

# **HEROES OF WORLD WAR II**

**Richard E. Nugent,  
the 1st Brazilian Fighter Squadron,  
and 209 Others**

**T. DENNIS REECE**

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

# HEROES OF WWII

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Published by Hellgate Press  
(An imprint of L&R Publishing, LLC)

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Hellgate Press  
PO Box 3531  
Ashland, OR 97520  
*email:* sales@hellgatepress.com

*Cover & Interior Design:* L. Redding

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available from the publisher on request*

*ISBN: 978-1-55571-955-5 (paperback)*

*ISBN: 978-1-55571-956-2 (ebook)*

Printed and bound in the United States of America

First edition 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Matilde*



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# Introduction

**W**HY ANOTHER BOOK about World War II? The short answer is to pay tribute to some of the uniformed personnel who helped win the war but have not been given proper recognition for their accomplishments. In the case of the 1st Brazilian Fighter Squadron, which won the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation (formerly the Distinguished Unit Citation), that statement needs one qualification. The unit has garnered considerable publicity, but most of the material is available only in Portuguese, and is therefore not accessible to most native speakers of English.

In April 1944 the following descending order of precedence was established for Army individual awards for bravery or noteworthy service:

**Congressional Medal of Honor**, for gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty;

**Distinguished Service Cross**, for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an armed enemy;

**Distinguished Service Medal**, for exceptionally meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility;

**Legion of Merit**, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services;

**Silver Star**, for gallantry in action;

**Distinguished Flying Cross**, for heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial flight;

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**Soldier's Medal**, for heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy;

**Bronze Star Medal**, for heroic or meritorious service against an enemy not involving aerial flight;

**Air Medal**, for meritorious achievement in aerial flight;

**Purple Heart**, for wounds received in action against an enemy;

**Good Conduct Medal**, for exemplary behavior, efficiency, and fidelity of enlisted men.<sup>1</sup>

All 209 other heroes and Richard E. Nugent won at least one award between the Distinguished Service Cross and the Soldier's Medal. At the time the major portion of this book was written those award citations were not available on the unofficial website *valor.militarytimes.com*, which aims to build a database of all valor award citations. No attempt has been made to list all of the awards those heroes won or to document their complete service histories. It is hoped that what is in these pages is enough to earn the awe and gratitude of those of us who have benefited from their devotion to duty, too often at the cost of their own lives.

Although the digital revolution has allowed the posting online of countless books and documents, many sources are still available only in print. The author appreciates the many individuals, from Shrub Oak, New York, to Spokane, Washington, who provided material, whether from libraries and genealogical associations or from family sources and personal reminiscences. Many thanks are also owed to the staffs of the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Outside of the United States, Olga Barroso in Sao Paulo, Brazil, kindly provided items from her husband, Alberto Martins Torres, now deceased.



# ONE

## The Philippines and New Guinea

\*\*\*

Maj. Charles H. Wyatt<sup>2</sup>  
*Silver Star, Bronze Star*

**M**AJOR WYATT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS, won his Silver Star while serving with the rank of captain as the citation explains:

Attached to the 73rd Infantry, on May 2, 1942, at Ganassi, Mindanao, Philippines Islands, he volunteered to attack, single-handed, five Japanese tanks supported by infantry which were approaching the town. Armed with dynamite and fire bombs, he took position and awaited the enemy. When the leading tank came within range, he disabled it. The other tanks and infantry withdrew after a brief stand. His gallant action beat off a vastly superior enemy force and gave our troops time in which to withdraw with their supplies.

The 1945 press release announcing the above award also included the following citation for a Bronze Star, which is quoted because of its relevance to the fate of then-Captain Wyatt after the fall of the Philippines:

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Attached to the 73rd Infantry, he was largely responsible for the rescue of a group of American civilians and missionaries from hostile Moros near Tamparan, Lanao, Mindanao, Philippine Islands. On May 25, 1942, he undertook this expedition, proceeding to Tamparan, where Moros were preparing to plunder the refugees' evacuation camp. His reputation as a leader of loyal Moro scouts, his resourcefulness and courage enabled him to extricate the civilians from their perilous situation and escort them to safety at Dansalan, Lanao.

After the American surrender Wyatt joined guerrilla forces fighting the Japanese. He surrendered to the occupiers when informed by letter from an American that a price had been placed on his head and it would be better to give himself up. He endured torture for a month in a futile attempt by the Japanese to get information on his guerrilla allies. Until his liberation in January 1945, Wyatt alternated between period of illness, including thirty-one attacks of malaria, and forced labor in plantation fields on Mindanao.

