

TAYLOR, JESSE GAY ("J.G.") S N: 299 781

Jesse Gay Taylor was born June 17, 1919. He died December 25 2004.

Father: Jesse Stephenson Taylor.

Mother: Essie Velma (Pate) Taylor.

Wife: Constance (Digman) Taylor.

Date of marriage: June 1, 1946.

Children: Wade Taylor, Larry Taylor, Linda Brock, Arlene Mincey.

Brothers: Glendale Taylor , Gwin Taylor, Garvis Taylor, Grady Taylor, Gardner Taylor, Gideon Taylor.

Sisters: Sara Gene Wilson, Glendon Bryant, Grace Setzer-Dewsnepe, Gladys Stephenson, Gloys Willoughby, Glera Taylor.

(Editor's note: Five of the Taylor children served their country during World War II.



Glendon served in the US Navy, Grace was a US Army nurse, Gwin Wade was in the US Navy in the Pacific Theater, and Grady was in the U Army serving in North Africa and Italy.]

Jesse enlisted in the United States Coast Guard in Miami Florida in 1942 at the age of 23. When he was honorably discharged August 14, 1946 he had advanced from the rank of carpenter's mate third class to carpenter's mate first class.

Taylor was working on a dairy farm when he decided to join the Coast Guard, and was sent to Manhattan Beach, New York for basic training. From New York he went to Atlantic City, New Jersey where he was placed on guard duty, and played a lot of basketball. It was one military experience he could remember as a fun time.

From New Jersey he headed to Norfolk, Virginia where he received training aboard LSTs for service with the Coast Guard. Upon graduation he traveled by train to Dravo Ship Yard in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There he attended a welding school and when his training was complete he finally received his assignment aboard the Coast Guard manned *USS LST-884*. His journey began as the ship and crew sailed down the Allegheny River to the Ohio River, into the Mississippi and on to New Orleans. From there the crew sailed to Gulfport, Mississippi for intensive training in the gulf and then back to New Orleans to take on supplies and head to the Panama Canal Zone. Taylor and his crewmates left San Diego, California for Pearl Harbor, with orders to replace a disabled ship.

*LST 884* caught up with a convoy at Eniwetok Island and sailed for Saipan, where it embarked a troop of Marines and supplies headed to Iwo Jima. There the ship took 13 five-inch shells from the Japanese guns embedded in Mt. Suribachi, and had to return to Saipan, where Taylor spent two days welding plates over the shell holes in the LST. After repairs the ship and crew again transported the Marines, their gear, vehicles, rations, small arms, and all equipment needed to keep the landing forces moving inland on Iwo Jima. Jesse said that the LST was about a mile offshore when the American flag was raised on Mount Suribachi. The first flag was supplied by the *USS LST 758*, and was later replaced by a larger flag from *USS LST 799*. "What a great feeling that was," said Taylor, "seeing the Stars and Stripes flying over that spot."

Going back to Saipan, the crew again took on Marines and supplies and headed this time to Okinawa. The ship arrived off the beaches on Easter morning, April 1, 1945. What happened next has been described as one of the most stirring naval incidents of the Okinawa Campaign. Boatswain's Mate First Class James

Clinton Bolton gave this written account of what happened: "In a new chapter of dramatic Coast Guard Action, the crew of the 884 fought off a Japanese air attack; was crashed by a Nip suicide plane; abandoned ship to return shortly after to fight and put out fires: and finally, with a skeleton crew, nursed the lifeless hull of the landing ship on a 1200-mile, 9-day journey to an advance base. With gutted living quarters, a ravaged galley, emergency rations of food and water and no power for lights or propulsion, the battered 884 limped into this anchorage... a floating symbol of the great tradition of the nation's oldest wartime service."

Taylor said: "The Japanese were not defending the beachheads, but were busy launching kamikaze attacks. Our ship was one of the targets of three suicide bombers. Two of the Japanese planes were shot down, but the third plane hit *LST 884*. Although the pilot was dead, the plane which was engulfed in flames, smashed into our ship. It went through the ship fitter's shop and into a cargo of ammunition. Because of fire and explosions, the commanding officer ordered all hands to abandon ship. About 24 men lost their lives that day. Some of the crew members were picked up by other ships, and some floated to the beach on oil drums (my means of transportation). Those of us who were able returned to the ship to help fight the fire, and after it was under control, we towed into Kerama Retto Harbor."

Jesse was awakened from sleep that night in the harbor and told that the Japanese had boarded the ship. He was informed that one of his crewmates had been killed while on watch duty. It was a sad time for all aboard, and Taylor said it made him think of how short life could be.

Before he died Jesse contacted the son of the crewmate that was killed that night. He told him in a letter of the feelings of sorrow that came back to the states with each of them. He ended his letter with these words: "I am now the father of two boys, tow girls, ten grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. As I recall this past life, I can only end with this: 'Thanks to the grace of God. It could have been me.' May you gather enough memories of your dad to instill in the generations to come that 'war are Hell' let's have no more!"

Before he was discharged, Jesse spent a year in the Saint Albans Naval Hospital in Saint Albans, New York having his jaw rebuilt from damage he received during the explosions. He had served at Pearl Harbor, and on Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Ulithi in the Philippines.

Jesse Taylor was one of the few members of the Coast Guard to be qualified and authorized to wear the shoulder patch insignia of the US Navy Amphibious Forces.

Medals awarded: Purple Heart Medal, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with two Bronze Battle Stars (Iwo Jima / Okinawa), [and] World War II Victory Medal.

Jesse Gay Taylor left his hometown of Geraldine to serve his country and returned there after discharge. He made known to his family that he wanted to make one more sacrifice for mankind. He wanted his body donated to science. His wish was granted.