



With the Colors

Jan. 16, 1945

Mr. and Mrs. James R. Diel of Newton are in receipt of a letter from the commanding officers of their son, Lieutenant James Lee Diel, who was killed in action in Holland in September, excerpts from which are given below.

Captain Richard N. Winters Jr. of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who had been his commander since he joined the Parachute Infantry at Fort Benning, Georgia, as a private in 1942, writes:

"I received your letter requesting information of the death of your son, James, in this evening's mail. Under the present conditions one can't do justice to writing, but I sincerely wish to help you with all the information I possibly can. Now that I've started I hardly know what to say since there are so many things we can't divulge.

"I saw 'Punchy' on the 17th for the last time not long after the jump. The next I heard about him was that he was killed when hit by an 88 (many purpose artillery piece) near Eindhoven. That's as much as I've been able to find out about his death.

"In many ways I am more than pleased that you've given me the chance to tell you what little there is to tell—we can only write the family when they write to us first, or we know they've been officially notified. I first knew Diel at Taccoa. In fact he was a private in my platoon at that time, but it wasn't long until in his quiet unassuming manner he stood out above the other men in his platoon, so that soon he was a corporal, sergeant, staff sergeant, and then in Normandy a first sergeant. In each case I happened to be the fellow who put him in for the promotion.

"Then when we had the chance to make battlefield promotions, Diel was the first and to date the only man in E company who has ever received a battlefield promotion. Perhaps this sounds like I'm bragging that I made him, but I am not for he just had the ability, and did such an outstanding job every time he was asked to do something that it really was a pleasure to work with him. He was told something and that was the end of it — it was done.

"In getting his staff sergeant rating I can remember a big argument with the C. O. at that time. He thought Diel didn't have the force or drive to handle men. That point was proved. When he made first sergeant and lieutenant I happened to be C. O. so there was no debate.

"One of the men showed me a very nice writeup in one of the Illinois papers some time ago about the Normandy campaign. The correspondent had evidently cornered Diel and got his story of the whole affair. The only thing they spelled his name Weil, and it took me quite a few paragraphs before I was sure it was our 'Weil' but after a while it became quite clear for no two companies did the same things.

"All this I know must seem so little, cheap and artificial to you who have paid with the death of one so close. It nauseates me too, it seems so worthless, but there is nothing you can do about it but accept fate as it is and make the best of it. It's really a helpless feeling, but there's not much more you can do."

Colonel R. F. Sink, commanding the 506th Parachute Infantry, wrote:

"I am taking this opportunity of writing you to express my deepest regret and to extend my sympathy to you for the loss of your son, Second Lieutenant James L. Diel, who was killed in action in Holland.

"Although he had not been with us long as an officer, his exploits as an enlisted man were well known throughout the regiment. As he probably told you, he was selected to be an officer as a result of his superior work and courage in Normandy.

"I know you are very anxious to know how James met his death. While bravely leading his platoon against strong enemy opposition, he was struck by enemy gunfire and died instantly. I know he felt no pain. Inspired by his courage his men continued the attack and destroyed the enemy. His death is a serious loss to the regiment.

"None of us wish to die, but if we must, we all want to go the way your son did, leading his men against the enemy.

"James was buried with full military honors in Holland. A Christian service was read by our Protestant chaplain. His men were there, remaining with him until the end."