

WAR DEPARTMENT
Bureau of Public Relations
PRESS BRANCH
Tel. RE 6700, Brs. 3425 and 4860

Stafford-657

SIS Release B-530

FUTURE RELEASE

The War Department announced today the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor, highest military decoration, to Second Lieutenant Thomas W. Wigle, Detroit, Michigan, Infantry officer, whose raw courage last September in Italy resulted in the capture of a German strongpoint along with 36 enemy paratroopers.

Lieutenant Wigle, 35, who wore glasses and was a violinist in civilian life, led a platoon of American riflemen over three walls in the face of heavy enemy fire. Then, armed with a carbine, he single-handedly pursued the defending enemy from house to house, finally trapping them in the cellar of the third building where he was fatally wounded on the stair steps as he advanced on them.

The Medal of Honor, awarded for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty", will be presented to his widow, Mrs. Margaret Wigle, of 489 Peterboro Street, Detroit, at ceremonies to be announced later. They have one child, Dianna, now two years old. Lieutenant Wigle's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Archie P. Wigle, also live at the Peterboro Street address.

The act for which he won the medal occurred September 14, 1944, near Monte Frassino, Italy, when he had volunteered to lead the rifle platoon after its original leader had become a casualty during two previous attempts to capture the strongpoint.

After his death, said one of his men, Sergeant Edward A. Armstrong, of 208 Oley Street, Reading, Pennsylvania, "we were fighting mad and held that hill against several furious counterattacks that night. I don't think any one of us has seen a greater display of courage than that displayed by Lieutenant Wigle that day."

--more--

B 515 - B 544

B 515 - B 544

Page 2--B-530

The rifle platoon, part of the 135th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division, had been assigned the mission of routing the enemy from a hill position consisting of three houses in front of which was a series of three walls, all under direct observation of the enemy. Twice thrown back by direct automatic arms fire, the platoon was without an officer when Lieutenant Wigle, who was acting as company executive officer, volunteered to direct the next assault.

He led his men up bare, rocky slopes to the first of the walls, where he was assigned to the top. He remained in full view of the enemy firing at them and drawing their fire, while the riflemen helped each other over the wall. By the same dangerous procedure he took his men across the second wall. At the third he noted that the houses were now only 30 yards away. Instructing his men to cover him, he advanced alone, armed with his carbine, through a thick hail of machine pistol fire.

Firing his carbine as he entered the house, he forced the enemy, members of a proud German Paratroop battalion, from room to room and finally out the back door into the next house. He entered this and discovered the enemy had sought refuge in the cellar of the house.

Standing on the top of the staircase, he yelled in German for the 36 paratroopers to surrender. Their answer was a burst of machine pistol fire, which struck him down, severing his spine and paralyzing his legs.

Two of his men by now reached the scene. They were Sergeant Armstrong and Staff Sergeant Bernard C. Sellers, of Savanna, Illinois. They found the lieutenant lying on the steps within 12 feet of the cowering enemy.

Reported Sergeant Sellers: "He ordered us not to come near the staircase or try to help him out as we could easily be killed. He kept begging us to give him a grenade or to throw some down the stairs ourselves but we were afraid that the explosion would kill him so we refused his demands.

--more--

B 515 - B 544

Page 3 -- B-530

"Finally we could not stand seeing him lie there helplessly and Sergeant Armstrong and I pulled him out. Luckily the trapped enemy did not fire at us. Just before he was taken away on a litter he shook hands with all of us and said he was sorry to leave us at such a tough time. I don't think there was a man amongst us without tears in his eyes as they carried Lieutenant Wigle away."

He died shortly afterward from his wounds.

Meanwhile, the 36 German paratroopers were seized and the strongpoint secured.

Lieutenant Wigle was born May 18, 1909, in Indianapolis, Indiana. He attended Northwestern High School, Detroit, and in 1931 and 1932 went to Michigan State University at Lansing. He was an accomplished musician, having played in his high school string quartet and later being a member of the Philharmonic Society Orchestra of Kansas City, Missouri, where he lived from 1934 to 1938.

He spent the next two years in Oroville, California, where he was a professional violinist and also taught the instrument. His last civilian job was ^{as} an inspector in the Packard Motor Company plant in Detroit, just before he was inducted into the Army in May, 1942.

He was married in July, 1942, to Margaret Alice Henry, who lived then at 8421 Woodward Avenue, Detroit.

Lieutenant Wigle received his basic Infantry training at Camp Wolters, Texas, and completed the course at the Infantry Officer Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia, receiving his second lieutenant's commission March 9, 1943.

Following is the official citation for his Medal of Honor:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in the vicinity of Monte Frassino, Italy. On September 14, 1944, the 3d Platoon, in attempting to seize a strongly-fortified hill position protected by three parallel high terraced stone walls, was twice thrown back by the withering cross-fire.

--more--

B 515 - B 544

Page 4 -- B-530

"Lieutenant Wigle, acting company executive, observing that the platoon was without an officer, volunteered to command it on the next attack. Leading his men up the bare, rocky slopes through intense and concentrated fire, he succeeded in reaching the first of the stone walls. Having himself boosted to the top and perching there in full view of the enemy, he drew and returned their fire while his men helped each other up and over.

"Following the same method he successfully negotiated the second. Upon reaching the top of the third wall, he faced three houses which were the key point of the enemy defense. Ordering his men to cover him, he made a dash through a hail of machine pistol fire to reach the nearest house. Firing his carbine as he entered, he drove the enemy before him out of the back door and into the second house.

"Following closely on the heels of the foe, he drove them from this house into the third where they took refuge in the cellar. When his men rejoined him, they found him mortally wounded on the cellar stairs which he had started to descend to force the surrender of the enemy. His heroic action resulted in the capture of 36 German soldiers and the seizure of the strongpoint."

--30--