

# Pass It On®...

## Harmony in Hardship.

*Glenn Miller dropped out of college to become the swingingest band leader in the world.*

The Great Depression rolled out across America like a pandemic, forcing families to work longer hours if they could find jobs and stand in soup lines if they couldn't. The pall of angst wore down the average family, yet most adopted a "make-do" attitude and put their backs into life, working through the lean times as best they could.

When folks had a moment to rest, they gathered around the radio to lighten their spirits. A new band leader was on the airwaves at a venue everybody could afford: the local kitchen. The radio connected people to the world, providing harmony from a band that made you forget how hard your day had been.

Glenn Miller grew up in the Midwest and Colorado. He learned to play the trombone and decided in high school that he was going to be a professional musician. He moved to New York City, got gigs as a studio musician and soon sent for his high school sweetheart.

Times were tough, and Americans needed music to wake them from their Depression-weary doldrums. The Glenn Miller Orchestra was just the ticket. He set a fast tempo with a beat you could move your feet to. The signature clarinet took the lead like a dance partner, and before you knew it, your whole body was swinging to the music. From Atlantic boardwalks to sagging porches in the Midwest, people of all ages were tapping and swaying and swinging to the music. Miller so defined the American musical experience that the Greatest Generation was often dubbed the Glenn Miller Generation.

By 1942, Miller and his band had lit up concert halls and movie screens across the country. But the war was on, and everybody wanted to do their part. The bespectacled band leader's eyesight was so bad that he was denied entrance into the armed forces. Undeterred, he applied to the Navy, which also rejected him. Then he talked his way into the Army at 38 years old and formed a military band like no other.

Entertaining the troops became a patriotic duty to lift their spirits. From the cooks in the mess hall to the mechanics in airplane hangars, Miller's music kept everything and everybody moving. He even broadcast a version in German to show the Axis powers that America was committed to stamping out Nazism.

"Chattanooga Choo Choo" blared across Europe while soldiers on leave jitterbugged to "In the Mood." The Western idea of freedom for all was contagious in nightclubs and town squares. Miller's new take on military marches, "American Patrol," encouraged a lively bounce and swing as columns of people moved together in harmony, yet distinct in their personalities – much like America at the time. And when military personnel were homesick, they were comforted by a tune they sang thinking about girlfriends and boyfriends back home: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree."

In 1944, Miller and his band were scheduled to fly from England to France. After bad weather grounded the flight, Miller became increasingly anxious to play for the boys liberating Europe. He pushed to take a smaller plane that would fly low and get him across the channel to Paris. The plane disappeared, and Miller was never seen again. But he has been heard ever since.

## Dance Your Troubles Away...[PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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