

First Merrill's Marauder KIA – Pvt. Robert W. Landis died 76 years ago Feb. 25 in Burma



Lanem ga patrol

led by
T/Sgt Joseph Freer



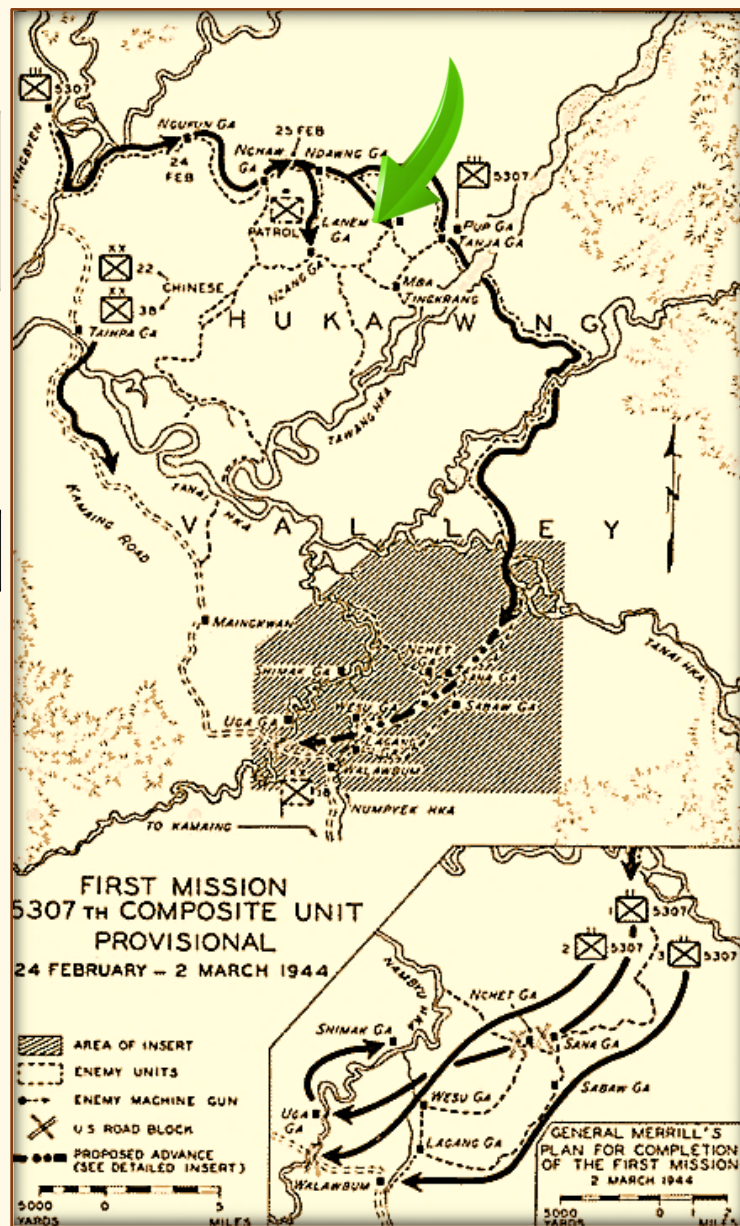
Joseph F. Freer
Died 1966

Stanley E. Cobb
Died Nov. 19, 1987

Robert W. Landis
Died Feb. 25, 1944

"Eddy" Eiskant
Died Aug. 23, 2009

Vincent Melillo
Died Dec. 24, 2015



Pvt. Robert W. Landis, 23, a native of Youngstown, Ohio, died in a firefight Feb. 25, 1944, the day after the top-secret commando unit began its history-making march of almost 1,000 miles behind enemy lines to seize its objective – northern Burma's only all-weather Myitkyina airfield.

Landis was killed at Lanem ga, (green arrow) a small village of basha huts. He was one of five Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon scouts, Blue Combat Team, 2nd Battalion. The other scouts were Sergeants "Joe" Freer and Stanley Cobb and Privates "Eddie" Eiskant and Vincent Melillo.

Lt. William Grissom had told "Sgt. Freer to take a patrol to check out a village when the firing erupted," Melillo said in an oral history while in his 60s. "Freer had sent Cobb and Landis around to the left flank and told me to cover the rear for him and Eiskant as they moved up front.

"I could see Sgt. Freer and Eiskant, who were firing through this bamboo fence into a hut, but I couldn't see Cobb and Landis. That was the first time I'd been in enemy fire ever. It didn't last very long. It seemed like a lifetime under fire.

"After the firing stopped, Sgt. Freer, me and Eiskant moved back to the platoon area, and I don't want to say what happened next. Cobb was already back there. He had lost his helmet and rifle.

"He was crying and said, 'They got Landis, they got Landis,' who was the youngest on that patrol, I think. Any soldier who has ever been in something like that is going to be upset in one way or another."

On Feb. 26, a different patrol went back to the deserted village, found the machine gun nest and recovered Landis' body. "The only thing he had on was his pants," said Melillo. "The Japs had stripped everything off him except his pants."

Marauder Sidney Savitt, a Jewish combatant on the recovery patrol, helped bury Landis along the trail, and placed a Christian cross on his friend's grave. Landis was honored when a camp in Burma was later named after him.

Veterans of fighting in the Solomon Islands, Landis and Cobb were among combat-seasoned Infantrymen from the South Pacific reassigned to the 2nd Battalion. Almost the entire 2nd Battalion, including its commander, COL George A. McGee came from the 33rd Infantry in Panama and Trinidad.

Landis was a law student at Youngstown College prior to joining the Army with the Ohio 37th National Guard Division. He enlisted Nov. 21, 1941. Capt. James Hopkins described Landis as an "intelligent, cooperative, patriotic young man."