

GLENN MILLER: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO HIM?

World News in Brief, Reuter

[This brief article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on July 14, 1997, under the headline "Bandleader Glenn Miller in the mood when he died, says paper", with the sub-heading "Miller . . . plane crash was 'wartime misinformation'."]



Glenn Miller: it is alleged he met his death in the arms of a prostitute in a Paris brothel in 1944... PHOTO COURTESY ALCHETRON

Bonn: A German newspaper has reported that the United States wartime bandleader Glenn Miller died of a heart attack in a Paris brothel in 1944 and not, as officially reported, in a plane crash.

The mass-circulation *Bild* claimed the famed trombonist and exponent of the big-band swing sound met his death in the arms of a prostitute. It said the secret of how he died was discovered by a German journalist, Udo Ulkotte, in US secret service files while researching a new book on Germany's BND intelligence agency.

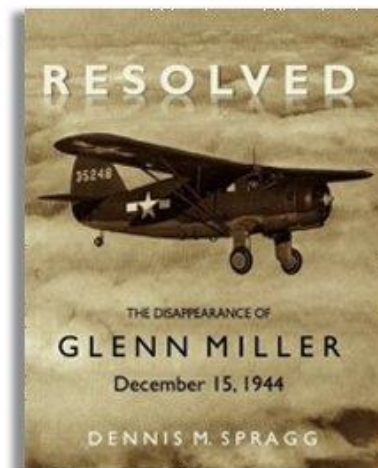
Bild quoted Ulfkotte as saying the secret was a typical example of wartime misinformation, and the true cause of Miller's death was concealed to keep his legend alive and protect the morale of US troops.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED WHEN GLENN MILLER DISAPPEARED IN 1944

From the Glenn Miller Archive, University of Colorado Boulder

[This anonymous article was published by the Glenn Miller Archive on July 8, 2014 and can be read on the internet at this link

<https://www.colorado.edu/music/2014/07/08/revealed-what-really-happened-when-glenn-miller-disappeared-1944#:~:text=Miller%2onever%20boarded%20the%20plane,a%20surrender%20from%20Nazi%20Germany.&text=He%20made%20it%20to%20Paris,heart%20attack%20in%20a%20bordello.>



DB Cooper. Amelia Earhart. Jimmy Hoffa. All prominent Americans whose unexplained disappearances have fascinated and confounded armchair historians and professionals alike—and created fertile ground for all manner of wild explanations and conspiracy theories.

Ditto for Glenn Miller, one of the University of Colorado Boulder's most illustrious alumni, who was the nation's most famous big-band leader when he disappeared Dec 15, 1944, after heading out over the English Channel on a small military plane bound for Paris.

Almost from the moment the world learned Miller had gone missing, conspiracy theories began to emerge like puffs of smoke from the Chattanooga Choo Choo. And they've never really stopped, as each new generation discovers the mystery and publishes books and articles purporting to have solved it.

But Dennis Spragg of the College of Music's American Music Research Center (AMRC) — and Miller's family—is doing his best to end all the crazy speculation.

“In 2009, Steve Miller, Glenn's son and a big donor to the Glenn Miller Archive”—the definitive Miller collection, housed at the AMRC —“asked me if I would consider dealing with the latest series of sensationalistic conspiracy books. He said, ‘enough is enough,’” says Spragg.

The three most prominent theories over the years:

- * Miller never boarded the plane, but was assassinated after Gen Dwight D “Ike” Eisenhower sent him on a secret mission one or two days earlier to negotiate a surrender from Nazi Germany.

- *He made it to Paris, where he died of a heart attack in a bordello.

- *The small plane he was on was destroyed by bombs jettisoned from a phalanx of Allied bombers passing overhead on their way back from an aborted mission over Germany.



A Noorduyn C-64 Norseman resembling the #44070285 plane which went down with Glenn Miller...

More than four years—and dozens of trips to Washington, DC, London and US Air Force archives—later, Spragg is confident he knows what happened: The plane went down in mere seconds over the channel, instantly killing Miller, another officer and a young pilot, likely because fuel lines from wing tanks froze. The steel-framed, wood and fabric plane all but disintegrated, sending its heavy Pratt-Whitney engine plunging to the bottom.

