

Sergeant Tyrus Heber “Ty” Tisdale

From Paul Carter in the Orange County Historical Society *Record*:¹

“Tyrus H. Tisdale, second son of Mr. and Mrs. B.H. Tisdale, was born on 12 October 1913 in Madison County. His parents’ farm, however, was in Orange County just east of Somerset on Route 641 (Liberty Mills Road), and he grew up there living the life of a farm boy. At some point, he acquired the nickname of “Ty,” and that stuck with him for the rest of his life.

“Ty graduated from James Barbour High School (whose main building is now the home of the Four County Players), and he attended Fork Union Military Academy. Early on, Ty became known for his skills as a baseball player. Regionally, he played in the Elks League of Charlottesville and in the Valley League. Locally, he played on the Orange Ramblers and Montpelier Club teams. He even briefly entertained thoughts of entering the minor league professional player draft. His favorite baseball glove is still in the possession of the family.

“As Ty reached his middle teen years, war clouds were beginning to gather in Europe, and as a precaution, the United States began to expand its armed forces. Ty was still too young to join the armed services, but just barely. For a time, he worked at Snead and Company of Orange, the predecessor of today’s Virginia Metal Industries, located on the Old Gordonsville Road.

“Ty joined the U.S. Army on 2 May 1941 and received his basic and advanced training at Fort Meade, Maryland and at Camp A.P. Hill in Caroline County, Virginia. He was then stationed for a time at Camp Blanding, Florida and at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. He was trained to be a member of a two-man team that operated a .30-caliber heavy machine gun. The gun, a product of World War I trench warfare, could fire up to 600 rounds a minute. One team member carried the gun and its cooling system and the other carried the mounting tripod and ammunition.

“In September 1942, Ty went overseas to England and began training for what became Operation Overlord, the invasion of the European mainland. At some point, he became both a sergeant and a member of the famed 29th infantry Division that contained regiments from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. With the extensive Civil War history of these states in mind, the division was quickly nicknamed the ‘Blue and Gray’ Division. On 31 May 1944, Ty wrote a letter home. Shortly thereafter, pre-invasion

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security sealed him and his comrades off from the rest of the world. On 6 June, the 29th Division boarded landing craft and headed directly for Omaha Beach on the coast of France. The waters of the English Channel were still rough from a recent storm, and the wind, currents, and enemy resistance combined to produce massive confusion.

“Ty was a member of H Company of the 116th Infantry Regiment. H Company was scheduled to be in the second wave to reach the beach. F and G companies were in the first wave, and they waded ashore at 6:35 a.m. Shelling from the ships supporting the landing had started grass fires on the heights overlooking the beach and the thick smoke temporarily obscured the vision of friend and foe alike. As H Company members in the second wave headed toward the beach for a scheduled 7:00 a.m. landing, enemy resistance seemed to be very light. A few artillery shells were coming down around the landing craft, but direct fire from the beach was sporadic and inaccurate. The men began to wonder whether possibly the landing might just be a piece of cake after all. By the time the second wave reached the beach, however, the grass fires were burning out, and Ty and his companions were open, unprotected targets for a murderously accurate blizzard of rifle and machine gun fire that opened up on them from positions all over the heights overlooking the beach.

“Landing craft could not come all the way up to the dry sand. The enemy had set hundreds of ‘tetrahedrons’ at both the high and low tide levels. Tetrahedrons were six-pronged, jack rock-like metal structures designed to rip the bottoms out of landing craft. Landing craft had to stop just short of the tetrahedrons and send the soldiers out into moving water of uncertain depths. The men, already weighted down with packs and equipment and now struggling in the swells to maintain their footing, were defenseless targets.

“After Ty’s landing craft dropped its ramp, he stepped out into waist-deep water. Before he could reach the sand, Ty received a mortal head wound. His best buddy helped him to shore, still alive, and propped him up against a tetrahedron where he soon died.

“The family back in Orange County received the sad news of his death by a telegram dated 17 June 1944. Sergeant Tisdale’s remains were initially buried in St. Laurent Cemetery, northeast of St. Lo, France until the late forties when they were exhumed and brought to Orange. His father and brothers met the casket at the Orange train station, and took it to Graham Cemetery for burial. Present besides his parents were his brothers T.B. Tisdale of Orange and W.M. Tisdale of Washington, D.C.

“Sergeant Tisdale is the uncle of Barbara Hawse of Orange and Tom Tisdale of Keswick.”