
The Glenn Miller Mystery: An Interview with Williams Suitts and Alan Cass

Editor's note: Glenn Miller (1904-44), the renowned big band leader and composer of such popular standards as "In the Mood" and "Moonlight Serenade," disappeared without a trace in poor weather over the English Channel in December 1944. The circumstances of Miller's disappearance have never been fully explained, but a Royal Air Force navigator named Fred Shaw came forward in the early 1950s claiming to have seen a plane resembling Miller's crash into the water as a fleet of Allied planes in which he was included was returning to England from an aborted mission over Germany. Shaw's personal logbook, containing details of the mission and Shaw's observations, was put up for sale by Sotheby's auction house on Tuesday, April 13, 1999.

The winning bid came from a seventy-six-year-old Boulder, Colorado businessman, William Suitts, whose affection for Miller's music goes back to his own experience as a World War II serviceman in Italy. Mr. Suitts agreed to be interviewed for the AMRC Journal along with Alan Cass, a leading authority and frequent lecturer on the life and career of Miller and founder of the Glenn Miller Archive. Cass, a familiar presence on the University of Colorado, Boulder campus and recent honorary degree recipient, is acquainted with dozens of collectors and fans of the band leader, but interestingly enough had never met William Suitts before the logbook auction.

Both men have now become fast friends and continue to celebrate the Glenn Miller legacy among hundreds of aficionados young and old at festivals and reunions across the country. The three-way discussion transcribed here took place on July 17, 1999.

Thomas Riis

TR: How did you first become interested in Glenn Miller, Bill?

WS: I think that I was about sixteen years of age when I first started listening to Glenn Miller's orchestra and others. I was living in Illinois at the time and used to listen to the radio stations from Chicago. Dick Jurgens and his

orchestra from the Aragon and Trianon Ballroom there. I used to fall asleep at night listening to that particular music.

When Glenn Miller came on the scene his music was so different. From the first time I heard it I loved it and related to it somehow and always remembered that.

TR: Alan, do you know when that was, when those first broadcasts were happening?

AC: Actually there were a few early broadcasts in 1937 and 1938, but the first really big coast-to-coast broadcasts began in the summer of 1939. Radio was just so important in those days. It was the way the big bands got to be recognized. If you played locally—in ballrooms, that sort of things—you had a local appeal. But you'd really hit the big time if you could get a national broadcast. Obviously it exposed you to a larger listening audience. And of course there was no television. Radio was *the* medium. There was a tremendous amount of interest from sponsors and song-pluggers then [in new bands].

TR: Nowadays we don't realize how the whole experience of living through the Depression and prewar crises was. Families gathered around the radio to hear their favorite programs and their favorite music. Tell us more about your story, Bill, your connection to music and Miller.

WS: I had graduated from high school in Illinois in 1940 and left home in



Alan Cass, William Suitts, and Tom Riis with Fred Shaw's logbook.

the middle of 1940 to attempt to find a job. I hitchhiked to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and was hired as a time-keeper in a foundry at forty cents an hour. [Laughs] I remember that when I worked overtime, I received sixty cents an hour, a penny for every minute I worked. I really thought I'd hit the mother lode!

I happened to be in the theater in 1941 in Chattanooga at the first showing of the Miller picture set in Sun Valley, Idaho, *Sun Valley Serenade*. When the band was waiting for John Payne and Sonja Henie to come down off the mountain and they were running late, I remember Glenn Miller turning to the band saying, "Let's run through 'Chattanooga Choo Choo.'" Everyone in the audience clapped, stood up and stomped their feet!

Just a short time later World War II broke out, I hitchhiked to Los Angeles (put a Pearl Harbor sign on my suitcase) to go into the service there. While I was waiting for my birth certificate to arrive (it was then back in Illinois), I went to the Hollywood Palladium, the *big* place to hear big bands . . .

AC: *The place!*

WS: I saw Dorsey after Frank Sinatra joined him. Peggy Lee was a singer with Dorsey's band at that time also. Never did see Glenn Miller! But there was something about that big band music I always responded to.