Ironically, as Spragg told the producers of the PBS show *History Detectives*, which will air *The Disappearance of Glenn Miller* nationwide on July 8, that not-so-mysterious conclusion was reached by investigators just days after the plane went down. But documents from the investigation were boxed up after the war, sent to the United States and locked away.

“It was right there all this time, but all the researchers trying to follow the trail of Glenn Miller just didn’t have access to it,” says Alan Cass, founder and curator of the Glenn Miller Archive.

But Spragg, who surely knows more about Miller’s time in the US Army Air Force and his mysterious disappearance than anyone else alive, was as driven as Sherlock Holmes in his quest to find the answers.



Dennis Spragg: as driven as Sherlock Holmes in his quest to find the answers...

“I just went for it. I didn’t realize it would take four years. Nobody else had been in the files at Maxwell Air Force Base until me,” he says by phone from Cape Cod, where he is spending the summer.

The more melodramatic tales simply don’t stand up to scrutiny, based on unambiguous documentation from a board of inquiry investigation at the time.

A little background: The musician, who attended CU—he received an incomplete in the only music class he took—for three semesters before leaving, became the nation’s most popular band leader from 1939 to 1942. He enlisted for the war effort and as a captain led band performances in England.



Glenn Miller in his Air Force uniform: when weather grounded normal transport flights, he hitched a ride on a small C64 Norseman with his friend Lt Col Norman Baessell and a 20-year-old pilot..

In 1944, after the Allies recaptured Paris from the Germans, Eisenhower asked Miller to head up a joint British-American radio production team, to perform for troops and to record for broadcast back home. Miller was agitated by complications in Paris and when weather grounded normal transport flights, he hitched a ride on a small C64 Norseman with his friend Lt Col Norman Baessell and a 20-year-old pilot.

“He was mad, he was in a rush. He was a type-A personality with the intestinal fortitude of a general,” Spragg says. “He was a leading celebrity in America and he got his own way.”

Contrary to popular myth, the flight was not unauthorized, and conditions were not foggy, as depicted in the film *The Glenn Miller Story*. It was a “casual” flight in a plane whose model had been recalled due to defective carburettor heaters, but it was at the end of the triage line behind combat planes and bombers. Heavy clouds aloft had the pilot flying on “visual flight rules” relatively close to the water and the temperature was below freezing.



Musicians & actors in “The Glenn Miller Story”: the flight was not unauthorized, and conditions were not foggy, as depicted in the film...

“The guy flew right into freezing conditions,” says Spragg, who strongly believes fuel-line freezing, engine overheating and circumstances doomed the plane.

The mystery arose in part because the Germans launched the counteroffensive that became known as the Battle of the Bulge the next morning, and nobody knew Miller was missing for 72 hours. As soon as Orville A Anderson of the US 8th Air Force—coincidentally Miller’s cousin by marriage—was notified of the missing aircraft on Monday, he said, “They’ve had it. I can mount a search but it won’t matter.”

“This was a non-survivable accident with immediate trauma,” Spragg says. “Anybody who thinks this plane could have been ditched has rocks in his head, but even if it could, they would have survived just 20 minutes in the water because of the temperature.”

And the other yarns told and repeated over the decades? All easily disproven by clear, documentary evidence.

*More than a dozen witnesses saw Miller board the plane on the 15th with Baessell.

*Those titillating rumours of a heart attack in a French bordello were concocted by Nazi propaganda chief Hermann Goering and broadcast only after the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force announced Miller's death on Dec 24. ("And he was a straight arrow," Spragg says. "Anyone who says that has just been regurgitating a story that originated with the Germans.")



Hermann Goering: he concocted those titillating rumours of Miller's heart attack in a French bordello...

*Using flight logs and the discovery that another plane actually was accidentally bombed, Spragg has shot holes in the friendly-fire theory. In order for Miller's plane to have been taken down by the flight of Lancaster bombers, time would have had to shift by an hour and the small plane would have had to be 20 degrees off course. This theory grew out of a tall tale told by one of the Lancaster pilots in a bar in South Africa in 1984, Spragg says—"So why not tell the story in 1944?"

Spragg is absolutely confident about his conclusions—"Nobody else has gone to the documents"—but not at all sure it will lay the myths to rest.

"I went through a logical process of elimination," Spragg says. "I went through all the possibilities and knocked them down or verified them. Of course, there is always a segment of the public that will never be convinced by logic."