

Perry Ottobein Tester, Junior was the only son born to Perry Ottobein and Bertha Marie (Moore) Tester. He was born on Friday, 28 October 1921 in Van Wert, Ohio. Perry, who went by “Jack,” was the last of four children in the family. Perry Senior, who went by “Otto,” was a railroad conductor and as typical for the time, Bertha worked in the home. Jack was a “late-in-life” baby. Otto was forty-three and Bertha was thirty-seven when Jack was born but the family seemed comfortable with Otto having continuous employment with the railroad during the Depression. The family lived in various homes that they owned in Van Wert.¹

Van Wert, as the county seat of Van Wert County, was the center of local government, commerce, and community life. The town is located about seventy miles southwest of Toledo, Ohio, near the Indiana border. In the 1920s and 1930s, agriculture was the primary economic driver but the town was also known for its unique production of Liederkrantz cheese made at the Borden plant, and the long-standing Van Wert Peony Festival, which had been held since 1902.

On 28 March 1920, eighteen months before Jack was born, Van Wert County was struck by a devastating tornado, described by local newspapers as the worst in the county’s history. The storm caused widespread destruction across much of Van Wert and neighboring counties, destroying homes, barns, schools, and churches. The loss of life was significant, with dozens killed and hundreds more injured across the storm’s multi-state path. The property damage in Van Wert County alone was estimated at \$2 million, a staggering sum at the time.² There is no record that the Tester family was directly affected by the tornado but certainly their neighbors and acquaintances would have sustained property loss if not loss of life.

The Tester family lived a modest life-style—or at least nothing of significance was recorded in the local Van Wert newspapers. Jack attended public schools and was a 1940 graduate of Van Wert High School where he was a star athletic-student. He was employed as a salesman for the Fuller Brush Company after high school, while he attended Miami University at Oxford, Ohio for a short time.³ By 1942, Jack was employed, married and in the Army.

Jack married the lovely Miss Elizabeth Ann Kiggins on 19 August 1942 in Van Wert. Betty, as she preferred to be called, also grew up in Van Wert and might have been high school sweetheart with Jack since they graduated in the same year. Betty’s parents, Floyd and Emily (Ryan) Kiggins owned and operated a restaurant in Van Wert. The Kiggins family may have struggled through the Depression. In 1930, Floyd was listed as the proprietor of their restaurant but in 1940, the restaurant was owned by his mother, Florence, and Floyd was identified as a waiter. The Kiggins were all living together with Florence signifying the family no longer owned their 1930 home. Floyd suddenly died

¹ U.S. Federal Census Records, 1910 to 1930. Ancestry.com.

² Artificial intelligence generated historical narrative. Perplexity AI.

³ Port Clinton Herald and Republican, Port Clinton, Ohio. Fri, Jul 6, 1945, page 1. Newspapers.com.

of a heart attack at forty-five years old in 1941. Betty was eighteen and a nursing student at Deaconess Hospital in Cincinnati at the time.⁴

Jack and Betty did not have much time together. Jack enlisted in the U.S. Army two days after their wedding on 21 August 1942 in Toledo, Ohio. While his military record from enlistment to assignment in the 413th Infantry Regiment for now is lost in time, he was assigned Service Number 353 37 166 at enlistment but was changed to 131 77 03 after he was commissioned as an officer.⁵ Jack's Army records, which are sparse, indicate he was a 1st Lieutenant, B Company, 1st Battalion, 413th Infantry Regiment, 104th Infantry Division at the time of his death.

The 104th Infantry Division was called the "Timberwolf Division" and its divisional insignia was a gray timber wolf, an animal native to the Pacific Northwest where the division was activated on 24 June 1921 as part of the organized reserve. The Division had subordinate units primarily in the Pacific Northwest states of Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, and Nevada.

The 413th Infantry Regiment, as a subordinate element of the 104th Division, was established in June 1921 in the organized reserves with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. The regimental seagull insignia and nickname are based on the legend that a flock of seagulls saved the crops of Utah's early settlers from a plague of locust. The 413th Regiment was ordered into active service on 15 September 1942 as part of the 104th Infantry Division, and trained at Camp Adair, near Corvallis, Oregon. Conceivably, Jack completed his basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington, was selected for officer training, and reported to the 413th Regiment at Camp Adair. The Division, including the 413th Regiment, trained in the Bend, Oregon area until they deployed to Europe in August 1944.

D-Day at Normandy was in June 1944 and Allied forces began their offensive push toward Berlin. By late November, the Allied forces had reached Germany's Siegfried Line, west of the Rhine River. The objective was Ruhr, Germany's industrial center.