Charles Handfield Wyatt, who carried the same full name as his father and grandfather, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 7, 1907. His paternal grandfather, a ninth generation descendant of a female immigrant on "The Mayflower," was an attorney. His father was a bookkeeper and bank clerk who was an officer of the Baltimore office of the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank from its opening in 1918 until he resigned in 1924. He then had an insurance and notary public business. Major Wyatt's mother, Meta (*nee* Hutton) Wyatt, was a homemaker who had no other children who survived into maturity. Her son may have inherited an attraction to engineering from his maternal grandfather, Nathaniel H. Hutton, a civil engineer who during a distinguished career supervised public projects from Baltimore to Fort Yuma, Arizona.

Wyatt graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1929 and received a military commission after participation in the ROTC. Following a brief stint as a mechanic in an aviation factory, he worked five years for Proctor

and Gamble on Staten Island in cost accounting and production engineering. He was transferred to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1936 to do cost accounting.

Changed to active duty status by the War Department in May 1941, he arrived in the Philippines three months later and was put in charge of airport construction. He had left behind in Ohio his wife, Margaret Miller (*nee* Jones) Wyatt, a former education supervisor, and their two children.

Angered by what he saw and experienced at the hands of the Japanese, after his return to the U.S. he wanted to go back to the Pacific before the Japanese surrendered “to exterminate the rats.” His once robust health had been broken in captivity, however, and he had to leave the military for medical reasons in 1947. Back in the suburbs of Cincinnati he became a civilian employee for the U.S. government. There he suffered another tragedy when an infant son drowned at home in their pool.

Wyatt died in Cincinnati from heart problems on October 26, 1952, and was buried in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore.

\*\*\*

1st Lt. George J. Hess<sup>3</sup>  
*Silver Star*

As part of an effort to cut off Australia from the United States, on March 8, 1942, Japanese forces landed on the northeastern coast of the island of New Guinea at Salamaua and Lae, just south of the Huon peninsula. An Australian division and the U.S. 32nd Infantry Division went into action on November 16, 1942, southeast of those points in the area of Gona and Buna.

Hess won the Silver Star while a second lieutenant. Shortly before that, a patrol was ordered to go into a swamp and come out to the rear of the enemy, but it reported the swamp was impenetrable. The commanding colonel then asked Major Gordon Clarkson, commander of the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, for a man with “guts” to lead a second patrol. Clarkson identified Hess from Company A. The results are told in the award’s citation:

## HEROES OF WWII

Near Buna, New Guinea, on December 25 and 26, 1942, at great risk he led a patrol of ten men through an almost impossible swamp, where a platoon had previously been repulsed, and seized and held a position between two strong enemy emplacements which were holding up our advance. Under intense enemy small arms and automatic fire he held this position during the afternoon and night. On the following day our troops pushed through the swamp and from the position he had secured, attacked and reduced both enemy positions. His daring leadership and high courage made possible the reduction of the enemy right flank and the eventual overwhelming of the entire enemy line.

George Johnson Hess and his twin sister were born in Wisconsin on February 23, 1918, to May Josephine (*nee* Johnson) and Dayton Manley Hess. They grew up with their parents and three siblings on farms in Rock County, on the border with Illinois.

Hess added two years to his age and enlisted in the National Guard in 1934. He obtained a high school education and some experience as a meat cutter by the time he entered the Regular Army as a staff sergeant in October 1940. Several years earlier he had married Marian Grace Davis, with whom he established a home in Edgerton, in Rock County, Wisconsin. In September 1942 he was commissioned an officer.

For his heroism on January 28, 1944, near Saidor, New Guinea, Lieutenant Hess earned the Distinguished Service Cross. The division as a whole also had an excellent combat record, earning at least fourteen Distinguished Unit Citations during operations from September 1942 in New Guinea to August 1945 in the Philippines.

After the war Hess stayed in the Army. His assignments included tours in Korea, Germany, and Fort Ord, California. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1963 and died in Las Vegas, Nevada, on July 13, 1994. His wife predeceased him in Wisconsin in 1979.