First I went into the merchant marine and then the air force and was sent to Buckley Field here in Denver for eight weeks. I fell in love with Colorado weather in the fall. It was so different from Illinois. So I vowed that if I ever had the opportunity to come back here I would. I went on to radio school at Scott Field, Illinois and eventually became a radar navigator technician. Went to the European theater, flying out of Foggia, Italy on B-24s in 1943 and 1944.

TR: **What is your personal music background?**

WS: I do a lot of whistling. [Laughs] I come from a family of ten children. I had two or three sisters who played piano, but no one in the immediate family played other musical instruments.

TR: **So your love of music is through your ears and heart?**

WS: That's correct.

TR: **Tell us about your experience with Sotheby's [auction house] leading up to the purchase of the logbook. That's a fascinating part of this whole story. How did you get interested in this business?**

WS: We've lived in the same house in Boulder for forty years. We're in the habit of taking the daily newspapers and putting them on the hearth of the fireplace. I take them out every weekend. I was doing my Sunday chore about two months ago, and as I prepared to put them in the trash bin on the top of the Saturday *Boulder Camera* I saw the headline about the Miller story, the

mystery disappearance, the log to be auctioned, something like that. I stood there and read the article and noted that Sotheby's was planning the auction for the following Tuesday.

I tore the article out, brought in into the house, showed it to my wife, and she read it. On Monday morning, I called New York just to find out what the procedure was on this. One of the representatives informed me that there had been a tremendous amount of interest in the bidding and if I were interested they would set aside a bid [telephone] line into the room where it would take place in England. I gave them my business phone number and was told to be there at 6 o'clock the next morning. With the seven hour time difference, they assumed that the bidding would begin between 2:00 and 2:30 p.m. London time.

I got up at a quarter to five, went to my car in the darkness, got in, turned on the radio as I always do, and as I backed out heard an announcement about an upcoming charity ball in Denver for the following week. The attraction was to be an appearance by June Allyson, one of the stars of *The Glenn Miller Story!* I hadn't even known that she was still alive. I thought, gee what a coincidence!

I drove down to my office, waited til 7 o'clock and didn't receive a phone call. I rang England directly to find out what had transpired with the Miller memorabilia. She said, "Oh, we're running about an hour and a half late on that, but there is still an open line left." I returned home—the car radio was still on—and just as I touched the knob to turn it off, the band started playing "Moonlight Serenade." I just couldn't believe that.

I went inside and told my wife about June Allyson and "Moonlight Serenade" and said I just think some things working out there mean I should have this book. She's always been very supportive and said why don't you just go for it. I didn't realize how far I was going to go for it. [Laughs] So, I came back down to my office where they called me at about 8:20 a.m.

As the gentleman started speaking to me from the bidding room, there were five items yet to be sold [before the Miller lot]. The auctioneer, as I could hear, was bringing the gavel down and announcing bids in pounds. I suddenly realized that I hadn't taken that fact into consideration. I said to the gentleman, "Is the bidding all done in pounds?" hoping they might do this one lot in dollars. He said, "Oh, yes, it's all done in pounds." And I said, "Could you tell me the exchange rate?" He said, "Well, just a moment. I'll have to check that." He was gone momentarily, then came back with, "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Suitts, we are only two items away from the Miller bidding."

So when I began bidding I really didn't know how much I was in for. What I related it to—the thought crossed my mind because we have a son with a business in northern British Columbia—was that it was maybe something along the lines of the Canadian exchange rate. . . . Wrong! [Laughter] It was more like twice as much.

Well, as they say, once you're on the floor, you might as well dance. Once the bidding started, I believe it started at about five hundred pounds. . . .

TR: Is that what Sotheby's predicted?

WS: That's correct. It just escalated very quickly to 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000 pounds. And, as Alan knows, since he was listening to the same bidding, it went that way up to just about 15,000 pounds, something like that. It wasn't slowing down, going up in increments of 200 pounds per bid. I raised it 500 pounds and there was no hesitation from whoever was bidding against me. Then I raised it again and this time bidding slowed a bit. I began to hope and after the next two bids I came out as the high bidder.

TR: What was the actual final bid in dollars?

WS: About \$34,000. Plus commission, which I hadn't been told about!

TR: So Sotheby's thought it might go for about \$900 or so. Alan, what was your part in this? I know you have an interesting parallel story about the bidding. We should get this on the record.

