

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Proudly Honors



ROBERT GEORGE COLE

UNITED STATES ARMY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL (O-5)

JUNE 1939 – SEPTEMBER 1944

KILLED IN ACTION SEPTEMBER 8, 1944

as

PURPLE HEART PATRIOT

JULY 2025

Cynthia Suich (Stepdaughter) and Robert Bruce Cole (Son),

Honoring Their Father's Service and Sacrifice

Sponsored by: Columbian Chapter, NSDAR



Born into an Army family at Fort Sam Houston in 1915, Robert George Cole grew up surrounded by Army associations pointing toward an Army career. So it was not surprising when he won an appointment and began his four years at West Point in the Class of 1939.

At West Point, Bob was well-liked and an enthusiastic athlete who played B-Squad football for four years. In June 1939 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant of Infantry and, a year later, married his lifelong sweetheart, Allie Mae Wilson.



In early 1941, Bob volunteered for parachute training, won his jump wings, and joined the 502nd Parachute Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. He advanced rapidly and by May 29, 1943, was a lieutenant colonel commanding the 3rd Battalion. He played a key role in the 502nd for the rest of his life. Well-built, with ruggedly handsome features and a strong commanding voice, Bob looked and acted like a leader. Furthermore, he knew soldiers and had a genuine concern for them. His men, in turn, respected and admired Bob; they knew that his strict discipline and tough training were aimed at their survival in combat.

The 502nd deployed with the 101st Airborne Division in England in 1943. There Bob initiated a rigorous training regiment to prepare his battalion to invade ¹"Fortress Europe." In the spring of 1944, training began focusing on ²OVERLORD, the plan to invade Europe via the Cherbourg Peninsula.

¹ "Fortress Europe" is a term referring to Nazi Germany's occupied territories during World War II, particularly their defensive fortifications against Allied invasion.

² Operation Overlord was the codename for the Allied invasion of Normandy, France, during World War II, also known as D-Day.

OVERLORD had the 101st landing at night by parachute and glider at ³H minus 4 hours, with the principal mission of neutralizing defenses of Utah Beach, where amphibious landings would begin at H Hour. Mission details had been changing almost daily, but once the units arrived at the marshaling areas in May 1944, the missions were solidified and all ranks were told their jobs.

Bob's battalion was to support the 2nd Battalion in destroying a ⁴122mm coastal battery dominating Utah Beach and then ⁵capture causeways 3 and 4 from Utah Beach. The 502nd drop zone was just inland from the coastal battery.

OVERLORD was launched on the night of June 5-6. The cross-channel flight went well, but, low clouds and unexpectedly heavy flak over Normandy caused troop carrier units to break formations and lose orientation, resulting in a badly dispersed drop for most of the division, including Cole's battalion. Initially, Bob found only four of his men. But as the night wore on he collected more of his men and those from other units and moved toward the coastal battery. Shortly before reaching the batter, Bob learned it was already destroyed, so he redirected his ⁶scratch force of 75 men to a successful attack and capture of Causeways 3 and 4.

At 1300 hours (1 p.m.) on D-Day, Bob linked up with the 4th Division which had landed across Utah Beach. By nightfall, Bob had collected 250 men and been placed in a regimental reserve.

The 3rd Battalion's next heavy action was an attack along the highway from La Croix Pan to Carentan. This paved road, quite straight and level, became a ⁷causeway, with four bridges spanning canals and the Douve River. The road was only six to nine feet above marshland, flooded fields, canals, and the river and restricted the attack to the road/causeway itself—which was exposed to fire from every direction.