\*\*\*

Capt. Warren W. Hill<sup>4</sup>  
*Silver Star*

Warren Wellington Hill was born in California on January 17, 1904, to Mable Alice (*nee* Snead) and Wealthy Wellington Hill. His earliest years were spent there in Salinas, in Monterey County, with his parents and an older sister. His father was a railroad signalman, and Warren eventually followed the same profession, working for the Great Northern Railway in Montana. By 1930 he had moved to Culbertson, in the northeastern part of the state. The town is located in Roosevelt County, named after President Theodore Roosevelt. (That would not be the last geographical association Hill had with the Roosevelt name.) He married in 1932 and had at least one child, a boy, from that marriage.

Hill enlisted in the Montana National Guard as a private in 1927 and rose through the ranks to become a second lieutenant in 1935 and a first lieutenant in 1939. An expert marksman, he led fourteen members who represented the organization in a competition at Camp Perry, Ohio, in 1940. In September of that year he entered the U.S. Army as a first lieutenant with two years of college when the guard was incorporated into the 41st Division. The next year he was promoted to captain and completed the Battalion Commanders and Staff Officers Course at the Infantry School.

In early 1943 the Allies decided to move against Japanese bases in Lae and Salamaua. After a beachhead was secured on Nassau Bay on July 2, the drive northward toward Salamaua began in an area defended by about 10,000 Japanese troops. Fierce resistance was encountered at a ridge named for one of the 41st Infantry Division commanders, Lt. Col. Archibald Roosevelt, son of President Theodore Roosevelt. Captain Hill's Silver Star citation explains his role in the offensive:

At Roosevelt Ridge, New Guinea, from July 27 to July 31, 1943, on five consecutive days he personally led his company in attacks against numerically superior troops who were entrenched in commanding ground with good fields of fire

and observation. By his personal example of coolness, gallantry and leadership, he inspired his men and welded his company into an efficient fighting unit which gained valuable ground and vital information concerning enemy dispositions. During the final action, he was seriously wounded and his men were inspired by his example to carry on the attack. The daring attacks, heroism and devotion to duty displayed by him made a substantial contribution to the subsequent capture of Roosevelt Ridge.

After the above action Hill suffered a serious wound from a Japanese grenade when he disobeyed orders and went out on a night patrol. He left the military on a disability retirement in August 1945 with the rank of major and returned to Montana. In 1947 he was instrumental in establishing the Disabled American Veterans chapter in the town of Polson. He eventually moved to Oregon, where he died in the Portland area on December 9, 1977. Survivors included his spouse, whom he married after his first marriage ended, and a son. He is buried in the Willamette National Cemetery in Oregon.

\*\*\*

2nd Lt. James A. Gordon<sup>5</sup>  
*Distinguished Service Cross*

Lieutenant Gordon won his DSC as the 162nd Infantry Regiment of the 41st Infantry Division and an Australian division fought northward to capture the area around the town of Salamaua, which fell on September 12, 1943. His contribution to the campaign, about five miles south of its objective, is described in his citation:

Near Tambu Bay, New Guinea, on August 4, 1943, as leader of a combat patrol he led his men up a narrow ridge to within ten yards of an enemy defensive position before being discovered. He immediately opened fire, killing one of the en-

emy and silencing a light machinegun. Enemy fire superiority forced the patrol to withdraw, from which position it was impossible for their light machinegun to fire upon the enemy position. He took the machinegun from the mount and advanced, firing from the hip, enabling his patrol to proceed under his cover to a point within grenade range of the enemy emplacement. He destroyed the enemy position with rifle grenades, making it possible for his patrol to advance and capture the enemy machinegun. He acted with extraordinary bravery and daring in the face of enemy machinegun and sniper fire on this occasion.

Gordon was born in Tradesville, South Carolina, on March 28, 1922, to Doby Edward and Sallie (*nee* McNeely) Gordon. The youngest of nine children, he was raised on farms in Lancaster and Kershaw counties in northern South Carolina. By 1942 he had moved downstate to Columbia, was married to Nell (*nee* Trotter) Gordon, and in the Army. He was commissioned an officer in June 1943.

Later in the year he was wounded. After being released from the hospital he was assigned to administrative duties at a replacement depot unit in Australia. He was given custody of a safe for storing payroll money and funds deposited by soldiers. He advised his superiors that one of the two keys for the safe was missing, but was told nothing could be done about it. Shortly thereafter, during a nighttime burglary of officers' quarters his wallet and safe key were stolen. He then asked for a guard to be stationed at the safe but after the first day this was not done. Later the safe was opened and the contents found to be stolen. An official inquiry found Gordon negligent in the matter and liable for the missing \$861. In 1949 President Truman signed a private bill absolving him of liability.

