

Capt. Earl L. Jackson

U.S. Army



Earl L. Jackson
Capt. US Army
ARNG Officer, Leader, Hero
KIA-Roer River, Germany

The story of U.S. Army Capt. Earl L. Jackson and his family is one of sacrifice. A widowed mother who lost a beloved son during World War II; a 32-year-old father who paid the ultimate price to preserve a way of life for family and country; and three children whose memories of their dashing father provoke pride and not just a few tears. There is not perhaps a unique tale, but a tale that is uniquely American; that is a tale of a courageous father traveling to foreign lands, fighting the good fight, preparing to sacrifice his life so that his family need not sacrifice theirs, and so that his countrymen not sacrifice their way of life in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

This tale begins back in 1913 in Makanda with the birth of baby boy Earl to Doss and Ida Tope Jackson. When Earl's father died at a young age, Ida Jackson was left to raise six children on her own, adding a few stepchildren when she remarried. She was just 5-feet tall and weighed about 95 pounds, but she was the strongest woman I ever saw in my life, said Ida's grandson Robert Earl Jackson, 71, of Energy.

She would need that strength as she sent her son Earl off to war, leaving behind his wife, Geneva and 3 children, Dorothy, almost 13, Robert Earl, then 11, and Shirley, 8. She

was our heroine, said Shirley Jackson McKinney, now 67 of Little Rock, Ark. She saved everything he sent home, every letter and every news clipping. We all have copies and they helped us to know our dad. They are our treasures.

Jackson's children got to know their father's compassionate side in one of the letters he wrote to his mother that he signed Your wandering son, Earl.

"I had a small stock of candy when I arrived here, but I soon gave it away to the children here. Little girls and boys from two to 10-years-old ask every American soldier they see for candy. They don't have candy here as sugar is too scarce. The children look pale and undernourished and I couldn't help but think of those healthy youngsters of mine living in a land of plenty. So, the candy I receive from rations go to the English kids. They need it worse than I do."

Jackson was a full-time adjutant in the Illinois National Guard based at the Carbondale Armory before he entered the U.S. Army in 1941. McKinney remembers little about those days, but does recall Jackson's leave at home before being shipped overseas.

He visited school one entire day with each of his three children. Each of us had our own school day with our dad. I was in the first grade and recall how very proud I was of walking to school with my dad in his full military uniform. "He sat in the back of the classroom the whole day observing my class work," she wrote in a tribute to her father. "That day was probably my last memory of seeing my dad."

The family kept up with Earl's exploits in his messages to his family, especially his mother.

Nov. 25 1944 somewhere in Germany: *"Dear Mom, Well, I'm still safe although I'm having some narrow escapes. My Jeep hit a mine a few days ago-threw me out of it- just shook me up a little but injured my driver and my executive officer. Have been under constant shell-fire for some time now."*

Dec. 11, 1944: *I guess you have been reading in the papers how my outfit crashed through the German defenses. "We, who had never been in combat before, defeated Hitler's best troops, 'his supermen.' This outfit amazed everyone as we got tough and chased the Jerries (German soldiers). When our men attacked, they either threw down their arms or ran and we had to chase them*

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to capture them.”

Belgium Jan 5, 1945: *“Having quite a lot of snow and cold weather here now, which makes going a bit tougher but we will come through. No one can beat the courage and determination of the American soldiers as we are again joining in this war.”*

Belgium Jan 18, 1945: *“Mom, I hear I’m to get a medal for my actions during the recent operations. I don’t know what I did other than get my company into the towns with few casualties and captured 37 German soldiers. Would have got more but they seemed to want to fight so we shot them. I could sure write lots of heroic things my men did but I’m not permitted to do so. I believe Company C is the fightingist outfit in the entire army and I’m still proud to be its captain. Well Mom, I’ll be glad when the war is over. I’ve seen everything. Death in its most horrible forms. And war is certainly not a pretty sight. No one can ever tell me anything about war! I know! Well, I’ll close for this time. Your son, Earl P.S. Would love some hot biscuits! You can sure make them.”*

Belgium Jan 20, 1945 *Dear Mom, I received the cake and fountain pen today. The pen was okay and I’ll send you a money order for it. The cake was damaged in shipment. It had become wet. Weather is still cold, and the snow is really deep although I am told that spring comes early here. I haven’t had much of a chance to send anything to Bobby yet but I intend to send him a German Bayonet and helmet. Well, I’ll close for this time. Earl*

A month later, U.S. Army Capt. Earl L. Jackson was killed in action.

He got through the Battle of the Bulge and they were mopping up little towns in Germany, said Robert Earl Jackson, who did receive the bayonet and helmet, albeit after his father’s death. He and his executive officer were killed by 88 mm artillery on Feb. 23, 1945. They must have had the area in their sights because it was a direct hit on them.

News of Jackson’s death came swiftly. was at school and a little girl came up to me and said, “Your daddy got killed in the war.” When I got home, my mother wasn’t there, but I found the telegram on the cabinet. It didn’t soak in. “It wasn’t traumatic, but it became more so the older we got,” said Jackson’s eldest daughter, Dorothy Lively, 72, of Herrin. Naturally we are proud, but we would much rather he came home. I can’t help but wonder where we would be, what he would have been doing, had he not been killed.

Robert Earl Jackson was with his grandmother when he got the news of his father’s death. The remembered pain of that moment was evident on Jackson’s face on a recent visit to the Carbondale Armory where a plaque commemorating his father was placed in 1950, in remembrance of the only National Guard member from that Armory to die in World War II. He was a great patriot. He loved the military and had he not been killed, he would have retired after a career in the military. “He

is the reason I went into the military,” said Jackson, a retired U.S. Army Master Sgt. E-8 who belonged to his father’s old unit.

McKinney said that although she was just eight when her father died, she has memories of her father she holds precious. “I do have memories. He had a love of his country, his children and family,” she said. He paid the ultimate price and he was courageous in doing that.” Jackson said he thinks of his father when he hears of the casualties in Iraq. “At 32, my father was so young, but here again we are having 19 and 20-year-old kids dying and it just tears me up,” he said. And he always remembers one passage from a letter sent by his father: “If I come out of this thing alive I shall fight for anything that will prevent this country from ever getting started in a war again. I’ve seen war now and know what it is. We don’t ever want it to happen again.”

In Memory of CPT Earl L. Jackson, KIA 23 February 1945
near the Roer River, Germany