

World War II Claimed the Lives of Four Utah Brothers

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World War II took the lives of many Utahns, but no family in the state sacrificed more for the Allied cause than Alben and Gunda Borgstrom of Thatcher, Box Elder County. Four of the five sons they sent off to battle died within a six-month period during 1944. "Few families in American history have been called upon to make such a tremendous sacrifice for the cause of freedom and liberty," one speaker noted at ceremonies honoring the Borgstrom brothers in 1946.

LeRoy Elmer Borgstrom was born April 30, 1914, in Thatcher. Like all his brothers he attended Bear River High School and was a farmer before the war. He was drafted into the Army on November 7, 1942, and sent to Oregon to train with a medical unit of the 361st Infantry, 91st Division. He was shipped overseas in March 1944 and participated in battles in Africa and Italy. He was killed in action in Italy on June 22, 1944.

Clyde Eugene Borgstrom was born February 15, 1916, in Penrose, Box Elder County. He enlisted in the Marines on October 14, 1940, before the U.S. was officially involved in the war, and was among the first Bear River Valley men to enter the service. He received basic training in San Diego where he was assigned guard duty until shipped overseas with an aviation engineering unit. He participated in various island battles in the South Pacific. He was killed in action on March 17, 1944, at Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

Twin brothers Rolon Day and Rulon Jay Borgstrom were born May 5, 1925, in Tremonton. The boys were drafted into the Army on July 7, 1943, two weeks after their high school graduation. Rolon trained at Camp Walters, Texas, where he passed an examination to enter the Air Corps. After further training in mechanics, aerial gunnery, and combat, he was shipped overseas in June 1944 as an aerial gunner. He died in England on August 8, 1944, of injuries suffered during a bombing mission over France and Germany. Rulon, also a gunner on a heavy bomber, was killed in action on August 25, two and a half weeks after his twin. Rulon, initially reported as missing in action, was not confirmed dead for several months.

Boyd Carl Borgstrom, born July 21, 1921, in Thatcher, had enlisted on October 14, 1940, with his brother Clyde. Upon news that his fourth brother was missing in action, Boyd was shipped from the South Pacific to Camp LeJeune, North Carolina, where he was discharged on October 7, 1944.

On Sunday, October 29, 1944, the Borgstrom family was honored at a public ceremony in the Bear River Stake Tabernacle in Garland. The grieving family received the Good Citizens Medal of the U.S. government, presented by the Sons of the American Revolution. Dignitaries paying respects to the Borgstroms and other Box Elder families with sons killed or missing in action included Gov. Herbert B. Maw, President George

Albert Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Senator Perry Jenkins of Wyoming, all of whom were scheduled to speak. The program included musical selections by the Orpheus Chorus of Brigham City.

In October 1946 Alben and Gunda Borgstrom were chosen as National Gold Star Parents by the Future Farmers of America. The Borgstroms attended the FFA convention in Kansas City to participate in the memorial program. According to a Salt Lake Tribune report, "Applause filled the vast convention hall for several minutes after the introduction of the Utah couple, chosen by the FFA, world's largest farm boy organization, to represent the parents of all members and former members who served in the armed services of the nation in World War II." The Borgstroms followed a procession of 32 national flags into the auditorium. Gunda Borgstrom was escorted by the Utah director of agricultural education, Mark Nichols, and Alben Borgstrom by Eugene Hansen, Utah FFA president. The 121-piece Utah FFA band played marches, service songs, and a recessional for the memorial program.

The Borgstrom brothers' father, who still worked his sugar beet farm, told of the pleasure he received from walking his fields and seeing concrete headgates built by his sons LeRoy and Clyde. Of his sons he said, "They were all hard workers and proud of what they could accomplish with their own hands."

In April 1959 the four Borgstrom brothers were honored when the Army named a reserve training center in Ogden in their honor. Gunda Borgstrom accepted a plaque with pictures of her sons at the dedication ceremony and saw a trophy case with her sons' records unveiled in the training center.

Sources: Biographical clipping files and subject catalog, Utah State Historical Society Library