

Lester G. Taylor, Jr. Jan 1943

Cullum No. 13227 • Sep 08, 1978 • Died in Flemington, NJ
Interred in St. Magdalens Cemetery, Flemington, NJ



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 of Rosedale High School, he moved on to junior college in the same city. He then completed a third successful college year at Ottawa State University in Kansas. At that point he realized one of his great ambitions and accepted an appointment to 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. He played football as a plebe, and favored the choir with his singing for four years.

As was the case with many classmates, Les was intrigued by the Air Corps and left for flight training during first class summer, returning to finish and graduate in January with wings and his gold bars. He then left for further fighter training before going to Europe with the 369th Fighter Squadron of the 359th Group out of the UK. He served most of two years as a P-47 and P-51 pilot, flying 87 combat missions and collecting 285 combat hours. By October of 1944 he had won two DFC's and seven Air Medals.

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 are rated Superior ... For extraordinary achievement ... The 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."

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

During his service in Europe, Les rose rapidly to the rank of captain. After his combat tour he saw service as a flying instructor and staff officer in the Air Training Command. His flying experience and skill were the later base of his becoming 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 of 1952 Les was assigned to the Fifth Air Force in Korea, winning a Bronze Star for outstanding performance. At the end of hostilities in Korea, Les returned to the US to start service as director of Combat Operations for the 34th Air Division at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico, responsible for air defense in five states. This time the reward for outstanding service was a promotion to the same position for the entire Central Air Defense Force at Richards Gebauer Air Force Base in Missouri. And while in New Mexico their daughter Patricia was born.

After completing the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Les was posted on an exchange tour with the Navy at the Western Sea Frontier in San Francisco. Again he performed brilliantly in coordinating USAF defense efforts with Navy Air and Sea Defense activities and in joint defense maneuvers and damage evaluation team actions. It was in San Francisco that their third child, Steven, was born.

In August of 1960 Les became base civil engineer at Castle AFB in California, with the 93rd Bomb Wing. This period of a year and a half began a career field for which he seemed always predestined. He continued in Turkey as director of engineering in TUSLOG in Ankara. Here he was responsible for the maintenance, repair and construction activities of all US bases in Turkey, for which he received the Air Force Commendation Medal in 1964. As a family man he was very proud of the citation which stressed the "... completion of grammar school and a major high school construction project which will serve dependant 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 next civil engineer assignment to McCoy AFB in Florida on return from Turkey. Then McCoy's loss was the Eighth Air Force's gain when Les moved to Westover Air Force Base as deputy director of civil engineering. This was his final position in the Air Force before he joined civilian ranks.

When Les initially moved to Turkey there was a ban on dependant travel; so he and Jean bought a house in Toms River, New Jersey. When the ban was lifted, Jean and the children moved to Ankara, but they held the house. So it was to New Jersey for retirement. There Les quickly went to work for the New

Jersey Department of Transportation. Following that position he became 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 had 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. Magdalen's Cemetery in Flemington.

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 two awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with its Oak Leaf Clusters are open testimony to the contribution he made to the Free World. He was very proud to have graduated from the Military Academy at West Point. Les 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 are impossible to put into words. 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; that he had done more and seen more than most who live to a ripe old age.

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

—his wife, daughter and classmates