



Hails “Doc” Taylor – Anzio Combat Veteran Christian – *published version*

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long version: www.PeciousHeart.net/message/2013-Taylor-long.pdf.

Jasper Hails “Doc” Taylor, 91 this year, said, “I never thought a time would come when one just could not go where one wanted to go.”

Doc’s sorrowful sentiment weaves itself gently between an infinity of sublime memories of ranging through the woods and “creek bottom” that he has loved dearly for over seven decades! His portion of Hickory Creek.

Born in Port Arthur, Texas, he said, “Life started when we moved up here to Warren. I was 12 years old. A paradise wilderness, open range everywhere – I loved it!” Doc said, vigorously articulating. “Never wanted to leave it! Still don’t!”

No electricity. “Liked to killed momma.” Doc smiled. “I was in hog heaven. Fishing, hunting, shining fish, giggering frogs.” Shinning fish? Doc nodded. “You bundle a bunch of strips of lighter pine and light the top. Fine torch. Hold it over the creek as you walk the shallows. Hit the fish with your knife. Or shoot the .22 into the water, which would stun the fish. We hunted all over this place.”

Doc married Peggy on June 9, 1958, and built a house across from his parents on the east side of Hwy. 69. They still live there, and their son Hails built a house a little deeper into the woods on the same place. Before finding his love, though, he had to go to war.

“I was intensely interested in electronics,” Doc said, “and I taught myself from encyclopedias and anything I could find. I learned enough to get my Second Class Radio License. Got my draft notice in late 1942 and that radio license guided me straight into the signal corps.”

After field artillery training at Fort Sill, Ok., they headed for Oran, North Africa, then over several months they went to Algiers, Tunisia, and to Naples in late 1943.

Doc reflected, “The Apostle Paul landed in a little place close to Naples. I did not know anything about Scriptures then.”

Part of Operation Shingle, they were sent to Anzio, a resort town about 30 miles south of Rome. Allegedly where Nero fiddled while Rome burned. But no fiddling in 1944. Over two dozen books have come out on Anzio, some with teasing subtitles as the Edge of Disaster, Epic of Bravery, Death Trap, and Agony at Anzio.



A scare deep in Doc's soul has haunted him these last 70 years.

Anzio – the Allied pushed up the Italian boot through two German defensive lines and were halted midway at the Gustav Line. Churchill hoped a landing at Anzio north of the Gustav Line could outflank the Germans. But Gen. Patton told Gen. Lucas that he could not get out of that alive and to "read his Bible!"

When the armada of 374 vessels arrived, Gen. Lucas reported in code at 0300 on January 22 that the landings were underway, surprisingly with little resistance. By midnight on the 23rd, 36,000 men and 3,200 vehicles had secured a defensive line four miles inland.

Also at 0300, news reached the head of the German military in Italy, Field Marshal Kesselring. Hitler was informed at 0600 at his Wolf's Lair.

