

## GAIL W. BILYEU

### KILLED IN ACTION – WORLD WAR II

Gail W. Bilyeu grew up on a farm in the Humphreys Creek community near Capps, the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Bilyeu. Gail was a Sergeant in the 319<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, U.S. Third Army under the command of Gen. George C. Patton. The 80<sup>th</sup> Div. helped blunt the German offensive in the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. In January, the 80<sup>th</sup> Div. returned to the offensive and in March crossed the Rhine River into Germany. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-80th-infantry-division>

On the day Sgt. Bilyeu was mortally wounded, April 3, 1945, his regiment was heavily engaged in what is known as the Battle of Kassel, April 1 to 4, 1945. Kassel is a medium-sized city north of Frankfurt. Fighting was fierce and ended up with U.S. artillery knocking out the German Tiger tanks and 88 mm flak guns the Germans were using to defend the city and the U.S. infantry taking the city center in what sometimes was reduced to house-to-house fighting. The German commander capitulated on April 4, the day after Sgt. Bilyeu was killed in action. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Kassel\\_\(1945\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kassel_(1945))

Mr. and Mrs. Bilyeu received a letter from a U.S. Army Chaplain with information about their son's death that was published in the *Miller County Autogram* May 31, 1945, copy attached.

Sgt. Bilyeu was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart with two oak leaf clusters, which means before he was killed in action he was twice wounded in combat and twice returned to service.

Although Sgt. Bilyeu's remains were initially buried at the U.S. Military Cemetery at Butzbach, Germany, his permanent resting place is at the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten, Row 13, Grave 5. There are 8,288 American military buried at Margraten plus 1,772 names on the Walls of the Missing. Unique to the cemetery is the connection with the Dutch people. Members of the local community have adopted individual grave sites, bring flowers to the grave of their adopted U.S. soldier, and research his life to honor his sacrifice. Under a program called "The Faces of Margraten," the Dutch people collect photos of the fallen and at a bi-annual event at the cemetery display the photos next to the headstones and next to the Walls of the Missing, bringing visitors face-to-face with their liberators. <https://www.abmc.gov/Netherlands>

**America in World War II.** World War II began in September 1939 when the German army attacked Poland and Britain and France declared war. The United States was brought into the war on the Allied side with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941. America mobilized, and 16 million Americans were either drafted or volunteered for service during the war.

Two million American soldiers served in the European theater of operations. Between the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944, and the end of the war in Europe May 8, 1945, 104,812 American military personnel were killed in action. Gail W. Bilyeu was one of them.

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