



*SS Bergenfjord*



**Donald Edwin Miller**  
**Staff Sergeant U.S. Army Air Corps**  
**15 March 1943 – 9 Oct 1945**



B-24 Liberator



B-17 Flying Fortress

Donald was born on 2 December 1924 in Lower Macungie Township, Pennsylvania. He attended grade school in Macungie and graduated from Emmaus High School in 1941. He then went to work at John Rems & Sons Knitting Mill in Macungie, where he operated a knitting machine until he was drafted. Donald was inducted into the Army Air Force on 15 March 1943 as a Private in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. On 7 July 1944, after training as a Flight Maintenance Gunner at Air Force Ground Station, Ft. Meyer, Florida, and at Air Force Training Station, North Carolina, he was sent to England where he trained on the B-17 "Flying Fortress" bomber aircraft at Thorpe Abbots Airfield near Brockdish. He was assigned to the 452<sup>nd</sup> Bomber Group (Heavy), 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. He flew on some bombing missions over Germany during 1944, and later that year he left for Cerignola, Italy, where he trained as an Aerial Photographer and was assigned to the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (Heavy), 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. From there he flew on B-24 "Liberator" missions over Eastern Europe. On a mission over the Hungarian-Austrian border, his aircraft lost two engines, and the pilot was forced to crash land on Vis, a small island off Yugoslavia. After they jettisoned everything possible to lighten the aircraft, they belly-landed on the beach of Vis. All the crew exited safely and were returned to Cerignola. On a later mission, on 26 March 1945, his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire over Strasshof, Austria, on one of its wings, including a fuel tank. The pilot then chose to head for an airfield at Pecs, Hungary, to land since it was in Russian hands. Soon the smell of fumes and a sudden flash of fire forced Donald and three other crew members to bail out, and the plane immediately exploded upon their exit. They did not know whether the pilot and co-pilot did the same. After dropping to the ground, Donald and two of the other three made their way to a small town; the other crew member severely broke his leg upon landing and could not accompany them. A man in the town hall called a German officer, who gave them the choice of accompanying his unit in their retreat from the attacking Russians or staying in the town. They chose to remain, and later turned themselves over to the Russians. The Russians sent a truck to transport them to a train, which eventually took them to Pecs. From there they left for Zagreb, Yugoslavia, along with another B-24 crew who also had made a forced landing. In Zagreb, Donald became ill with fever, passed out, and woke up in a Catholic convent. An American doctor, who was from the American Consul in Bucharest, Romania, treated him with penicillin and had him and the others driven to Bucharest, Romania. There they met up with 20 other Americans. Two weeks later, they were flown to Kiev, Ukraine, in an old C-47 aircraft where they were kept under strict guard by the Russians. Three weeks later they were taken to a Displaced Persons Camp in Odessa, Ukraine, where they remained for a week with 70 other people from all over Europe. They were fed soup only once a day. After leaving the camp, they boarded the *SS Bergensfjord*, a Norwegian ship that had been requisitioned by the British in 1940 for use as a British Troop Ship. On board they met Mrs. Winston Churchill who was with her husband, who was attending the Yalta Conference near Odessa. She heard there were Americans aboard the ship and wanted to meet them. As the ship entered the Mediterranean Sea, the crew was informed: "The war in Europe is over." After stopping at several ports along the way, Donald re-joined his squadron in Cerignola, and on 8 July 1945 boarded a ship in Naples for his return home. He arrived back in the States on 18 July, and was discharged on 9 October 1945 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After returning home, Donald ran a partnership salvage yard and sold used cars in Upper Milford Township, Pennsylvania, and later worked as a Machinist for Bethlehem Steel. He married **Mary (Leiby) Miller** (1909–1995) in 1946, and they made their home in Shimerville, Pennsylvania. They had a daughter, **Linda Starr**, and a son, **Randall Phillip**. In 1997, Donald married **Elsie Samora**, a widow who had four children of her own. Donald is a member of Macungie Memorial VFW Post 9264 where he served as a past commander, and is presently serving on the Post Honor Guard. Donald's parents were **Harry W. Miller** (1898–1963) and **Minerva A. Miller** (1901–1973).