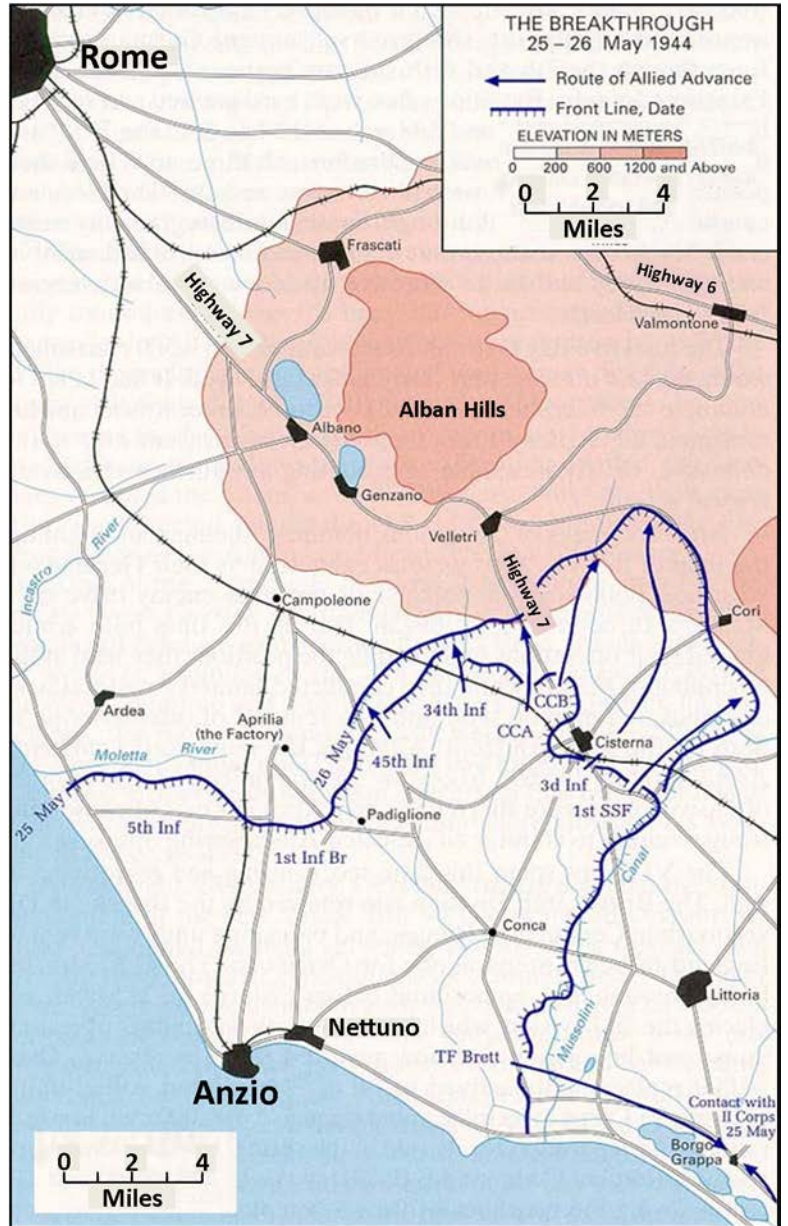
Anzio – the Allies held about 10 miles of coastline north and south of Anzio, radiating out for a 30-mile inland battle line, about the size of a single Tyler County precinct with 100,000 men and thousands of vehicles and artillery. The Germans had marshaled 140,000 to surround Anzio. The major battlefield from Anzio to Rome was smaller than Tyler County. In the end, of the 240,000 on both sides, 56,700 (one-in-four) became casualties, twice the population of Tyler County.

Infuriated, Hitler personally ordered the "abscess" south of Rome eliminated.

"Artillery was king," historians have said, and indeed it was, a king of hell. The Germans sent about 1,500 rounds a day. By February 16, the Allies were sending 20,000 rounds a day. The Germans reported 75% of their casualties from Allied artillery. So much killing.

VI Corps radio artillery man Doc Taylor said, "Hell! Four months of it! It took us that long to break out of there. About three times, the Germans almost pushed us out. It is hard to describe, the daily artillery and aerial bombings. *Every single day!* We set up our camp in a wine cellar. It was perfect safety ... when you got down into it. I'd go to sleep to it like music. Slept like a log. Just a routine."

Was there wine in the cellar?



"Was when we got there. None when we left," chuckled Doc. "Several got court-martialed because they got so drunk they could not work. I just did not like it."

Doc was part of a four-man radio crew. "The command post would send a message on fire direction, map coordinates, how many rounds per gun, and time on target. I'd acknowledge and then relay the message to the artillery. Hundreds and thousands of rounds. I blew up everything they told me to blow up."

Doc's firing routine was not without humor. "It hurts if you are too close to one of those 155-mm Long Toms. Everybody that went to Anzio was in the thick of it. Even the hospital got hit. It got so routine." Doc chuckled. "While we were raining shells on them, the Germans were flying in from Rome. Bombing and strafing the beachhead. Screaming in at high speed, they would drop anti-personnel or bigger bombs, then fly out as fast as they could. If they fooled around, they got shot."

