

27 Estella Drive
Flemington, New Jersey 08822
08 March 88

Mr. William A. Knowlton
4520 4th Road North
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Bill:

Please forgive the delay in responding to your letter. I was stunned to hear as you put it, "a voice from the past, so to speak". I have been trying to put the past behind me but there isn't a day that goes by that Les isn't in my thoughts and my heart.

Finding records has been difficult. Les never kept a file on his achievements nor did he talk about the war or his contribution to it. He was very proud he had the opportunity to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy of West Point. He never made anyone who touched his life feel that he was superior to them. It was one of the endearing qualities about him. He was an exceptional person.

Married to Les for 35 years I know he would want his obituary to be brief; however, I feel a tribute to him and his accomplishments should be acknowledged. Therefore, I'm enclosing a list of military service from 1943 to Les' retirement in 1966. Also a listing of his awards. Hopefully, you can use some of this material.

Words cannot describe the kind of person Les was as he was so very special. When he died his family was devastated. It is still difficult to go on without him.

Thank you for sending the Assembly. It was interesting to find that I did know some of the people in it. Also, I wish to thank you for your kindness and interest in preparing this tribute to Les.

The attached is an attempt by my daughter and myself to put Les' life on paper. Please feel free to edit and adjust as is necessary. Attached are records of awards, etc. for your reference.

Sincerely,

Genevieve Taylor
(Jean)

Lester George Taylor, Jr., was a proud, dedicated man. This pride and dedication extended throughout his life to both his country and his family. Les came to us from Kansas City, Kansas. As a graduate from Rosedale High School, he moved on to Junior College in the same city after graduation in two years. He continued his education at Ottawa State University in Kansas where he spent a successful third college year. At this point in time, Les finally realized one of his great ambitions and accepted an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy of West Point.

While West Point was a strange environment to him at first, it did not take long for his natural cheerfulness to make him at home. He had many friends in Class and Company, who turned naturally to him for advice and counsel.

On January 19, 1943, Les pinned on the gold bars of Second Lieutenant and departed the plains of West Point. As was the case with many classmates, Les was intrigued by the Air Corps and left for flight training during First Class Summer. He graduated with wings and left for further fighter training before going to Europe with the 359th Group out of the U.K. He served most of two years as a P-47 and P-51 pilot. During this period Les flew 87 combat missions and collected 285 combat hours. By October of 1944, he had won the DFC with one Oak Leaf Cluster the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters.

The quality, dedication and daring of his combat duty is well reflected in his many citations. To quote from only a few: "Performance and duty is rated Superior". "For extraordinary achievement." "A skillful and zealous manner in which these officers have sought out the enemy and engaged him in aerial combat, their devotion to duty and courage under all conditions serve as an inspiration to their fellow flyers. Their actions on all these occasions reflect the highest credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States."

During this hectic time in Les' Air Force career he began an equally important part of his life. Shortly after graduation he met a girl from Pennsylvania through mutual friends. They fell in love and Jean and Les were married on June 29, 1943 before Les went overseas. Three children blessed this union.

During his service in Europe, Les rose rapidly to the rank of Captain two years after leaving West Point. After his combat tour Les saw service as a flying instructor and staff officer in the Air Training Command. His flying experience and skill were later capitalized upon when he became Director of Flight Safety Research at Norton AFB in California and editor of the Air Force Safety Magazine.

In August of 1945, while Les was TDY in London, Jean gave birth to their first son, Wayne.

In December, 1952, Les was assigned to the Fifth Air Force in Korea. Once again he was decorated for outstanding performance. This time earning the Bronze Star. In December, 1953, following termination of hostilities in Korea he returned to the U.S. where he commenced service as Director of Combat Operations for the 34th Air Division at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. While performing this role he was responsible for the Air Defense of five states. His outstanding performance was justly rewarded as he then moved up to the position of Director of Combat Operations for the entire Central Air Defense Force at Richards Gebaur AFB, MO.

During Les and Jean's time in New Mexico, a daughter, Patricia, was born to them.

From there Les graduated from the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk and was posted to the U.S. Navy as an Exchange Officer with the Western Sea Frontier in San Francisco, California. He performed brilliantly in coordinating the Air Force defense efforts with Navy, Air and Sea defense activities and participated in the planning and execution of joint defense maneuvers and Damage Evaluation Team activities.

In March of 1960, while Les and Jean were in San Francisco, their third child was born, a son Steven.

August of 1960 found Les assigned to duty at Castle AFB, California as Base Civil Engineer. His 1-1/2 years with the 93rd Bomb Wing at Castle began a career field for which he was always predestined.

Assignment to Turkey followed from 1962-1964 as Director of Engineering for T U S L O G. While serving in this capacity he was responsible for the maintenance, repair and construction activities of all U.S. bases in Turkey for which he received the Air Force Commendation Medal in June, 1964. To quote from this citation of which he was very proud, "His knowledge and leadership contributed immeasurably toward completion of grammar school and a major high school construction project which will serve dependent students throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean areas. His determination and leadership were instrumental in the success of these undertakings."

He was promoted to Colonel during his assignment to McCoy AFB in Florida as BDCE from 1964-1965. McCoy's loss was the 8th Air Force gain when Les was transferred to headquarters at Westover A.F.B., Massachusetts as Deputy Director of Civil Engineering. This was the final position he held in Air Force life before he joined the ranks of a civilian.

Due to the ban preventing dependents from traveling to Turkey, Les and Jean bought a home in Toms River, New Jersey. When the ban was lifted, Jean and the children joined Les in Turkey.

So it was to New Jersey that they decided to retire. Les quickly went to work for the N.J. Department of Transportation. Following that he held the post of Director of Planning for Trenton State College, a post he held until his death.

Struck by the beauty and quality of the town of Flemington, they moved there where Jean still lives. Les died suddenly in early September 1978, just a few weeks before his sixtieth birthday. He is buried in St. Magdalens Cemetery in Flemington, N.J.

January 1943, has lost a valued member of the Class - A brave airman from World War II who continued to serve the cause of education after leaving active duty. The awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and Oak Leaf Clusters are open testimony to the contribution he made to the Free World. He was very proud to have graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. He was as proud of his family as he was of his career. He was an exceptional person, devoted husband, father and grandfather.

The person he was and the pride and fairness he projected throughout his life is impossible to explain. He gave his all to both his family and his career. The principles by which he lived provided a foundation for his children to build upon as they now live their lives. Prior to his death he told a close family friend that he had lived a full and happy life; had done more and seen more than most who live to a ripe old age.

He is survived by his wife, Jean, children Wayne, Patricia and Steven, by his mother and father, Lester and Lavone Taylor, his brother Edwin, his sister Peggy Ernst, and granddaughter Kimberly.