History at Lafayette College and author of nine books, including the award-winning *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America*; *Lewis Mumford, A Life*, a *New York Times* Notable Book; and the critically acclaimed best seller *Masters of the Air*, being made into an HBO dramatic miniseries produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg. Miller has hosted the PBS series *A Biography of America* and has appeared on numerous other PBS programs in the *American Experience* series. With Tom Hanks, he coproduced the HBO documentary, *He Has Seen War*. A former resident at All Souls College, Oxford and a lecturer for the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, his articles and reviews have appeared in *American Heritage*, *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Washington Post*, among other publications. Miller also currently serves on The National WWII Museum's Presidential Counselors advisory board.

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