AC: Yes, indeed! Here we are in the same town, probably no more than a quarter of a mile from each other and not knowing it at the time.

I had heard about this through Pam Penfold (with *The Coloradan*). She had got word about the auction about a month beforehand from someone who bid regularly with Sotheby's, asked was I aware of this item. She called and sent me the information and I was surprised to find that the logbook was being put up. I started asking around among the Miller collectors.

TR: You know several Miller fans.

AC: Oh, yes. They are pretty well connected around the world. We contacted many members of the family as well. I recall that the Associated Press had reported that Sotheby's estimated the bid range to be between \$600 and \$1200 U.S. We thought this might be worth bidding on if it stayed in that range.

We at CU were contacted by a number of people. Glenn's son, Steve, called about two days before and asked my opinion, first of all if I thought that this was worthwhile bidding on. I indicated that it was. Would I represent him anonymously and place a bid? he asked. I agreed, though I had never done anything like this before in my life. Steve wanted to guarantee that the logbook would end up in a museum, preferably the Glenn Miller Archive.

We were both looking at that price range, as well. We wanted to make sure that it was going to be in pounds rather than in U.S. dollars, so I got on the internet and contacted the people at Sotheby's in England, in Sussex actually, where they sell military memorabilia.

TR: Not in London?

AC: No. In Sussex they do large items, military aircraft, tanks, down to medals, sabers, swords, an incredible array of "militaria and aeronautica," as they refer to it. The lady I spoke with there was very kind. She said she would

hook us up on a phone as they did with Bill and arranged for us to be in our office at that phone number. They said to expect a call around 6:30 a.m. our time. I squared away the pounds/dollars exchange rate, contacted Steve Miller only because we were concerned to be clear. Steve had put a very definite limit of \$2000. Not wanting to stick my neck out too far on that one. We had it all arranged.

I woke up that morning at about 2 a.m. Had a raging headache, couldn't get back to sleep, and finally about 4 o'clock decided I might as well go on up to the office and wait for the phone call. Like Bill I received a call saying the auction was running a little bit late. It would probably be about 8:30 our time before they would ring again.

I simply waited in the office. They called back when they were down to about two lots before the Miller material. This fellow with a decided English accent came on the line. You could tell he was in the bidding room at Sotheby's because you could very faintly hear the bidding process going on. I asked at that time how many people were in the room, and he said a few more than a hundred.

He said, "There's a great deal of interest in this, by the way. We've had a lot of phone calls. Many people waiting for phone calls." He asked me to stay on the line with him and of course I did. Before I knew it the bidding process began, and I would say that within less than a minute they had gone *well* past the limit we had set for ourselves.

TR: You were out of the running.

AC: Out of the running in grand style! I had a tablet with me to keep track of the bids. It was obvious it was going to go quite some distance and so the person on the end of the line said, "We've reached your maximum. Do you want to hang up now?" I said, "No, I'd really like to listen and see just how far this thing goes." He said, "That's fine," so we stayed on the line.

I chit-chatted back and forth. He kept giving me bids and I kept writing them down. As Bill said, they were coming very close together. As the amount reached 15,000 pounds, there was a hesitation. The gentleman on the other end of the line said, "I think we're going to wrap this up before too awfully long." All of a sudden you could hear the rap of the gavel and there was applause. He said, "Well, we have a winner." I said, "What did it go for and is there any way of finding out who the winning bidder was?" He said, "Well, the bid was 19,000 pounds but it is Sotheby's policy not to divulge the name of the winning party."

All of the time I was thinking that this would be like such an event often is in the art world, where someone acquires an object like this and squirrels it away and it is never seen or heard from again. So I was a bit despondent about that. I hung up, called home, told my wife I'd be a little late coming home. . . . I called Steve Miller and said, "I'm sorry. We were way out of the running. Believe it or not, it went for much more than we expected."

Next thing you know, I came home later that afternoon, 4:30 or 5 p.m. My wife is all excited, jumping up and down. She says, "Did you hear? A gentleman from Boulder has made the winning bid?"

