

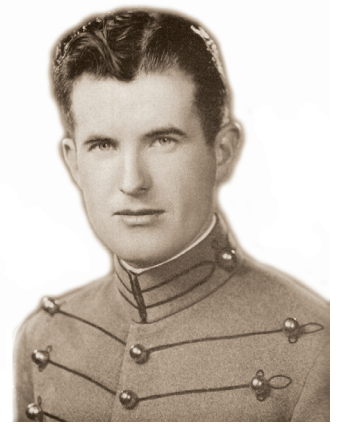
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# FIRST TO FALL

THE BILL CRAMSIE STORY

*by Wayne G. Sayles*



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As a boy growing up in the Sierra Nevada foothills, where his grandfather was a pioneer in the gold rush days, Bill Cramsie dreamed of nothing but flying. His sole ambition was to become a West Point cadet and an Army Air Corps aviator. Through extraordinary effort and persistence, he achieved that goal. Bill Cramsie graduated from West Point in the class of June 1943. Thrust into the fury of World War II, that class became the most highly decorated class in the history of West Point. Lt. Cramsie was assigned to the 416th Bomb Group and began flying combat missions out of England in the Spring of 1944. On April 10th of that year, the day after Easter, Bill Cramsie's aircraft was badly damaged by flak while attacking a V-1 Buzz Bomb site in Flanders. Making three heroic passes over the target, and being hit on two of those passes, the aircraft could not be coaxed back across the English Channel. Bill and his two gunners perished as their A-20 Havoc crashed into the sea. He was the first member of the West Point class of June 1943 to be killed in action -- the "First to Fall". His body was never recovered, but his spirit lives on through the metaphysical power of an amazing artifact. After 60 years, the class ring of Bill Cramsie mysteriously appeared and prompted a major effort to learn and tell his story -- a story that can finally lay his spirit to rest. The story of Bill Cramsie is a story of triumph and tragedy, of honor and humility. It is a voice from the past that inspires us to be all that we can be and to realize that nothing of worth comes without dedication and sacrifice.