The 104th Division had arrived in Cherbourg, France on 15 September 1944⁶ then moved through France towards Belgium. The Division's mission was to secure crossing points over the Roer River with the 413th Infantry Regiment assigned to capture the town of Inden, and establish bridge crossings over the Inde River, a tributary of the Roer.

The Regiment faced heavy German resistance and harsh weather but their key victories included liberating the town of Zundert, securing the Breda-Roosendaal Road, and crossing the Mark River at Standdaarbuiten. Casualties during this time included 313 killed and another 1,000 wounded.

⁴ Delphos Daily Herald, Delphos, Ohio. Tuesday, March 25, 1941, page 3. Newspapers.com.

⁵ U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, ancestry.com and U.S. American Battle Monuments Commission records, Fold3.com.

⁶ <http://robbhaasfamily.com/Robbins/Walt-Sr/WW2/413th%20Inf%20Reg.htm>

German forces had heavily fortified Inden with machine-gun nests, artillery emplacements, and minefields and in the town's eastern sector, the bridges allowed German defenders to funnel Allied troops into kill zones.

At dawn on Tuesday, 28 November, the 1st Battalion, 314th Infantry advanced across waterlogged fields toward Inden. By midday, Companies B and C had advanced toward the central bridges over the Inde River and a platoon from Company C had established a foothold on its eastern bank, repelling multiple counterattacks through the afternoon. However, Company B was forced to withdraw to a defensive position outside the town until they received orders that they would be relieved. Company B withdrew to the town of Lohn to reorganize.

Two days later, on Thursday 30 November, tanks carrying men from Company B moved towards Inden from the west. Company B got to within 800 yards of Inden when the tanks withdrew from heavy mortar fire leaving the men of Company B once again pinned down in the fields outside Inden. That night Company B pulled back to reorganize for a final drive on Inden over the weekend. There was no Thanksgiving dinner for the troops. On Saturday 2 December, the German forces remarkably withdrew across the Inde River and by Sunday, Inden was quiet and in the hands of the 413th Infantry.⁷ However, 1st Lt Tester did not survive the events of Thursday. His Distinguished Service Cross citation describes his actions that day. Citation:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Perry O. Tester (0-1317703), First Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with an Infantry Company of the 413th Infantry Regiment, 104th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces from 28 to 30 November 1944, in Germany. When four enemy machine guns opened fire upon his platoon, First Lieutenant Tester, throwing hand grenades and firing his carbine, advanced far forward of his men in an assault which resulted in the complete destruction of the weapons and crews in vicious close-in fighting. While his company withdrew to reorganize for a continuation of the attack, he remained behind, and in the face of intense fire carried a wounded soldier 1,000 yards to an aid station. Leading another assault two days later, First Lieutenant Tester was severely wounded by a shell fragment. Administering medical aid to himself, First Lieutenant Tester, despite his pains, continued to lead his platoon in the attack until he was again hit by artillery fire and mortally wounded. First Lieutenant Tester's gallant leadership, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty at the cost of his life, exemplify the highest traditions of

⁷ "History of the 413th Infantry Regiment," no author or publisher. Pages 61 through 68.

the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 104th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.⁸
Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 46 (1945)
Home Town: Van Wert County, Ohio

The Distinguished Service Cross is the second highest military decoration awarded to members of the United States Army for extraordinary heroism in combat. The individual must distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving extraordinary risk of their own life. It is second in precedence to the Medal of Honor.

Perry was survived by his wife, parents and three sisters. 1Lt Tester is buried in the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery and Memorial in Liege, Belgium and a cenotaph was placed in the Ridge Cemetery, Middle Point, Van Wert County, Ohio. He was twenty-three years old.

Betty married Norman Rupert in June 1946. Norman and she were co-owners of Marysville Office Center where Betty was the bookkeeper. Betty died in 2009 at the age of 86 years old. She was survived by her son.

This story is part of the Stories Behind the Stars project www.storiesbehindthestars.org This is a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WWII fallen here on Fold3. Can you help write these stories? If you noticed anything missing in this profile, you may contact the author. Click on the author's name located at the bottom of the story page next to the words "added by."

SBTSPProject/Ohio/Van Wert County

NOTE: This article was written by a human with limited assistance from artificial intelligence followed by careful review and editing for accuracy and relevance.

⁸ <https://homeofheroes.com/distinguished-service-cross/world-war-ii/distinguished-service-cross/army-t-v/>