My first reaction on hearing this was did they make a mistake and think that *I* had made this bid? [laughs] I turned to my wife and said, "How much money do we have in our checking account?" She said, "We don't have *that* much." I said, "I can't believe it. Did they think it was me?" She said, "No, no, no, it's a gentleman from Boulder and his name is William Suitts. Do you know him?"

I had to think for a minute, but I said, "No, I don't believe our paths have ever crossed. I have no idea." She said well, a reporter from the *Denver Post* had called and given her his name and wanted to know more information about the Glenn Miller Archive and the logbook and that they were already in touch with Mr. Suitts.

So, I was very happy to know, first of all, that I hadn't made that winning bid—even though I wanted to. At the same time I was really happy for Bill, never having met him, for the fact that it would be coming to this country. That we might even have the opportunity to see this document was a thrilling possibility. Knowing that Bill at this time was in the middle of a media blitz we decided it would not be wise to try to contact him that day.

TR: The media response here, we might add, was really tremendous, and I'm sure pretty unexpected for you, Bill. You had calls from all over, right?

WS: Within five minutes I received a call from AP [the Associated Press]. A gentleman who was at the bidding, the reporter who had actually run the original article I'd read in the Boulder newspaper. He was the one who called, recorded our conversation and put it back immediately on the AP wire. It then of course went around the world, which is the reason that I heard from Auckland, New Zealand, Paris, London and about every state in the Union.

After I spoke with the AP man, United Press called about ten minutes later. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes afterwards that the BBC called and asked if I would be willing to go on the air live. They would put me through, they said, which they did immediately and told me I would soon hear the broadcast taking place. They were talking with the correspondent in Belgrade about matters in Kosovo over night. I had a yellow tablet on my desk when I heard the news broadcasters. I wrote on the bottom of my pad, "What do *I* have to talk about? This is so mundane!" You've got to remember that this was after the Kosovo war had really escalated and the bombing was happening.

So all of a sudden he said, "We're going to interrupt this broadcast because I know of the great amount of interest by our listeners in the bidding on the Glenn Miller logbook." He said, "We are fortunate enough to have the high bidder, Mr. William Suitts, from Boulder, Colorado. Are you there, Mr. Suitts?" He proceeded to ask me how I became interested in this and so forth, and I told him the story.

TR: A pretty humbling experience to suddenly go international on the BBC?

WS: It really was.

TR: Please tell us, either Alan or Bill, why does this logbook have such an attraction? Why is it so valuable from a historical point of view?

WS: Well, Fred Shaw was the navigator on this Lancaster airplane, which was on its first mission to the small town of Siegen, Germany. Shaw said this is why he remembered it so well, even though he flew thirty-five missions after that. Shaw was on that flight to Germany in one of the first groups of planes to take off. There were between 120 and 165 Liberators according to the information in all the papers I've received about this.

TR: Did Shaw believe he had actually seen the Miller plane?

WS: That's correct. Well, he didn't realize it was the Miller plane at the time, of course. On the fifteenth of December [the day Miller was lost] Shaw was the navigator on this mission. They were almost over the target, a short distance away over Brussels, when they received the return-to-base message, as all planes did.

They had already fused their bombs—the [British] Lancaster can carry 12,000 pounds of bombs, considerably more than either the B-17s or the B-24s that the Americans had at the time. All the planes had a 4,000-pound bomb called a “cookie.” Because of the deteriorating weather, they were given the option to drop their payload. First of all, they had to drop their 4,000 pound bomb, because they couldn't land with it on board. They were also given the option of dropping any of their incinerator bombs. Now an incinerator bomb is about four pounds, a magnesium bomb, eighteen inches long, four inches wide, is made to go through two stories of a normal house or building's roof and then start a fire. Bombs like this caused the firestorms in Dresden and Tokyo.

So on the way back there was a designated area over the English channel for jettisoning bombs—actually there were two, a southern area and a northern area—that were strictly forbidden to other airplanes and shipping. As they were returning over the southern area to jettison their bombs, they had just opened their bomb-bay doors, as Shaw records it, and other Lancasters were jettisoning their bombs as well.

