

Trained for War

Lester Laneau “Pete” Miller was born in the Dillon County community of Hamer. He attended public schools in Dillon and entered Clemson in 1935. A vocational agricultural education major, he participated in 4-H, the Grange, and Future Farmers of America. He reached the cadet rank of second lieutenant and was assigned to Senior Company Number 2. After graduating with the Class of 1939, Miller returned to Dillon and took a job teaching at Centenary High School.

On February 11, 1942, Miller was called to active duty. He trained first at Fort Benning, Georgia and was then assigned to the 314th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Infantry Division. The 79th was a Selective Service division composed of men called up by the draft. Miller’s training as a member of the 79th is instructive. The division was activated at Camp Pickett, Virginia in June 1942 and subsequently trained at Camp Blanding, Florida and Forrest, Tennessee. The division was next ordered to the Desert Training Center in Arizona and then continued its training at Camp Phillips near Salina, Kansas. The division sailed from New York in April 1944 and completed its training in England. It crossed the English Channel and landed on Utah Beach, entering combat on June 19. While the 79th’s twenty-four months of training compared most favorably with the eleven months this same division had to prepare for battle in World War I, its training period for this new conflict was well below average. According to War Department figures reported by the *Washington Post* in July 1944, the average American division in World War II had trained for thirty-one months prior to its commitment to combat.

The reduced level of training received by the 79th didn’t seem to impact its combat effectiveness. A week after its commitment, the division entered the key French port of Cherbourg. It held a defensive position in early July before capturing LaHaye du Puits on July 8th. This battle pitted the infantry against German tank units in brutal fighting that cost the division more than one thousand casualties. On July 26th, the division attacked across the Ay River and took Lessay. It crossed the Sarthe River and entered Le Mans on August 8th. The division continued to advance as German resistance began to weaken, crossing the Seine River on August 19th and the Therain River on the 31st.

As the Germans fell back, the 79th reached the Belgian frontier and captured Charmes in heavy street fighting on September 12. On September 22, First Lieutenant Miller was killed in action.



L. L. MILLER



Lieutenant Miller was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents, one brother then serving in the Army, and three sisters, one of whom was serving in the WAVES, the Navy's auxiliary branch for women volunteers. Lieutenant Miller was buried at the military cemetery in Andilly, France. In 1948, his remains were returned to the United States and were reburied at the Riverside Cemetery in Dillon.

