

Just Like a Miracle

By M. Glen Bullard

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DEDICATION

To every military person who has given of themselves to protect religious and personal freedoms in the world, this play is dedicated.

STORY OF THE PLAY

It's Christmas Eve, 1944, in the midst of a raging blizzard...and the throes of a battle that is expected to become the last major assault of WWII, the Battle of the Bulge. A small patrol of battle-fatigued American soldiers, who have captured a German SS officer to interrogate, are lost and seek refuge in a bombed-out church somewhere south of Bastogne, Belgium.

Although united in brotherhood through the danger they face, the men are very different; from the tough but well-respected first sergeant career NCO, to the humorous and entertaining private, to the youngest soldier, a teenager, who does not believe in religion. Unbeknownst to the soldiers, the captured German major speaks English and has his own history.

Amidst great tension and life-threatening danger, this band still manages to celebrate Christmas Eve. The stirring climax dramatizes how God, in epic fashion, answers one GI's prayer for the lost patrol.

There is no violence in this performance. There is love for our fellow man. There is love for our enemy. There is even love enough for a miracle.

The setting is based on historical events surrounding the 101st Airborne Division at the Battle of the Bulge, which inspired the miraculous ending that is sure to be enjoyed and remembered. Approximately 45 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 m, doubling possible)

NARRATOR: Our storyteller and guide. Needs to be in uniform, Sergeant rank.

PRIVATE DUTCH: A teenage soldier who finds Christ.

FIRST SERGEANT KILGORE: A career soldier who has been on the ground since the beginning of the war. Those who serve under him have the privilege of calling him "Top" as he is Top Sergeant of the unit.

CORPORAL VANCE: Rifle team leader. (Can be doubled with Sergeant Malloy.)

PRIVATE HOLLYWOOD: Private Wood, nicknamed "Hollywood" due to being the entertainer of the group.

MAJOR HEFLIN: German prisoner from 1st SS Panzer Division. Unbeknownst to his captors, he grew up in the United States and is well-steeped in American culture. The patrol is unaware that he speaks English.

SERGEANT COHEN (DOC): Medic of the unit. Doc does not celebrate Christmas, so to him, this Christmas Eve is just an evening like any other.

PRIVATE FAUDRY: Bandaged soldier.

SERGEANT MALLOY: Young, energetic soldier. A messenger bringing good news. (Can be doubled with Corporal Vance.)

EXTRAS:

PRIVATE KELLY: Offstage voice.

VOICEOVER: Can be prerecorded.

*Although the 101st Airborne Division is real, these characters are fictional.

SETTING

A bombed-out church in Belgium, 1944. A window is stage left. A chair is placed stage right for the prisoner. Over-turned table to the center stage left. Various debris is scattered about. A vintage standup radio to the center stage right, hidden under debris. A makeshift firepit is placed center stage in Scene 2.

LIGHTING

Blue spotlight
Makeshift firepit
Bright lights

SOUND EFFECTS

Please note that many appropriate songs and audio clips are in public domain. These are searchable on the internet from various providers for a fee or may be downloaded free. Be sure to check copyright restrictions carefully. Your group could also create or prerecord voiceovers.

Ambient distant artillery
Station-to-station static
An upbeat swing song
“Lum & Abner” (Or similar old radio program.)
Armed Forces Radio News broadcast. (We need to hear about the Germans breaking through the Allied lines close to Bastogne.)
Slower jazz song of the time period
Jazzy 1940s Christmas song
Voiceover of Bing Crosby (Text is included in the script.)
“Silent Night”
Piston engine rumble of large aircraft flying over
Soft 1940s bluesy melody

Scene 1

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on the NARRATOR. He is to the side and behind podium to help conceal that he is in uniform.)

NARRATOR: We hope with this production you allow us to borrow your imagination and place it far from where we now sit. But we must do something first. In order to make this story happen, we must sing a verse from a Christmas carol. Let's sing the first verse of "Away in the Manger," which ends with "...Asleep on the hay." You do not have to sing well, but if this story is to take place, we must ALL sing loud. Sit back and sing with me...

(Starts and leads the singing.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd.)* Okay. well done! I believe that should do it. Now the year is 1944. It is winter – Christmas Eve, to be exact. The place? Bastogne, Belgium – a key city that controls the crossroads to the battlefield in Northern Europe. In a last-ditch effort to turn the tide of this war, Hitler has released an all-out, winner-take-all assault on part of his western front to break through the Allied lines. During this German offensive, 20,000 of our men are surrounded by German infantry and tank divisions totaling more than 50,000. Under the command of Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe the men of the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell refused to retreat and were determined not to surrender.

Now, as I promised, here is our story. A group of volunteers from Echo Company have been sent on a dangerous but crucial mission: to capture and bring back a German soldier for interrogation. The men are lost in the Ardennes Forest, about twenty miles from headquarters. Despite their continued effort, they have yet to find their way back or to secure shelter for the evening. Nonetheless, they have been successful in capturing a German soldier. Specifically, a German major named Becker Heflin.

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd.)* Although Major Heflin is a significant prize, he comes at a high price to Echo Company who lost two men (including their interrogator) and a third man was wounded in the abduction. The time is about fifteen-hundred hours (that would be 3:00 in the afternoon for you and me). A blinding snowstorm has been raging for the past 6 hours with no sign of letting up.

Our guys approach a bombed-out church at this moment with great caution because, although it looks destroyed and abandoned to them, the men are certain they heard people singing a Christmas carol from within just a few minutes ago. *(Pause.)* And you know what? They just may have....

(SFX: Gradually fade in ambient distant artillery.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd.)* Tonight, you now sit in that very church, silent and invisible to these soldiers. We sit here safely, in the future, looking upon these men as if from a dream. But to the men of Echo Company, the Battle of the Bulge is no dream. *(Pause.)* Listen, I believe we may have our first visitor...

(NARRATOR moves offstage as PRIVATE DUTCH enters, covered with snow. He moves silently, weapon drawn. He looks all around, cautiously; eventually he relaxes his rifle as he arrives down front.)

DUTCH: *(Shouts back towards offstage.)* OKAY, First Sergeant. ALL CLEAR! Don't know where that singing was coming from. Ain't no church choir in here.

KILGORE: *(From offstage and from a distance.)* OK, ALL CLEAR! *(Pause.)* Private Kelly... I want that Browning covering the courtyard. What have we got left on the belt?

KELLY: *(Offstage.)* Not enough, Top. Maybe 180 rounds? About 30 seconds, that's it.

(FIRST SERGEANT KILGORE enters.)

End of Freeview

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