The devastation Doc directed, even these years later, still strikes him with awe over all of the fire power and carnage. What a day's work! A German or American soldier would disappear from a direct hit, blown to bits. Whoosh, kaboom, and gone! Missing in action.

"One could feel the explosions. The radio broke one day," said Doc. "When I checked it, a piece of shrapnel had gone clean through it. When I opened the radio, the piece of shrapnel had busted the tops off of the tubes. I replaced the tubes, and the radio worked fine. The shrapnel could have gone through me!"

Doc paused. Reflected. "The sights and sounds cannot be duplicated on TV. I had many frightening moments and near misses.... Artillery day and night coming in around the clock! By the grace of God, I survived. I know what real war is!"

A surgeon, nurse, cook, mechanic – everyone in Anzio was subject to *disappearing* or getting a Purple Heart.

The Anzio hospital was called "Hell's Half Acre." AnzioBeachheadVeterans.com recorded 22 Medals of Honor given, the most for any WWII battle.

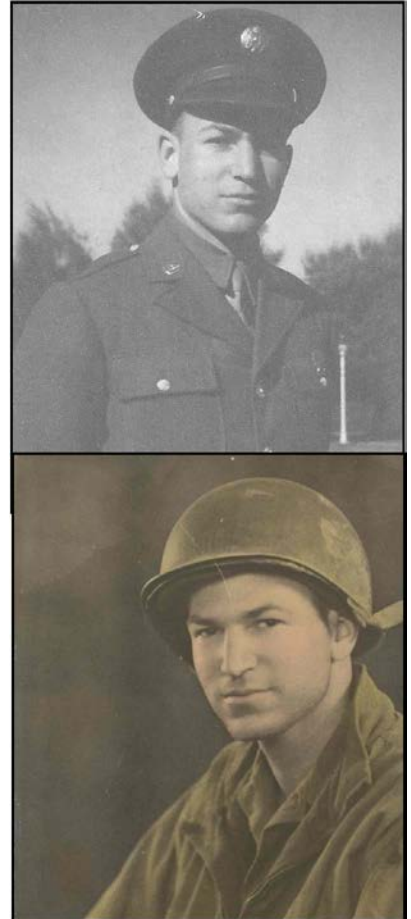
Some went mad. Others steeled their hearts.

One day, Doc was scurrying about town and got too close to one round from Anzio Annie, a huge 231-ton 11-in. railroad gun. The shock wave knocked him down. Deaf and disorientated, he could not walk or think for a few minutes. He recovered, but has not forgotten.

Doc's wife Peggy chimed in, "God saved him for me!"

On May 15, 1944, the Allies broke the Gustav Line and raced north to Anzio. On May 23, at 0545, the combined Allied forces of 150,000 let loose Operation Buffalo and a thousand-plus cannon, mortars, and tank guns lit the sky. Forty-five minutes later the Allies emerged to cut Hwy. 7 through to Cisterna. After two fierce days, they broke out of Anzio on May 25.

"The front at Anzio just fell apart," Sgt. Doc Taylor said, "and we just spilled into them. It took all of one day, and most of the next day before the whole 7th Army rolled into Rome. We were welcomed like heroes." They captured the Eternal City on June 4, 1944.



The greatest praise came after the war when Field Marshall Kesselring said, "If you had not pitted your strength against us at Anzio-Nettuno you would never have landed in Northern France."

Doc was involved in five official battles. The Naples-Foggia Campaign landed in Italy and took Naples. The Rome-Arno Campaign included Anzio, the taking of Rome, and a push north. The Southern France Campaign moved up the Rhone Valley to northern France. The ill-fated Rhineland Campaign could not break the Siegfried Line. The Central Europe Campaign raced across Germany and to its surrender on May 7, 1945.

"As we advanced up Southern France, we would go through these little villages, and the people were enraged at what the Germans had done," Doc emphasized. "One little old woman would approach a weapons carrier with a bottle of wine. She'd hold out the bottle with a glass and ask, 'Kill Germans, kill Germans?' If yes, she'd give them a drink of wine."

