

Major/Reverend Carl W. Tillman
Class of 1939
Enshrined 2024



Carl W. Tillman was born in Newport, Kentucky on 19 December 1917. He attended St. Xavier High School and Xavier University. While at Xavier University, Tillman attended Reserve Officers Training Corps. While a cadet, he was co-captain of the Pistol Team and was selected to shoot in the National Field Artillery Pistol Competition. In 1938 he fired the first ever perfect score in club history with 100 out of 100 points in 10 shots.

Graduating in 1939, Lt. Tillman received Field Artillery training at Ft. Knox where he was commissioned a Second Lt. on 29 July 1939. He was stationed at Ft. Knox until April 1942 when he was assigned to the First Armored Division, a combined arms division.

In December 1942, the First Armored Division was part of the invasion of Africa and moved through North Africa including action in Oran, Morocco, and Tunisia. While in North Africa he participated at the battle of Kasserine Pass (18-24 February 1943), which was the first major engagement between U. S. and Axis forces in Africa. After the Tunisia campaign, Lt. Tillman was presented with a captured Italian flag by General Harmon, implying significant contributions to the Tunisia operations.

The final Axis surrender in Northern Africa was on 13 May 1943. Lt. Tillman continued to serve in North Africa until October 1943. That same month, the First Armored Division with Lt. Tillman participated in the invasion of Italy. He was wounded while at Anzio on 12 February 1944 when Axis planes conducted an aerial bombing. Lt Tillman was struck in the head by a piece of bomb fragment after returning from a liaison mission. He received a Purple Heart Medal for his war wound. He also received the American Defense Medal.

There are conflicting dates as to his promotion to Captain; perhaps normal in war time. From his letters home, new Captain Tillman didn't want family to worry about his injury, downplaying the extent of wounds. He was religiously focused by attending mass daily and requested the family to arrange for masses to be read weekly for the poor souls in purgatory.

After a quick recovery, CPT Tillman returned to active duty on 2 March 1944. His unit participated in some of the heaviest fighting in Italy, yet while in Rome he had an audience with Pope Pius XII and CPT Tillman completed his Italian tour of duty on 6 May 1945, and returned to Ft. Knox, KY. He was released from active duty on 22 January 1946. He continued service in the Army Reserves where he was promoted to Major on 13 January 1947. He resigned his commission on 9 September 1948 to continue his theological studies.

Fr. Tillman was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Covington by Bishop Mulloy on 31 May 1952. Fr. Tillman's only assignment as a priest was as co-director of Marydale Retreat Center where he served as moderator of Men of Marydale and as retreat master. Unfortunately, Fr. Tillman died at the young age of 40 in 1957, only five years to the day of his first Mass in 1952.

Fr. Tillman's entire adult life was one of service: first to his nation and then to his God. He is buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Fort Mitchell, KY.