The nosegunner said, “Look, there's a kite below us—that's the term they used for a small plane—that's in trouble.” Shaw recalls that he left his navigator's seat, went to a blister (a side plexiglass window in the Lancaster bomber) and was looking down watching the exploding bombs from the other planes and saw, as it came up underneath the wing, the small plane that was in trouble. He immediately recognized it as a Norseman because he had flown this type of aircraft before, having been trained in Ottawa, Canada where they were made.

He saw the plane clearly as it made a violent left bank turn and go into the

channel. Now he was at 4000 or 4500 feet. Bombers were supposed to maintain a minimum 4000-foot altitude when they dropped a 4000-pound bomb because the concussion that resulted from it was so strong. You can imagine that if Miller's plane was flying at from 1200 to 2000 feet, low enough to avoid bad weather, either a concussion or one of the incinerators could have caused the smaller plane to go into the drink.

It was estimated that over 110,000 frag bombs were jettisoned at that same time. Normally if the weather had been clear they wouldn't have done it, but the pilots were trying to conserve gas. They knew they might not be able to land at their regular field and be forced to an alternate landing area, maybe another hundred or two hundred miles further out of the way.

TR: In short, because of the weather and all the munitions falling through the air this was a very bad place for a small plane to be.

WS: The worst place possible. Now, you might wonder—as some people have—why didn't anyone report this? Well, first of all, when you don't complete a mission, you don't go through debriefing. Normally, when you complete a mission when you get off the plane there is a truck for the crew to get into and you go to a building and sit, like we are here today, and answer questions from the interrogation officer: How was the flight? Did you suffer any hits? etc. But none of that took place this day because there wasn't a completed mission. Nobody reported this little plane. And it wasn't a big deal. It was a little plane. We were losing forty or fifty bombers with ten men each on board at targets over Germany.

TR: So in the Fred Shaw logbook, there is no mention of this small plane?

WS: No, none at all. Actually the logbook basically just states the date, 12-15-44, the hour, 1200 hours, the aircraft type—it was an NF 973 Lancaster. The duties of the person making the entry, navigator. Under "remarks" he says "Siegen operation cancelled, jettison southern area." The time is noted as 2 hours 45 minutes that day. The logbook continues with the other missions.

The tail gunner in this crew has passed away, but I have letters from both his brother and his sister that say that he mentioned seeing this particular plane going down, which confirms Shaw's later statements.

For health reasons, Fred Shaw moved to Johannesburg, South Africa after the war. In 1954 he went to see *The Glenn Miller Story*, the movie, for the first time. Then, learning the events leading up to Miller's death, he went back and found his old logbook, read the entries, and realized that his Norseman sighting was actually on the same day as the disappearance. That's when he put it together.

TR: I guess I recall being told that Miller just disappeared for several days. They assumed the worst but couldn't prove it.

WS: Actually there were at least two days, some say four days before anyone realized what had happened to Miller, when no equipment came to pick up the band men as they arrived in France.

AC: Right. It took about four days. Because Miller's was an unscheduled flight. Glenn just happened to be in the officers' club one morning when a colonel, Norman Baesell, came in who was flying to Paris that day in a very small aircraft. Glenn asked the flight officer, John Morgan, if he could fly him over with Col. Baesell. The weather conditions up to that point were very, very poor, but they felt that flying in a small plane, at a very low altitude, they could make it. Col. Baesell convinced Glenn to go on over ahead of the band and make those final arrangements for the closely approaching Christmas Eve show.

Apparently Glenn hesitated a moment but then decided that this would be his last opportunity. Who knew how long it was going to be before the weather cleared? So, he was at the wrong place at the wrong time, and, as Bill just explained, he was at the wrong place in the air as well, at the drop area, if indeed that is what happened.

TR: This was at the start of the Battle of the Bulge, also, right? There were other momentous events to be concerned with.

AC: The Battle of the Bulge broke out the very next morning. Yes, it sounds callous but I've talked to people in the military who said, "You know this was a small plane with one major, one colonel and one flight officer on board." Although we can say now, "But it was Glenn Miller on that plane!" at the time no one knew that. The whole war effort at this moment was aimed at stopping the great German counteroffensive. The Miller disappearance was militarily insignificant when you consider all the other conditions.

