

## Harland F. Burgess Biography

### Pre-WSC Background

Harland Fremont Burgess was born on April 23, 1899 in Columbus, Kansas, the son of Francis and Sarah Burgess. His mother gave birth to nine children, six of who were still living at the time of the 1910 United States Census. Harland was the youngest.<sup>1</sup> His father was a farmer, and the family made their home on a farm in Palouse, Washington. While growing up Burgess made news in *The Pullman Tribune* on January 10, 1913 due to him falling and fracturing his collarbone.<sup>2</sup> He again made the local news as a senior at Pullman High School for his election as editor of the *Alkawawa*, the high school yearbook.<sup>3</sup> He graduated from Pullman High School in 1917, and enlisted in the United States Army; he was discharged on December 19, 1918 to attend the Students Army Training Center at Washington State College (WSC).<sup>4</sup>

### WSC Experience

Burgess attended WSC from 1917 to 1922 and received his Bachelor's degree in Education.<sup>5</sup> He received an appointment to manage the WSC newspaper, *The Evergreen*, in 1919. An article about his move into the position of business manager of the paper noted that he had "considerable experience with the business end of newspapers," and that he was well-acquainted with the business community in Pullman.<sup>6</sup> Burgess also served on the new student

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<sup>1</sup> "Harland F. Burgess in the 1910 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>2</sup> "Local News Notes," *Pullman Tribune*, January 10, 1913, at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

<sup>3</sup> "High School Notes," *The Pullman Tribune*, February 16, 1917, at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

<sup>4</sup> "Harland Fremont Burgess in the Washington, WWI Service Statement Records," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>5</sup> C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends* (Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 173.

<sup>6</sup> "Burgess To Manage Evergreen – Austin Resigns," *The Evergreen*, March 26, 1919, at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

committee at the State College YMCA.<sup>7</sup> He was part of the state college R.O.T.C. and a newspaper clipping dated October 12, 1920 reveals he was a Cadet Lieutenant in command of the first battalion.<sup>8</sup> By the following month, he was a Cadet Major.<sup>9</sup> He received a commission as second lieutenant, infantry, in the Officers Reserve Corps of the U.S. Army in June 1921.<sup>10</sup> During his senior year at WSC, Burgess served as the committee chairman for the 1922 Military Ball, an all-college formal held on February 25, 1922.<sup>11</sup>

### **Wartime Service and Death**

Following his graduation from WSC, Burgess embarked on a military career in the U.S. Army. He married Marion Ulley on June 16, 1923 in Spokane, Washington.<sup>12</sup> Army transport records reveal Burgess and his wife spent time in Brooklyn, Honolulu, and Manila.<sup>13</sup> By September 1941, he was a Major in the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington.<sup>14</sup> Burgess's father, Francis, died on April 27, 1940, followed a year later by his brother, Walter.<sup>15</sup>

Burgess served in the Pacific Theater during World War II, but the specifics about what campaigns he fought in are unknown. What is known is that he achieved the rank of Lieutenant

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<sup>7</sup> "Y.M.C.A. Down to Working Basics," *The Evergreen*, April 9, 1919.

<sup>8</sup> "558 Students in R.O.T.C.," *Spokesman-Review*, October 12, 1920, at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

<sup>9</sup> "W.S.C. Cadets Promoted," *Spokesman-Review*, November 20, 1920, at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

<sup>10</sup> *Powwow*, June 1921, WSU 25, WSU Publications: Alumni Office <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>11</sup> "Military Ball," *The Chinook of '22*, WSU 46, WSU Publications – Chinooks at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

<sup>12</sup> "Washington, Marriage Records, 1854-2013 for Harland F. Burgess," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>13</sup> "Harland F. Burgess in the U.S., Army Transport Service, Passenger Lists, 1910-1939," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>14</sup> "In This Alumni World," *Powwow*, September 1941, WSU 25, WSU Publications: Alumni Office <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>15</sup> "Harland Fremont Burgess," *Ancestry.com*.

Colonel, and he was aboard the Japanese prison transport ship, the *Arisan Maru*.<sup>16</sup> In late 1944, Japanese forces knew that U.S. troops were close to recapturing the Philippines. They began to move thousands of prisoners of war (POWs) to locations nearer to Japan, transporting them in the holds of merchant ships carrying supplies and weapons.<sup>17</sup> News of those captured by the Japanese was hard to come by for families and friends, as well as the U.S. government. The International Red Cross was the main source of information, and they routinely sent lists of POWs to the U.S. Army Office of the Provost Marshal General. However, Japanese lists of POWs provided through the Red Cross were often incomplete and late. A number of U.S. and allied intelligence gathering units undertook the monumental task of intercepting radio messages and translating the “elaborate system of codebooks and rules” used by the Japanese.<sup>18</sup> Due to their work, convoys, individual combat, and merchant ships were identified and provided conclusive evidence of what happened to many American POWs.

On October 24, 1944, in the midst of the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, the following message was decrypted: “The Luzon Straits Force is assigned to 2 unidentified Convoys and the Naval Air Force is assigned to 2 other unidentified Convoys.”<sup>19</sup> One of the convoys departed Manila for Takao, Formosa on October 21, 1944; within that convoy was the *Arisan Maru*, containing 1,783 American prisoners of war.<sup>20</sup> Conditions on the *Arisan Maru* were brutal, with many prisoners dying of heat exhaustion due to lack of water. At dinnertime on

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<sup>16</sup> “LtCol Harland F Burgess in the Global, Find a Grave Index for Burials at Sea and other Select Burial Locations, 1300s-current,” *Ancestry.com*; “Harland Fremont Burgess,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/63784350/harland-fremont-burgess> (Accessed June 30, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Lee A. Gladwin, “American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell,” *National Archives* 35, No. 4 (Winter 2003), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/hell-ships-1.html> (Accessed June 30, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Gladwin, “American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

October 24, the ship approached Shoonan, off the eastern coast of China. Survivors described feeling “the jar caused by hits of two torpedoes,” stopping the *Arisan Maru* “dead in the water.”<sup>21</sup> The Japanese abandoned the ship, and the 1,783 American prisoners went into the rough waters of the South China Sea. Japanese destroyers “deliberately pulled away from the men struggling to reach them.”<sup>22</sup> In the end, only eight Americans are known to have survived the sinking of the *Arisan Maru*.

### **Postwar Legacy**

Japanese war records reveal that a total of twenty-five ships carrying 19,000 POWs were sunk by American submarines or bombers; roughly 11,000 Americans are thought to have died due to those attacks.<sup>23</sup> Burgess is buried at Pullman City Cemetery. In addition to being memorialized on the World War II section of the WSU Veterans Memorial, Burgess’s name is on the Walls of the Missing, Manila American Cemetery, Taguig City, Philippines.<sup>24</sup> His wife, Marion Ulley Burgess, received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History from WSC in 1947.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Macdonald, “He Survived – 1,800 Fellow Prisoners Aboard Japanese ‘Hell Ship’ Died 50 Years Ago Today,” *The Seattle Times*, October 24, 1994, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19941024&slug=1937653> (Accessed June 30, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> “Harland F. Burgess,” *American Battle Monuments Commission*, <https://www.abmc.gov/node/436693> (Accessed June 30, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> “Fifty-First Annual Commencement: The State College of Washington,” *1947 Commencement Program*, WSU 86, WSU Publications Collection: Commencement <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).