

Gene L Wilson

Compiled by Judy Hansen
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Gene Leroy Wilson was born 21 Jan 1918 in Odgen, Utah to Frederick Carlton and Irene Smout Wilson. He was the 2nd oldest of six children of whom were Max, Gene, Betty, Robert, Ned, and Carlyn. The family came to Lehi on July 3, 1920 because his father had signed up and could play in the City Baseball Teams in Utah County that were professional (they got uniforms and were paid). They never left so Gene was raised in Lehi, Utah.

Gene had his trials and adversities growing up. When he was three months old he got the Whooping Cough. He got so sick his parents almost lost him. His great grandmother was afraid the family wouldn't be able to save him so they call the doctor who didn't think he'd come through either, but he did.

Gene and his brother Max worked hard and received their Eagle Scout Badges in February of 1930. His mother got to pin the badges on them at a Stake Meeting at the Lehi High School. His mother was so proud of them both.

When his brother Ned was born, Gene was at Mirror Lake on a Boy Scout outing. He got a terrible spell of pneumonia. His father had to go get him. Gene's nails and lips were black. Dr. Eddington, the new family doctor, said he couldn't live through the night. Dr. Eddington stayed up with him most of the night. Neighbor ladies made and applied mustard plasters for several days and nights. The Priesthood men of the L.D.S. Lehi 2nd ward prayed for him. His parents also prayed for him. Gene did get well, thanks to Heavenly Father and also to all the kind people who helped.

In 1939 Gene's ears got infected and gathered and broke. He was very sick. The Junior High waited until he recovered so that he could take the lead in their play.

Gene and his brother Max was always fighting. One day when his parents had traveled 30 miles to Salt Lake City, the two of them got into it and Gene had a tooth broken off. There was no more fighting after that.

Gene's sister Betty said that Gene was always a tease. He would do something to make you mad and then laugh. Gene was always very funny about his clothes and always looked nice in them. He had a winning personality and was well liked both in school and out. Betty always though he considered her a nuisance. Once when they were just kids, their mother made Max and Gene take Betty to the movies with them. They didn't want to but they did. They were eating apples



at the show and Betty told Gene and Max she had swallowed a seed. They told her an apple tree would grow in her stomach so she went home crying to her mother.

Gene graduated from Lehi High in 1935 and attended Brigham Young University (BYU) from 1935 to 1938. He worked at the Lehi School Office for two years after he graduated high school so he was still around when his little sister Betty attended. He went to all the school dances and all the girls wanted to dance with him because he danced so well. His mother always told him he had to dance with his sister, which he did, but he would always say to her, "Don't dance so stiff" or "Straighten up." She said she felt like he was always criticizing her but knew it was for her own good.

The night his oldest brother arrived back from his L.D.S. Mission, Gene brought Elva Wilson to meet him and the wind blew terribly hard. The chimney blew down and soot was all over everything. Quite an introduction into the family for Elva. Gene married her March 15, 1940 in the Salt Lake Temple. They had such a short happy life together.

World War II had started and Gene enlisted in the Army in May 1942 at Fort Douglas, Utah. He left for Camp Roberts in June 1942. He received his basic training there and left for Officers' Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in October 1942. From his letters the training was very hard but he stuck it out and graduated a 2nd Lieutenant in January 1943. Then he came home for a short furlough, arriving on his birthday, January 21, 1943. That was the last time his parents saw him.

Gene reported to Camp Robinson, Arkansas and was sent to Fort Edwards Massachusetts. Gene's sister Betty had her first wedding anniversary Feb 1943. Her and her husband Lane Hall went to New York City and met Gene who was there waiting to be shipped overseas. They stayed at the Commodore Hotel and had dinner at a nice restaurant. The steak was 2 inches thick. They all walked down 5th Ave but couldn't do much sight-seeing in one day. That was the last time his sister saw him. He was proud of his uniform and still so fussy about how he looked.