Very little searching was or could have been conducted. Other airfields were called checking on planes that might have landed because of the weather. It took four or five hours before Don Haynes, who was Miller's executive officer in Villacoublay, found out for sure that indeed Miller's plane was lost. They became extremely concerned and reported the incident to proper military authorities. Because it was Major Miller and so close to Christmas, they delayed a bit just to reconfirm before hitting Helen, Miller wife, with the bad news. In any event, the disappearance was reported, picked up by the world press and the *New York Times* on Christmas Eve.

TR: This is an interesting turn of events then, isn't it? Because the logbook itself doesn't really tell us all that much.

AC: Well, essentially what it does is put the plane on this date at about the time Miller's plane would have been in the vicinity . .

TR: And it backs up Shaw's statement, which is convincing in many ways.

AC: Absolutely. Scholars and others have looked at the sequence of events,

and among any number of other possible and adequate explanations Shaw's seems the most logical. People who interviewed Fred Shaw in the past felt that he was a very credible witness. I understand, after my last visit to Clarinda [Iowa, Miller's birthplace and the home of an annual Miller festival], that there are no other survivors now from the Shaw mission. So no one else can corroborate his story. This logbook may be the strongest piece of evidence we have. We may never know for sure until we're able to recover the aircraft in that area. Nevertheless, this may be a very, very significant item because it puts the Lancaster and Miller's plane pretty much in the same area.

WS: Well of course some assumptions have to be made. They say, "Well how could you know for sure because there was no flight plan filed?" But if Miller's pilot had flown the most direct course, it would have taken him to that spot.

TR: You've researched this further. You've written to Johannesburg?

WS: Well, I've not written personally, but I've received quite a bit of material with the logbook and a lot of clippings and letters written by Fred Shaw to people who have written books. Other navigators were asked to investigate the probability that the Miller plane could have been near the Lancasters jettisoning their bombs and were able to place him within a mile of that vicinity.

TR: It looks like the evidence is about as solid as we're going to find barring, as you say, actually discovering the wreckage of the Norseman.

AC: That's true. There is an interesting side story to this. As Bill explained, Fred Shaw, having seen the movie in 1954, tried to convince some people in Johannesburg at that time that his plane might have been responsible. Interestingly enough he got very little notice at that particular time. We're not sure exactly why. But it didn't receive worldwide attention. It wasn't until, believe it or not, about twelve or thirteen years ago—I can't give you the exact date—but during the 1980s, CBS on their New Year's Eve news broadcast reported that they had interviewed Fred Shaw. It was only then that wider interest in his explanation grew. That's when other researchers started looking at it. It's very interesting. It seems today you have two different camps and points of view: those who accept Shaw's version and other more skeptical individuals who still want direct evidence.

So this logbook remains a key piece of the puzzle. You can't put a dollar figure on it. Bill has obviously paid a high price but, it may be worth many many more times that.

WS: Is that an offer, Alan? [Laughter].

TR: I think with the passing of time it has new meaning. Now we have a swing revival going on. Miller has passed from being someone who many people knew to becoming an icon of sorts, hasn't he? It is a fascinating phe-

nomenon, and I think it does have to do partly with his disappearance and the circumstances. There were many other swing bands in the 1940s, some quite popular and distinctive. Miller didn't have an unusual number of famous soloists, for instance. He was known for what his *band* did. Except for Tex Beinecke and Bobby Hackett, it was the band. The group sound plus the personality of Miller.

AC: And the fact that he was over draft age. He didn't have to be in the regular army, but insisted on joining up. He felt very sincerely. He was a real musical patriot. There's no doubt about it. You can see it when you go to the Miller festivals in Iowa. All these people come back [from so many places around the country] and share memories. There's quite an age span there.

Miller was born in Clarinda in 1904, but lived in several different states. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Nebraska. Lived there for most of his formative years. Lived in Missouri for one year in junior high school and then moved to Fort Morgan, Colorado for his high school experience.

TR: So we can't claim him only for Colorado?

AC: Well the people of Missouri want a piece of him. Nebraska has a legitimate claim, as well as Iowa, but Glenn always considered Colorado to be home. Interestingly enough, after spending only about a year and a half in Boulder, in many of his broadcasts he would say, "For the folks back home in Boulder . . ." His wife, Helen Burger, was a native of Boulder. He spent many enjoyable moments here at the University. They had a great sentimental attachment to both the University and to the town. That's one of the main reasons why we have the Glenn Miller Archive here, because of that sentimental attachment.

