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William J. Miller

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IN MEMORIAM

With sorrow for the loss of so great a friend, we received the news of the death of Brigadier William J. Miller on July 16, 1969. Now, with respect and appreciation for the knowledge and guidance he provided us during part of his distinguished and varied career, we dedicate this issue of the San Diego Law Review to his memory.

Born October 19, 1895, in London, England, Brigadier Miller received a commission in the British Royal Signals in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I. He served in Gallipoli, Iraq, and Palestine. As a lieutenant at Britain’s Arab Bureau Headquarters in Cairo, he became a good friend of a fellow lieutenant, Lawrence of Arabia. The two often traveled hundreds of miles behind enemy lines to help organize Arab rebels against the Turks. In 1918 he left the army and entered the colonial service. For the next fourteen years he administered various districts in Palestine, including Jerusalem, where he also exercised judicial power as Magistrate and Coroner. In addition to being a member of the Economic and Agricultural Commissions, he found time to study and pass advanced language examinations in Arabic and Hebrew. Brigadier Miller was awarded the Order of the British Empire for his services during these years.

Brigadier Miller was admitted to the Inner Temple in London in 1926. In 1932 he retired from the colonial service to prepare for the bar examination. Later, as a member of the English Bar, he practiced law in High Court, London, and on the Western Circuit.

Recalled to the army in 1939, he served in France, and in East and North Africa. During this period he was the Chief Secretary of the Military Government of Eritrea. Following that, he became Military Governor of Tripolitania. Still later, he served as Chief of Staff for Civil Affairs under Field Marshal Montgomery. After lecture duties for four months on military subjects at Harvard, Yale, and the University of Virginia, the Brigadier returned to London for staff duties at the War Office. At the end of 1945, he declined an appointment as Military Governor of Singapore and retired from the service to join his wife, Elisabeth, in the United States. They had met in 1922, when she and her family were traveling through Palestine, and were married four years later. Mrs. Miller was born in Grosse Point, Michigan.
In 1949, Brigadier Miller became a U.S. citizen and he and Mrs. Miller moved to La Mesa, California. In 1960, officials of this law school, who recognized the potential he represented, asked him to come out of retirement and teach a subject for which his background had uniquely qualified him: The History of the Common Law. His response was typical—he would gladly assume the responsibility, with the understanding that his services would be in the form of a contribution to the school. The Brigadier thus became one of the first “dollar-a-year” faculty members.

Students and faculty members alike quickly felt both affection and respect for the intelligent and witty gentleman in their midst. Charming in the inimitable style of the educated English barrister which he was, he delighted his listeners with his tales of adventure and hilarity, and impressed them with his expertise in the law. Conscientious and relentless in his expressed desire to assist students in obtaining the best possible preparation for successful careers, he spent countless hours in his own preparation for class lectures. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, the School of Law in 1962 awarded the L.L.D. degree to Brigadier Miller. In 1963 he was asked to give the commencement address. One line in particular of that address was indicative of his regard for education: “We all cherish grace of intellect when we see it; it is the mark of the scholar and the gentleman.”

Generosity was given an added depth of definition during the tenure of Brigadier Miller. The token dollar which officials insisted on paying him each year was just as insistently returned. On the occasion of the commencement address in 1963, he declined reimbursement for expenses from and to Detroit, Michigan, where he and his wife were then briefly sojourning. “It’s my law school, too,” he said.

One of the Brigadier’s comments upon resuming his career in 1960 was, “It will require hard work to resume my old and loved familiarity with the law, but I know I will enjoy it. Law is a hard taskmaster and I hope I can help students prepare for successful careers.”

In that desire, as with his many endeavors throughout a brilliant career, we know that Brigadier Miller succeeded.