Gordon stayed in the military until he retired with the rank of major in August 1961. He then became a real estate developer in Columbia.

He died on September 6, 1998, and was entombed in Greenlawn Memorial Park in Columbia. Survivors included two sons and two grandsons. His wife predeceased him one month earlier.

\*\*\*

**Pfc. Paul E. Peterson<sup>6</sup>**

*Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumous)*

Private First Class Peterson was with Company A, 162nd Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division, when he won the Distinguished Service Cross:

When near Salamaua, New Guinea, August 31, 1943, he was given the mission of covering an approach to a ridge occupied by his platoon. When the enemy attacked in front of his position, he immediately opened an accurate fire which held the enemy at bay for some time. After the enemy had made a heavy concentration of grenades and he had been wounded he realized that his position was untenable and he ordered the two men supporting him to withdraw while he covered their movement. While heroically protecting his comrades he was killed. In addition to killing at least nine of the enemy, by his daring act he gained valuable time for his platoon to establish deadly cross fire and inflict heavy casualties.

Paul Edward Peterson was raised as the youngest of six children in his family's home in Pomeroy, in northwest Iowa, where he was born on April 2, 1916. His parents, Hilma (*nee* Erickson) and Malcolm Peterson, both emigrated from Sweden and married after arriving in Iowa. After graduating from Pomeroy High School in 1933 he attended Buena Vista College (now Buena Vista University) in nearby Storm Lake for two years. He then worked in the general store his father had operated for several decades.

In October 1939, Paul moved to Los Angeles County, California, where he worked as a waiter. He entered the Army in October 1941 four days before his parents celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Prior to going overseas, Peterson received training at Camp Roberts in California, and at Paine Field and Fort Lewis, both in Washington State.



News of the death of Private First Class Peterson hit hard not only his family but also the town of Pomeroy: he was the first of seven persons from that vicinity killed during the war. Memorial services were held for him in 1943 and for his burial in 1948 in the town's Union Cemetery.

\*\*\*

Pfc. Milan W. Peel<sup>7</sup>  
*Silver Star*

Private First Class Peel was another hero of the 41st Division in the drive to take Salamaua, as stated in the citation for his Silver Star:

During operations in the Tambu Bay-Salamaua area, New Guinea, from June 29 to September 12, 1943, he participated with outstanding gallantry and efficiency in many dangerous combat patrols to obtain essential information about enemy dispositions. On one occasion his alertness and courage enabled him to warn his patrol of an enemy trap which would otherwise have most certainly caused heavy casualties. On another occasion while voluntarily guiding an Australian captain to our front-line units he was seriously wounded and the Australian officer was killed. After regaining consciousness he showed great presence of mind in promptly returning and reporting the enemy and, despite his painful wounds, displayed exceptional courage and devotion to duty in leading a combat patrol back to the scene of action. By his conspicuous courage on these hazardous missions he contributed greatly to the success of our operations.

Peel was born in Fayette County, Kentucky, on June 5, 1918, as "Miles Peel," but was later as known as "Bill." His father, Miles (or Milas) Madison Peel, worked variously as a saloon keeper and grocery store clerk in Lexington. Milan's mother, Nora (*nee* Tatman) Peel, was a homemaker. The fourth member of the family was Milan's older brother. In 1920 they

moved to Kokomo, in central Indiana, where Miles worked in a grocery store and later in a gas station. Milan attended Kokomo High School for several years. In 1935 his parents left the state, but he stayed in town, working as a bartender in a tavern while living at the YMCA.

Milan entered the Army in June 1941. Following completion of Officer Candidate School in Brisbane, Australia, he was commissioned in January 1945. Upon leaving the military he returned to Kokomo, where he entered the Army Reserve in 1954. Later he became commander of the 199th Ordnance Company in that city, reached the rank of major, and was elected president of the local Reserve Officers Association.

As a civilian he had managerial jobs successively for a tire service company, a steel corporation, and a tool and die company. He was also president of the local Exchange Club. He married in July 1945, was divorced in 1967, and remarried three months later.

He died on October 19, 1971, in Rochester, New York, while on a business trip, and was buried in Kokomo Memorial Park Cemetery. He was survived by his second wife and two children.