Gene left for North Africa where he served under General Mark Clark. When General Clark was sent into Italy, Gene also went and landed with the first barge. Operation Avalanche—the main invasion at Salerno began on 9 September 1943. They landed at Paestum, Italy in the Gulf of Salerno. They were the first American combat unit to land in Europe. As this first wave of the 36th Infantry Division approached the Paestum shore at 3:30 a loudspeaker from the landing area proclaimed in English: *"Come on in and give up. We have you covered."* The allied troops attacked nonetheless. General Clark wrote in a letter dated June 13, 1945 that *"there was plenty of artillery going both ways. But the Americans were gradually losing ground. I didn't stay but a few days but from what I saw Salerno made Normandy look like a picnic."*

LOCAL MAN AMONG FIRST ON SALERNO BEACH

Lieutenant Gene Wilson was one of the first landing barges that landed on Salerno Beach in Italy, according to word received this week in a cablegram by Lt. Wilson's wife. He stated that he was safe and well and that he had received his Christmas boxes and the first mail from home since his arrival in Italy. He is a member of General Clark's Fifth Army. Lt. Wilson's wife, the former Elva Wilson, and baby son, live in Salt Lake City. He is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Carlton Wilson of his city.

From September 16th through the 18th after securing Salerno, the 36th Division moved forward to attack Altavilla and Hill 424.

The battle of San Pietro was a major engagement from Dec 8th through 17th 1943. Gene also was involved in this battle. The regiment assaulted the Winter Line on the afternoon and starless night of Dec 8th by scaling the 4,000 foot hill 1204 (Mount Sammucro) which overlooked San Pietro. This was one of the steepest heights scaled by Allied troops during the war. Massed artillery was turned on San Pietro, key to the German mountain-crest line. The first infantry assaults had been beaten back; tanks trying to bull their way up the narrow road had been annihilated. San Pietro was nearly blown off the earth; it seemed that no German could survive the bombardment. Yet, Germans lived under the stunning blows, hid in the rubble, stood off the infantry that followed on the heels of the barrage. Only after doughboys had come down from Longo and Hill 1205 on the flanks were the Nazis finally eliminated. The Italian village of San Pietro – population 1400 – had been liberated. There was once casualty for every freed Italian and Gene was one of those casualties.

This one battle, filmed under the direction of John Huston, is considered to be the finest combat film made by the Department of Army. The First Battalion received a Fifth Army Commendation for its part of the operation. The 143rd captured San Pietro and opened the Liri Valley to the Allied Forces, but not without terrific losses.

Lt. Gene Wilson Pays Supreme Sacrifice In Italy

Lieut. Gene Wilson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Carlton Wilson, of this city has paid the supreme sacrifice for his country according to word received by his parents on Sunday from the U. S. Army headquarters in Washington.

He was serving his country in the Italian theater of war when late in December he received wounds which later proved fatal.

Lieut. Wilson was with the first invasion forces which landed in Africa in 1942 and in the first wave of infantrymen who went ashore at Salerno.

He was a graduate of Lehi high school and Brigham Young university.

Surviving are his parents, his wife and infant son of Salt Lake City; three brothers, Max Wilson and Ned Wilson, Lehi, and Lieutenant Robert Wilson, U. S. army, and a sister, Betty.

Gene was killed December 15, 1943 before they reached the heights of Cassino. His parents received the word of Gene's death January 9th, 1944. He had a little son that he never saw. Gene Carlton Wilson was born March of 1943 only a few days before his daddy was shipped overseas. Gene telephoned his wife the last time just before he left the United States and she pinched the baby to make him cry so Gene could hear him.

Of the battles and of the winter months that were ahead, Major General Fred L Walker, then Commanding General of the 36th Infantry Division, said upon their conclusion, "I do not recall any campaign in the whole history of the United States Army in which soldiers have had to endure greater hardships or have performed greater deeds of heroism than this campaign in Italy."

A memorial service was held for Gene on March 12, 1949. The family felt so much better to have Gene home after waiting nearly six years. He was buried near the front entrance of the Lehi Cemetery.

Gene was awarded the Silver Star w/1 Oak Leafv Cluster post and the Purple Heart.
He belonged to 36th Division, Co B 143 Infantry Regiment
He held the rank of 1st Lieutenant
His serial # 01308572
His service #39026526
His height: 68” (5’8”)
His weight: 169 lbs.

This story is a combined effort of the Lehi Historical Society and the Stories Behind the Stars project, a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WW2 fallen on Fold3. Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

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1948, BYU, These We Honor, Pg 15

Allied Invasion of Italy https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_invasion_of_Italy

William Clark, letter dated June 13, 1945