

WAR VICTIM'S MOTHER RECEIVES LETTER FROM SON'S COMMANDER

Mrs. Leroy Taylor, 503 N. Seventh street, mother of Staff Sgt. Willis Taylor who died in action with the American Rangers in Italy on January 30, 1944, has received a letter from First Lt. James J. Altieri, who was Sgt. Taylor's commanding officer in the fatal battle.

The army officer describes the battle and pays tribute to Sgt. Taylor. His letter follows:

January 31, 1945

My dear Mrs. Taylor:

Your most welcome letter arrived today, and as I did know your brave son personally, am more than anxious to enlighten you in regards to information you desired.

Mrs. Taylor, I realize only too well what the loss of your son means to those who loved him. Truly your grief and sorrow cannot be compensated by anything that I might state. However, you have a right to be terribly proud - for your son was outstanding among his fellowmen. He held the esteem and respect of all those who knew him and he died a hero's death among his friends. He and the many other Rangers who were killed on the Anzio beachhead will never be forgotten for what they have done for their country. It is indeed tragic that so many of our best and bravest have lost their lives, but it is inevitable in a war so fiercely waged as this one.

Just before our embarkation for the landings at Anzio, I was placed in command of the 2nd platoon of "C" company. Willis was my mortar Sgt. From the time that I first met him, he was always conscientious and efficient in his work. He always made it a practice to help others and to pass along good advice to the new men. When we landed at Anzio he was at his best - cool-confident- efficient. He was of inestimable help to the success of many of the platoon's missions. During the first few days of the beachhead he was exceedingly cheerful despite the circumstances. He certainly was never afraid of death, but he voiced the wish that he hoped he would not be wounded and come home crippled or disfigured - he wished to die an instantaneous death if it had to come.

Just before the Rangers were to attack Cisterna, I was placed in command of another company and did not get to see him before the attack. The last I saw him he was smiling and kidding with some of the fellows, Company "C" - his company, was the spearhead of the attack up the road to Cisterna. Advancing at night on January 30, they encountered stiff opposition from well entrenched German positions astride the important road. His company was in the thick of the fight, destroying many enemy positions. Their losses were heavy also.

Meanwhile, the first and third ranger battalions had infiltrated past the enemy outposts and were almost into the town, when they became surrounded by strong enemy forces. The story of how they fought until the end is well known. The two Battalions were lost.

Willis was found the next day and was given a proper burial with a chaplain attending services. His grave is well kept and marked.

I wish I could tell you more, but you no doubt realize how difficult it is to reconstruct something of that nature. However, I can assure you of this much: He died an instant death-the way he wished it; and he had no fear of death.

Only the loved ones of those who fell know the full and poignant meaning of sacrifice. From all those who knew Willis, may we extend our profound and heartfelt condolence. We feel proud to have lived and fought with men such as he.

If you have a close-up picture of Willis, I may be able to add it to the Ranger book. This book will be ready sometime in the near future. When it is, I shall be pleased to present you with one of the first copies free of charge as a presentation of the Ranger.

I shall be ever ready to be of any help, should you desire further information on anything pertaining to the Rangers.

Hoping you the very best.

I remain,

James A. Altieri

1st Lt. Infantry

(Formerly of the Rangers)

Besides the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Taylor of this city, Sgt. Taylor is survived by his widow and two small children. His wife is the former Vivian Dellinger of Blue Creek township.

Contributed by Karin King

Buried: Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial, Nettuno, Provincia di Roma, Lazio, Italy