Though his experiences here were brief, they significantly affected his career. The foundation of his music and his personal character really were created on this campus. I can't help but think that the coming of the logbook to Boulder was fated to be. When you consider all the people out there who were bidding, who had an interest in this, including collectors in other countries, not to mention the 2000 members worldwide of the Glenn Miller Appreciation Society and the Birthplace Society.

The reappearance of the logbook was a very significant thing—and to find out that it ended up in Boulder is even more extraordinary. Bill's connection, his being a navigator in World War II in the Army Air Force. So many coincidences there that you just can't overlook.

TR: You feel there's some other power moving things.

WS: There's a lot of synchronicity out there. And a lot of sympathy with others who have had the experience of hearing Miller's music during the war. I just wanted to add I've received calls from three different World War II POWs, men who were shot down. They said one of the things they missed most of all in the prisoner of war camps was music in general, but especially Glenn Miller's

music. “I’ll Be Seeing You,” “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree,” “At Last” were remembered from listening to Miller’s band when it was playing for the boys in England before he was lost. Those songs had important meanings and associations; you heard them in a very private way.

AC: That says it very well.

TR: Tell us some of the other things you have in the Glenn Miller Archive. This is a good time to add other comments, Alan.

AC: The collection here we started exactly thirty years ago [1969]. It began as a modest project. I was associated with the University Memorial Center on campus. We had the Glenn Miller Ballroom, which the students had named in Glenn’s honor back in 1953, when the building was being finished. It is a state memorial to those who gave their lives in the service of their country from World War I, World War II, Korea, Southeast Asia, and now Desert Storm. It was a significant facility and we wanted to relate to students who were showing up on campus in 1969 why we had the Glenn Miller Ballroom, who he was, the fact that he had these connections with the state of Colorado and the University. It began as a very modest display area.

It has grown over the years and has been a very humbling experience for me. I certainly have no expertise in archival work. But we were interested in collecting his music, collecting memorabilia. As Bill has found out, people want to share their memories. People have sent him things associated with Miller, some very precious things that they have saved over the years. The same thing was true with our collection.

At the beginning of the hunt thirty years ago, we decided to notify someone in our alumni association that we were looking for material related to Glenn during his school days here in 1922, ’23 and ’24. We ran an ad in our alumni newspaper. A writer for United Press International, an alumnus, picked up on the story, ran it nationwide to every radio, television, and newspaper in the country—without our knowledge!—and before we knew it, these things started showing up in the mail. Autographs, recordings, yearbooks, marvelous photographs. One photograph of the band taken in England that a fellow had carried in his billfold across Europe. Autographs a young girl had collected when she was sixteen years old, at the Cafe Rouge. We have scrapbooks that people very lovingly put together of newspaper articles and dance cards.

These were all significant items and came with poignant stories attached. Often the collectors, our donors, weren’t sure if their grandchildren or children were as interested as they were in their personal treasures, and now it appeared there was a place in this country where such things could be preserved for future generations to enjoy. And so this collection has grown and grown over the years.

It would be difficult for me to tell you everything that we have, but there are over 3000 photographs and negatives on file relating to Glenn. We have his

very first trombone, which he mastered as a young man in that year they spent in Grant City, Missouri. We have his college trombone. It is still on display in the Heritage Center. We've just added his last trombone that he was playing before he was lost. (It had been with the other band instruments coming over to Paris in 1944.) We have three generations of those horns.

The very first gold record ever given to a recording artist is here. There are probably hundreds of thousands of gold records presented since then. But on February 10, 1942, this very first gold record was presented to Glenn by RCA Victor and it became the standard in the industry. It was given for "Chattanooga Choo Choo," which had sold over 1,200,000 copies. There had been a few other recordings before this that had gone over the one million sales mark, but this was the first time a formal presentation had been made. We even have photographs and a radio broadcast of the occasion.

TR: Was this statistically the most successful Miller recording?

