

Gen. Chapman Presents Medal for Heroism

Honor Paid Ohio Soldier by Army Men Who Come Here From Washington for Ceremony

Although still suffering from bad burns, Sgt. Robert G. Lee of Columbus, Ohio, hero of the Army transport disaster Saturday night at Peru State Forest, responded with almost everything but a salute yesterday afternoon as Brig. Gen. Elbridge G. Chapman Jr., commanding general of the airborne command, pinned the Soldiers' Medal for extraordinary heroism on the soldier's fourth floor bed in the St. Luke's Hospital. Gen. Chapman and a staff of officers from the Army ground forces headquarters in Washington, D. C., flew to Westover Field, Chicopee, then motored to Pittsfield for the short but impressive ceremony, ordered by Lieut. Gen. Lesley T. McNair, commanding general of the Army ground forces.

"Thank You Sir"

With his platoon skipper, Lieut. John Hanlon, and his company buddy, Sgt. John Berry, in attendance, Sgt. Lee looked up at his distinguished guest with a "Thank you, sir. I hope that when I get back with the troops I can live up to this citation." Then turning to Sgt. Berry, the crash hero asked "about the boys." Before the patient could swing into too much of a conversation, the party withdrew from the room.

In delivering the citation, Gen. Chapman said he was conveying the sentiments of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Gen. George C. Marshall and Lieut. Gen. McNair. He added that he was looking forward to the time in the near future when he could bestow the rightful honors to Sgt. Lee at a formal review of the troops in the presence of the full command. The citation follows:

Sgt. Robert G. Lee, Company F, 502d parachute regiment, for heroism displayed on Aug. 15, 1942, near Pittsfield, Mass., in rescuing comrades from a plane burning after a crash. When the plane in which Sgt. Lee and 18 other officers and men were proceeding to Westover Field, Mass., crashed, Sgt. Lee, uninjured, was able to escape from the wreckage through a small door of the plane. Disregarding the danger of an explosion of the plane's gasoline supply, Sgt. Lee re-entered the burning plane repeatedly, removing seven persons to places of safety.

Sgt. Lee, though severely burned, then walked a distance of half a mile and firing his pistol, summoned aid. As a result of his efforts, the lives of two men were saved and Sgt. Lee himself suffered severe burns. Sgt. Lee's extraordinary heroism reflects great credit upon himself and the military service.

Gen. Chapman Gets His New Stars At Westover Field

Before coming to Pittsfield yesterday afternoon to decorate Sgt. Robert G. Lee at St. Luke's Hospital, Brig. Gen. Gerry Chapman, commanding officer of the airborne command went through the ceremony of a promotion at Westover Field in Chicopee. He was elevated from a colonelcy before leaving Washington by plane. The oath was administered to him at Westover Field by Maj. George K. Geary, post adjutant. The general's new stars were pinned on his shoulder straps by Lieut. Col. G. F. Shugart, representing the troop carrier command.

"I'm proud to be identified with troops having that man's caliber," Gen. Chapman said as he left the patient's room. "I am no physician but judging from the way that boy kept his chin up after such a grievous experience, I'm sure he'll pull through."

Flew to Westover

The party from Washington flew to Westover Field aboard Gen. McNair's personal plane, piloted by Lieut. Col. G. F. Shugart, representing the troop carrier command. Also in the retinue were Capt. George C. Mayo Jr., and Capt. F. W. Turney, staff officers of the Army ground force headquarters. They were escorted from West-

over Field by State Police Sgt. George H. Carter of the Northampton barracks.

Gen. Chapman, who, incidentally was carrying out his first mission as a brigadier general (he was promoted from a colonelcy shortly before leaving Washington yesterday morning) and his party went to the House of Mercy Hospital to visit the other two survivors, Privates Alonzo Pearson of Windber, Pa., and James Fern of Abingdon, Va.

According to some of the accompanying officers, three-starred Gen. McNair, upon learning of Sgt. Lee's heroism, had to use his high military rank to the fullest extent to secure the Soldier's Medal from the War Decorations Board at such a short notice. A firm believer in giving credit where credit is due without waiting several months, Gen. McNair started the citation ball rolling when he first heard of Sgt. Lee's deeds Monday night.

Sgt. Robert G. Lee, hero decorated at St. Luke's Hospital
Eagle 19 August 1942

Peru - Air crash, 1942
Robert G. Lee awarded medal