

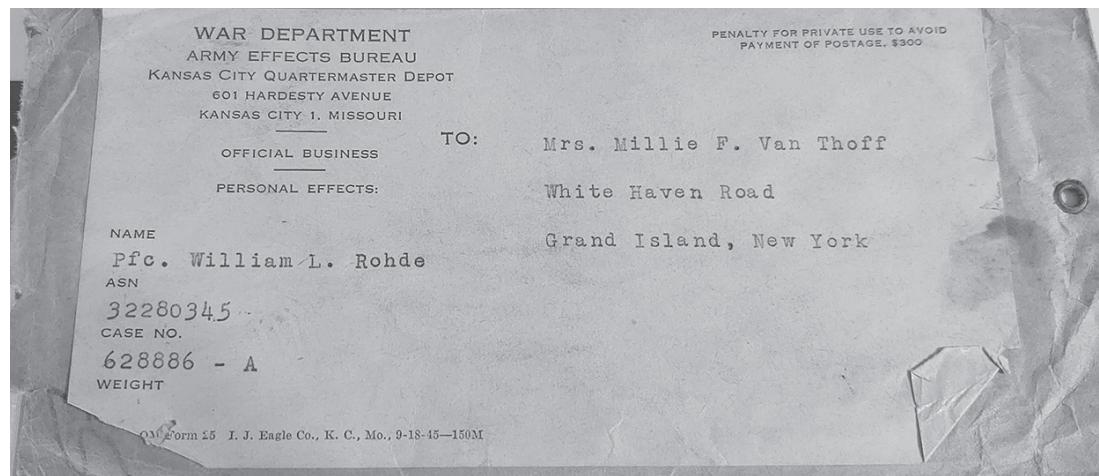
Pfc. William L. Rohde



William KL. Rohde practicing baseball on the family's East River Road farm.



The American flag and Pfc. William L. Rohde



Envelopes from the U.S. Department of the Army with letters outlining details of Pfc. Rohde's death.



The engraved tombstone in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.



The American flag sent to his Pfc. William Rohde's family.

literally lost it when she heard that news," her daughter, Karen, recalled during a recent interview in her home. "She was early in her pregnancy with me, and her doctor told her she had to calm down or she may lose the baby."

A letter dated 23 October 1945 to Millie Vanthoff from 1st Lt. Don L. Poling of the 762nd Signal Aircraft Warning Company in Seattle began to tell the story of what happened to her brother. "During the past two years William was on the Little Kiska outpost, and because of his devotion to duty, friendliness and his pleasing personality, he had endeared himself to us, the officers and men of that little garrison," he wrote. "We count our lives as being richer for having known William Rohde." A week later she received a letter from Post Chaplain Major Thomas D. Byrne, who said, in part, "Though there has been no fighting here for some time, they had been holding the Northern flank of the offensive which has culminated in the utter defeat of Japan, and in doing that, they have played their part as much as any man on the firing lines."

A letter from The American Red Cross arrived the next day notifying her of the funeral services conducted at the Fort Richardson Cemetery in Alaska "with all the dignity that can be accorded by the highest military courtesy." The letter added: "He and his companions have a very beautiful resting place, surrounded by palm trees with snow-capped mountains in the distance."

The family thought that was the end of Pfc. William L. Rohde's life story. Killed in action over Anchorage, Alaska, and his remains buried with his eight comrades without a proper burial and service at home.

Nearly a year later in November 1946, Millie received a letter from Maj. James C. MacFarland of the War Department asking them to send dental records from his dentist at home as they were trying to correctly identify those killed in the fiery crash. They did that, and five months later, a letter was received from the Quartermaster General of the Department of Army informing the family of "the disposition of the remains of Private First Class William L. Rohde, A.S.N. 32 280 345."

"In view of the circumstances of his death, William and eight of his comrades, it was not possible to establish individual identification. Remains, interred as a group, will be returned to the United States within the next few months for burial in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in Kansas," it said in the letter. A stone was engraved there with the names of the nine deceased soldiers.

Millie told her daughter that none of the immediate family members had visited the gravesite. A relative who was visiting Kansas years ago found the cemetery and sent them photos of the grave. The Army said there were no personal items of Rohde's to return, but they did send a boxed American flag with the soldier's name attached to it.

"My mom and her sisters loved their brother and really missed him," Vanthoff said. "Mom said he was such quiet, caring person whom everyone loved to be around. She said one of his passions was playing baseball. He would have loved to pursue a career in baseball."

Vanthoff will represent her family at the DeGlopper Memorial Dedication on June 5 when the statue of the World War II decorated hero from Grand Island is unveiled, along with the plaques for the Islanders killed in action. "It will be a wonderful tribute for our uncle to be recognized in the park with all of the other Island veterans," she said.

In Loving Memory
Kevin Doring
10/2/60 - 3/28/13

In Loving Memory

It's been 8 years since you passed. You are always in our thoughts and prayers, and forever in our hearts.
We love and miss you dearly.

Mom & Dad

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