\*\*\*

1st Lt. William V. Morris<sup>8</sup>  
*Silver Star*

On January 2, 1944, Allied forces seized Saidor, New Guinea, a coastal town strategically located between the Huon Peninsula to the east and Madang to the west. Lieutenant Morris, from the 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, earned his Silver Star as Allied commanders planned their next moves west of Saidor:

In action near Dein, New Guinea, from February 21 to 24, 1944, he led an amphibious patrol which landed in enemy territory approximately 20 miles in advance of Allied front lines. Although completely surrounded by more than 2,000 enemy troops, some of whom at times passed within 20 yards of his position, he reconnoitered enemy activity, installations,

equipment and strength. By his determination and daring he was responsible for the successful completion of the mission, which furnished information vital to the conduct of impending operations.

Born in Bradley, South Dakota, on December 8, 1922, Morris was the younger of two children of Mary (*nee* Matson) and William V. Morris. (Although they had identical names, father and son generally did not use "Senior" and "Junior.") The family moved to Des Moines, Iowa, when the younger William was a toddler. His mother died in 1931 and his father remarried the next year. In Des Moines his father, an Army veteran of World War I, worked for a cement company and the junior William was a member of St Anthony's Church.

William enlisted in the Army as a private in June 1940 and was later commissioned a second lieutenant following officer training at Fort Benning, Georgia. After earning the Silver Star he was promoted to captain and fought on Leyte in the Philippines before being killed in action on June 17, 1945, in Luzon. He was survived by his father, step-mother, and sister. He is buried at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.

\*\*\*

Pfc. Herman J. Taylor<sup>9</sup>  
*Distinguished Service Cross*

Elements of the 24th and 41st Infantry Divisions landed at opposite ends of the Cyclops Mountains in the Hollandia region on the northern coast of New Guinea on April 22, 1944. Private First Class Taylor won his DSC in this area as the divisions linked up when:

In action at Koejaboe, Dutch New Guinea, on April 29, 1944, at the risk of his life he went to the rescue of his commanding officer who had been wounded and lay in a position directly in front of an occupied enemy dugout. The office had fallen in such a manner that his body blocked any attempt by the re-

mainder of the patrol to place fire on the enemy positions. Private First Class Taylor moved around the enemy dugout and despite grenades thrown by the enemy persisted in his efforts and succeeded in dragging the officer to a position of safety.

Herman Jenkins Taylor was born on September 27, 1918, in Logan County, Kentucky, where his father, David Forrest Taylor, was a farmer. Herman's mother, Katie Belle (*nee* Jenkins) Taylor, died when he was nine years old of blood poisoning from an infected cut in her hand. Roughly a year later his father remarried. That union produced one child, and Herman grew up as the third oldest of his father's five children with extended relatives occasionally living in the house. In the early 1930s the family moved to the county seat, Russellville. In the latter part of that decade Herman worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps, an older brother at home worked as a plumber, and his father worked sporadically as a grader in a tobacco warehouse.

Herman enlisted in the Army in September 1941 with about one year of high school. He may have also worked briefly in manufacturing, as his civilian work occupation at the time was listed as unskilled labor in the production of asbestos products, abrasives, and polishing products.

Taylor left the military as a staff sergeant in June 1945. Back in Russellville he owned a plumbing and heating company, and was active in church, veterans', and other civic organizations, as well as the local draft board.

He died in Russellville on June 30, 1993. Survivors included his wife, Helen Ray (*nee* Merriman) Taylor; three children; and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He is buried in Dripping Springs Cemetery in Logan County.

\*\*\*

Capt. Albert H. Braden Jr.<sup>10</sup>  
*Silver Star*

Albert Henry Braden Jr. was born on July 18, 1915, in Beaumont, Texas, one year after his father graduated from medical school. The first-

born child, he would eventually be joined by four younger siblings. His mother, Kathleen (*nee* O'Connor) Braden, and the rest of the family moved to Sherman City, Texas, by 1920, and to Houston by 1930. At San Jacinto High School in the latter city he joined the German Club, and would maintain an interest in German culture for the rest of his life. After graduating from Rice Institute (now Rice University) in 1936, he followed in his father's footsteps by attending the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. He graduated in 1940, then served an internship at Kansas City General Hospital.