After a day and a night of heavy fighting and severe losses, Bob had gotten a force past bridge 4 onto the Carentan side of the Douve, but the enemy still contested every advance, primarily from a farmhouse surrounded by hedgerows. Even heavy artillery fire failed to suppress the enemy fire. Bob saw his options as either continuing to infiltrate his men or directly assaulting the strong point. He chose the latter and yelled over to his executive officer, "We're going to order artillery smoke and then make a bayonet charge on the house." Major Stopka yelled back, "OK." Bob then told



D-Day

June 6, 1944

- Term signifying a military operation start date, now identified with the invasion of Europe by U.S. Allied forces on June 6, 1944
- Actual name of invasion was Operation Overlord

- The Nazis believed the invasion would occur at the narrowest spot on the English Channel
- The invasion actually focused on five beaches on the coast of Normandy, France.
- The five beaches were code-named Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword

- 176,000 Allied soldiers stormed the beaches, the largest sea-borne invasion in history
- Allied casualties totaled 11,000 (including 2,500 dead)
- Considered the turning point of the War in Europe

Source: World Book, Encyclopedia of Battles

PATRICK ZELLER/STAFF

³ H-Hour was the name given to the beginning of the amphibious assault during the Normandy landings of World War II. H-Hour occurred at 6:30 a.m. local time on June 6, 1944.

⁴ A 122mm coastal battery typically refers to a fortified emplacement featuring one or more 122mm artillery guns, historically used to defend coastlines against naval threats.

⁵ During the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944, the capture of the causeways leading inland from Utah Beach was a crucial objective for the Allied forces. The terrain behind Utah Beach was characterized by marshes and flooded land, making the causeways the primary routes for exiting the beach and advancing inland.

⁶ "scratch force" is often drawn from various existing units or even individuals not currently assigned to any particular unit. assembled for a specific, often urgent task. Once the task is completed, the force is usually disbanded.

⁷ A causeway is a raised road or path, typically constructed across a body of water or low-lying, wet ground.

Stopka to pass the word to fix bayonets, reload, and prepare to charge when Bob blew his whistle. At 0615 (6:15 a.m.) Bob lifted the artillery fire and blew his whistle. On Bob's left Major Stopka was yelling, "Let's go! Over the hedge!" But as Bob looked back, he saw only a few men up and running. He thought, "my men have let me down." Actually, confusion in getting the orders down to the men had caused their failure to respond, but more men joined in as they saw him leading the charge. Bob ran on, urging his men to fan out and keep moving, while meanwhile firing his pistol and yelling, "I don't know what I'm shooting at, but I gotta keep on." Some men, hearing that comment, broke into laughter despite the danger all about them.

Disorganized as it was, the charge nevertheless captured the farmhouse position. But, as Bob mustered his unit--now scarcely more than a hundred men—he realized at what a terrible cost. For his actions in this fight, Bob was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Sadly, he didn't live to receive the award. In Holland, in September 1944, while attacking the heavily defended town of Best, Bob called for air support which mistakenly strafed Bob's positions. When Bob ran out in front of his men to direct the laying of identification panels, a German sniper shot Bob squarely in the temple—killing him instantly. He died as he had lived, unafraid, with his first thoughts for his men.

In the beautiful and immaculate Maargraten Cemetery in Holland, Bob's tombstone is a special one reserved for winners of our country's highest award for valor. Bob's heritage of

Duty performed with Honor and Courage for his men and his Country remains fresh and clear in the hearts of all of us who knew him.

"In addition to receiving the Purple Heart, he also was the recipient of the Medal of Honor. My brother gave his father's Purple Heart medal to the Robert G. Cole High School at Fort Sam Houston, Texas; named after his father. As a military child, a military spouse, and part of a Gold Star family, it's my duty to remember and honor my family's military connections." ... Cynthia Suich

Standing at his graveside are his son, Robert Bruce Cole and stepdaughter, Cynthia Beall Suich. Robert and Cynthia are half brother and sister through their mother and Lt. Col. Cole's lifelong sweetheart, Allie Mae Wilson.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert George Cole's headstone in Holland identifies him as a recipient of his nation's highest award for valor.

September 14, 2009 at 8:09:51 AM
474 of 2,099