"Bruyeres – the one I like to tell," he continued, "it began to snow. We had to find places to spend the night. We found a farm house. One of us went to the house. A lady came to the door and was scared to death. She did not know us. She let us move into the wine cellar. Each day we would drive down to chow, and we would bring some food back for her, her father and brother. After a few days of that, she began to see we were not like the Germans. She moved us into her warm kitchen. That wood stove was going strong and felt good. Her name was Anna. I'll never forget her.

"After about three weeks, we got orders to advance. As we walked out of her home, Anna followed us. Crying. She went to each one of us and kissed us. She gave me a photo of her family. I still have it to this day." Doc showed an old photo that Anna had given him. "Her brother Henry had been a circus clown. They had a little field where they raised potatoes. We would go out and help them harvest the potatoes."



Holding the photo, he said, "Anna is seated on the left next to her father, and her brother Henry stands on the far left. I think that was all that was left of her family."

Anna wanted them to remember her, as she would remember them.

Doc's outfit headed for the German Siegfried Line.

"One of us was chosen," Doc said, "to take a 2-1/2 ton truck to the rear of the line, to get food and supplies. Good ole' boy John J. Sabinera, Italian, full blood. Soft heart." Doc's voice rose with pride. "He unloaded half of that truck at Anna's house. As good as he was, he was an avowed and vocal Atheist. How remarkable is that?" Doc grinned. "I was not much of anything then. We talked a bit. But what an irony that was, that such kindness came from an avowed Atheist.

"For us, the war ended on May 8, 1945, on the edge of Garmisch, the German city where they had the winter Olympics in 1936 [first to feature alpine skiing]."

Doc headed back to the states.

"When I got out of the Army. I was the most miserable human being," Doc said. "My attention was drawn to the Rev. Harry Hodge of the United Gospel Tabernacles. He would

preach every morning at 0745 on KFDM, Monday through Friday. It was just what I needed. I just got attached to the *thrill of gospel*," he said, rolling his voice to emphasize. "My ears immediately picked when he preached. The Word came *penetratingly* into my heart. This was the gospel."

Doc worked for KFDM, Beaumont, for 23 years as an engineer taking care of their transmitter. Then he went to Lufkin for three years to work for KTRE TV and helped them install their station."

One day in Lufkin changed his life. A school teacher named Peggy brought her students to the station for a visit.

"I saw her for the first time," Doc said decisively.

Love at first sight?

"Love at first sight! There was never another girl. And never another man. Both of us."

Of their three boys, Hails, Todd, and little Kyle, they lost Kyle to cancer just before he turned 10 years old.

"He was a special fellow," Doc mourned. To this day, if he reflects more than a minute or two, a few tears come to his eyes. "Kyle ... the cute way he would respond to questions. 'What are you doing, Kyle?' And he would say, 'Being here.'" Doc looked down. Another tear.

Melissa Carson remembers attending first grade with Kyle at Warren Elementary. "A really sweet boy.... One of our class projects was to make wild animals out of wooden sewing spools – so much fun. When we were done, our whole 'zoo' was presented to Kyle. His quiet calmness and sweet demeanor will always stay in my heart."

Doc and Peggy's youngest son Todd is a programmer for Battelle and lives in West Richland, Wa. Their oldest son Hails taught at Woodville ISD and then developed his own computer programming company and today he consults for Nautical Control Solutions while pastoring Chester Baptist Church.

From 1992 and about 14 years, Doc volunteered at the Gib Lewis Prison. When his lifelong friend Dr. Bob Larson had to quit teaching at the prison, Doc took over his Bible study class. Even these 80 years later, Doc and Bob still communicate regularly.

For a long time, Peggy raised African Violets, at one time having about 250 in specially made cases all over their home. These days, he and Peggy go everywhere together. After church, they walk out together, holding each other's hand, so the other will not fall.

From the piney woods, through Anzio's hell and Europe's expanse, then running a quiet TV transmitting station – with the love of his life Peggy always there – Doc reads his Bible and prays. The woods are fenced. The open prairie gone. The creek bottom hard to get to. This is still just earth, but not forever. For there is a Grand Open Prairie that will never be fenced, where the creek bottom is always accessible, in perfect peace, and there will be "no more war."