





TOMMIE

*1st Lieut. A. Thomas Rowe, Jr.
Co. H, 6th Inf., Armored Division*

Killed In Action
N. Africa, April 27, 1943

Dedicated to
The Memory of
"Tommie," Alexander Thomas Rowe, Jr.
and to
His Mother, Ida Byrd Rowe,
Two of earth's noblest

In Memoriam

"Killed in action in North Africa April 27th" — these are the tragic words in the telegram from the War Department received by his father and mother on the evening of May 20, 1943. Their terrific strain all through the Tunisian battle had eased with the word of the victory there, making this news all the more a stunning blow.

Tom's lovely bride upon hearing the news said she would come at once. Only a few days they had had together after their marriage. All the friends also are feeling keenly this loss. This sympathy the sorrowing parents appreciate, and they are leaning hard on God and trying to be brave "as their Tommie was."

He did well the part assigned him to do. It has been a comfort to the parents that Tommie's Distinguished Service Cross was awarded for his *saving* life. They are comforted, too, by his assurance to them on his last visit home of his trust in God.

Some things about Tom as he lived among us come back so vividly now—his gracious manners, his cheery outlook, his fearlessness, his ever ready helpfulness. He could always be counted upon to make a Sunday-school party a success. We remember some of the good talks he gave in Sunday school and church, and especially the solos from his rich bass voice, which is stilled forever for us here, but which we trust is pouring forth in far richer strains to beautify life in his new home."

Mrs. Bessie L. Byrum

NOTE: The above was published in the FELLOWSHIP FORUM, a quarterly magazine published by the Young People's Department of the Park Place Church of God Sunday School, Anderson, Indiana. The writer of this article, Mrs. Bessie L. Byrum, was one of Tommie's teachers.

INTRODUCTION

For almost twenty-six years Tommie and I lived together, played and worked together, prayed together and, in a sense, he and I had a little world of our own—of course, within the world that took in his mother, and still within the bigger world for whose freedom he gave his life in North Africa, April 27, 1943.

Tommie was A. T., Junior; he was to preserve the name; he was to build a strong Christian character and fill a useful place in life, and I could always count on him. I leaned upon him, a sturdy, honest, willing young fellow with boundless energy. No one will ever know how much I loved him. When he left us to enter Indiana University 100 miles away, it seemed like a thousand miles; I knew that was the beginning of his separation from us and I wept—oh, no, nobody saw me do it, for should a big physically strong man weep? But I have seen strong men weep—business men, professional men, financial wizards, religious men, ministers and laymen—I have seen these men weep; they were looked upon as strong men, and I have made no claims to being strong.

After May 20, 1943, when we began to realize the awfulness of the tragedy, I resolved—if I should be able—to put down on paper some of my reactions, this perhaps to give an outlet for my emotions, and possibly give some comfort to our immediate relatives and encouragement to others who might read what I had written.

As in the terrible tragedy that took the life of another gallant soldier, Tommie's cousin, Charlie Young, I lived over and over hundreds of times the minutest details of Tommie's going as I conceived them—the exploding shell, the mortal wound, his fall to the ground, his death struggle, his life blood saturating the ground, his final last breath, his being carried to the rear, the digging of the grave, the wrapping of the body in his blanket, the folding of his hands, laying him in the grave and covering him with the African sand—and on and on day after day,

night after night, re-enacting all of these things in my imagination—and a hundred others.

It would be impossible physically to put it down in writing, and some might say, "Is it necessary to give all of these harrowing details?" Well, the product of this writing is not for sale, is not a commercial item; I am financing it myself; nobody has to read it, and it gives me relief to be able to say in writing some of the things that I feel in my heart, and I also have the hope that some other parents may read this and may gain some comfort from the fact that they have the same feeling, though maybe not expressing it. I stopped writing on this yesterday and said to myself, "I'll try to finish it tomorrow." Well, this is "tomorrow."

They buried Tommie near where he fell, then moved him next day to Tebessa (a Military Cemetery) and erected a white cross. I see him there and when the war is over, if it is at all possible, his mother, Marjorie and I plan to drop our work and visit that grave in Africa. Even though it is more than six months since we received this terrible news, every night I think without exception I have said (sometimes audibly, sometimes only in my mind), "Good night, Tommie."

As I have tried to adjust to the terrible fact that I shall never again see this splendid boy, certain words and thoughts force themselves to the top: "Futility," "Frustration," "I have been cheated," "I will not be reconciled," "I must live," "Not long to wait," "The insanity of war," "Patriotism, what is it?" and many other thoughts, some of them in sharp conflict.

If anyone is interested in reading what I have written, may it help and not hinder!

A. T. Rowe