He entered the Army as a lieutenant in August 1941. Over the next four years he would serve as a battalion surgeon, regimental surgeon, and commander of the 24th Medical Battalion in the 24th Infantry Division. Near the end of operations in Hollandia he unexpectedly found himself close to the front lines, as described in his Silver Star citation:

During the night of May 23-24, 1944, an undetermined number of Japanese attacked the perimeter of the unit to which he was attached in New Guinea. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, he administered medical care to our wounded and checked the dead, using a flashlight, thereby endangering his own life and becoming a visible target for the enemy. His calmness and devotion to duty under hostile fire reflect great credit upon himself and the military service.

After his discharge as a major in 1945, Doctor Braden did his residency in St. Louis, then returned to Houston to practice medicine from 1948 to 1986. There he was active in numerous medical, religious, and cultural organizations.

Doctor Braden died on October 21, 2000. Survivors included his wife of fifty-three years, Mary Louise (*nee* Daley); four children, including Dr. Albert H. Braden III; and eleven grandchildren. He is buried in St. Roch Cemetery in Mentz, Texas.

\*\*\*

Col. John H. Brewer<sup>11</sup>  
*Legion of Merit* (Posthumous)

Colonel Brewer was attached to the 5th Fighter Command, Fifth Air Force, when he earned the Legion of Merit:

For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services in New Guinea from November 28, 1942, to May 12, 1943. As Signal Officer of a Fighter Command, Colonel Brewer planned and organized the aircraft warning service of New Guinea. His courageous personal reconnaissance of the terrain involved, his technical expertness in meeting the operational requirements of the area, his energy and his personal character commanded the respect and devotion of his subordinates and enlisted the effective cooperation of Allied military personnel. Colonel Brewer made an important contribution to the defense of Northern Australia and to the success of the Papuan Campaign.

John Henry Brewer was born on April 3, 1900, in Norwich, Connecticut, and grew up there as the oldest of five brothers surrounded by families of immigrants from all over Europe. His mother, Mary S. Brewer, was born in Ireland, as were the parents of his father, Timothy F. Brewer, a skilled manual laborer. After graduating from high school John worked for several years in an electric power station which furnished energy for the Shore Line Electric Railroad Company. Working with modern applications of scientific research would be the focus of his adult life.

Brewer graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1924, in the same class as Richard E. Nugent, but unlike him never changed his military specialty. Upon commissioning he elected to go into the Signal Corps. The next year he obtained a Master of Science degree from Yale University. From 1925 to 1929 he was at the Signal Corps Sound Laboratory at Fort H.G. Wright, New York. He completed the Signal Corps

Company Officers' Course in 1933, and between 1929 and 1941 was also a signal officer in Panama, the Philippines, and at Langley Field, Virginia. Before going overseas in 1942 he had significant command or training responsibilities in Seattle and Tampa.

On May 12, 1943, Colonel Brewer was killed in the crash of a transport plane in New Guinea flying between Port Moresby and Dobabura, on opposite sides of the Owen Stanley Mountains. His survivors included his wife, Catherine (*nee* Cosgrove) Brewer, whom he married in Panama in 1930, and a son.

He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Brewer Avenue in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, is named in his honor.

\*\*\*

Cpl. William T. Burns Jr.<sup>12</sup>  
*Soldier's Medal*

Corporal Burns was a cavalryman who may have been with the 1st Cavalry Division in New Guinea when he earned the Soldier's Medal. The description of his heroic act must be one of the shortest and most interesting ever used on a U.S. award citation:

For heroism in the South Pacific Area on November 27, 1943, when he unhesitatingly leaped onto a burning compost pile to rescue a comrade and an animal.

William Thomas Burns Jr. was born on April 23, 1918, in Texas, undoubtedly in Van Zandt County, where his family lived on a rented farm. His mother, May Burns, was a homemaker who was raising six other children when William Junior was growing up. By the time he was twelve the family had moved to a farm in Palo Pinto County, outside the town of Graford. A few years later he was helping his father on the farm, while an older sister taught in a public school.

Burns entered the Army in November 1940. He served until January 1945 and after the war settled in Alamogordo, New Mexico, using the

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name W.T. Burns Jr. He co-founded the Burns-Luttrell car dealership in 1960, and in the 1970s owned the race horse Rate Me Crazy. That may not have been his first foray into professional sports; in 1939 one W.T. Burns Jr., a promising pitcher from Graford, Texas, was signed to a minor league contract by the Amarillo Gold Sox.

He died on November 28, 1991 (one source gives the date as November 27), and is buried in Monte Vista Cemetery in Alamogordo.