AC: No, the most sold recording of the big band era is "In the Mood." It sold well over four and a half million. I think it has gone over that number by now. Miller's recordings earned twenty-nine gold records altogether, all but the first awarded after his disappearance. (There may be another six or seven out there, which we are checking on now.) These presentations were made to the family.

We have other personal items on display, things given to us by Glenn's relatives. Some of it is in the Heritage Center in Old Main Hall [on the University of Colorado campus]. The Archive is also located in the Coors Events Center at the present time. We are hoping in the not too distant future to be joining forces under the same roof with the American Music Research Center and have this collection a little more readily accessible for students and fans. Access now is by appointment only.

TR: More collaboration is an exciting prospect because I think when we find these figures and events and individuals in American cultural life—not only musicians though musicians are certainly a big part of it—they generate this tremendous amount of what can only be called reverence. We need a place to honor that.

AC: It is very humbling. I think what Bill has said is true. He's been amazed at things people have said and given to him: here he has a book of autographs with Bunny Berigan's (the great trumpet player) signature and with Glenn's signature on it. People have contacted him to pass on precious memories that need to be preserved. Fortunately we have a place where that can happen.

TR: People in their twenties and thirties are still actively involved with this music and want to know about it.

WS: Yes, I know. I just came back from a wedding for my sister's son—he's about thirty-five years old, attended the University some years ago—and at the

sit-down dinner afterwards with eight of his classmates at the table, he asked how many were still interested in Glenn Miller and dance music. Every single one of them raised a hand!

AC: There are a lot of swing dancing clubs now and lindy hopping clubs. We go to Iowa and Fort Morgan and see all of this activity. It is amazing to look out in the audiences. Not just people of my generation or Bill's generation, but a lot of young people are very much interested in the music these days. That is very gratifying.

Thirty years ago I was really quite concerned that there would be a finite amount of material available. Eventually interest would fall off. But, quite to the contrary, there seems to be as much interest now as there ever has been.

TR: Is there still a touring band that plays Miller's music? I mean bands that use the original arrangements?

AC: Right! Only one band can actually carry the name Glenn Miller Orchestra. They still travel fifty weeks a year. In fact they are in Japan right now, returning this week. They go over twice a year. I think the smallest crowd they play for is 8000 people. They've played for 35,000. The Japanese people are just crazy about this music. People in Europe. People in this country. It will obviously never reach the popularity it did originally. But there is renewed enthusiasm everywhere.

We are fortunate in Denver. I think we have four big bands performing regularly. As you look across the country, there are big band stations playing the music. There are big band cruises, nationwide big band shows. It is very refreshing to know that people really have locked in on this particular form of American music, true American music. I think it will survive. In fact, I'm convinced that it will.

People always ask me about the legacy of Glenn Miller. Of course the first thing obviously is the music. But really I think one of the legacies, just as important as far as I'm concerned, is people like Bill. People who remember Glenn Miller, the man. I think that he would be utterly amazed that his popularity continues today so many years after his death. But it is because of people like Bill and the young people who have listened closely to the music and have rediscovered it. He died at age forty. His band was only around [originally] for about a three-year period, a very short time.

A lot of hard work went into that but when you consider the bands that went on afterwards, there was a lot of competition. Yet, he's still the second best seller for RCA Victor records, eclipsed only by Elvis Presley. One of the more significant achievements again when you consider that short time period, in 1940 Miller had *forty-five* recordings on the top-selling charts. No other performer today or before—we're talking about the Beatles, Madonna, Elvis, the Rolling Stones, you name it—no one has ever equalled that particular accomplishment. That is very significant!

TR: So perhaps we can even use a phrase like “defining phenomenon”? He was a symbol of a whole era, a whole mentality. I think you said something, Bill, a few minutes ago about the emotion of the performance working with the lyrics. That’s a pretty unbeatable combination: when you have a personality like Miller’s, a band that plays—from a strictly technical point of view—in a very solid manner, with terrific songs, with moving lyrics, in a context where people are making those emotional connections that we all have with some kinds of music. That’s just an overwhelming phenomenon.

WS: It certainly has been an overwhelming experience for me. I didn’t think I’d ever hear from a single person about it.

AC: It was meant to be.

TR: Thank you both so much.