

Jesse Lloyd Colley Biography

Pre-WSC Experience

Jesse Lloyd Colley was born on February 28, 1917 in Mesa, Franklin County, Washington to Curtis Leroy Colley and Olive Hagsdale Colley.¹ Colley had three older brothers, Ralph, born in 1911; Raymond, born in 1913; Marion, born in 1914; and one younger brother, Delbert, born in 1920.² In the 1920 United States Federal Census, Curtis Colley's occupation was listed as "farmer."³ Franklin County lies in south-central Washington, with the Columbia River forming its western border and the Snake on its southern and eastern borders.⁴ The area possesses a dry, arid climate but the waters of its surrounding rivers provided salmon for Native American inhabitants for centuries. White settlement in the area began in the 1850s as prospectors traveling to the British Columbia gold rush stayed to raise sheep and plant orchards.⁵ The Washington Territorial Legislature created the county on November 28, 1882, and Franklin County's first permanent settlements were railroad stations. After the completion of the Grand Coulee Dam and improved irrigation methods were utilized for farming, agriculture became the staple of the county's economy. Pasco became the county's seat, and on the far eastern border of

¹ "Washington, Birth Records, 1870-1935 for Jesse Lloyd Celley (sic)," Washington State Department of Health, *Ancestry.com*, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/1209/WBI_2-0842/360616?backurl=https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/520507/person/6139175012/facts/citation/6298455340/edit/record (Accessed July 30, 2019); C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends* (Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 177. Colley's date of birth alternates in public records between February 28, 1917 and March 1, 1917, with even his gravestone showing March 1, 1917. However, the officially recorded record of his birth is listed as February 28, 1917 in the Washington State Department of Health records, so that is the date that is used here. Quann also lists Colley's name as "Jess," but the majority of documents related to his life use the name "Jesse" so that is what is used here.

² "Curtise (sic) Leroy Colley," *Ancestry.com*, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/520507/person/6139175008/facts> (Accessed July 30, 2019).

³ "1920 United States Federal Census for Curtis L Calley (sic)," *Ancestry.com*, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/6061/4390427_01039/93784944?backurl=https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/520507/person/6139175008/facts/citation/6297934751/edit/record (Accessed July 30, 2019).

⁴ Elizabeth Gibson, "Franklin County – Thumbnail History," *historylink.org*, September 14, 2005, <https://www.historylink.org/File/7452> (Accessed July 30, 2019).

⁵ *Ibid.*

the county the town of Hardersburg, later renamed Kahlotus, was platted in 1901.⁶ The new town's economy was based on wheat, but alfalfa, hay, potatoes, and sugar beets were also grown in the area.⁷

By 1930, Colley's family relocated to Kahlotus, where his father continued to farm. The younger Colley graduated from Kahlotus High School in 1935 and enrolled in Washington State College (WSC) that fall.

WSC Experience

Colley attended WSC from 1935 through 1937 as a Business Administration major.⁸ On his draft card, registered on October 16, 1940, he listed himself as self-employed as a farmer and living in Connell, Washington.⁹

Wartime Service and Death

Colley enlisted in the United States Army on April 24, 1942 as a Private.¹⁰ He was assigned to the 27th Infantry Regiment and sent to Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was ninety miles long and an average of twenty-five miles wide, with "forbidding" terrain of mountains, dormant volcanoes, steep ravines, and deep streams.¹¹ The coastline contained no natural harbors, with

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Quann, *WSU Military Veterans*, 177.

⁹ "Jesse Lloyd Colley in the U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2238&h=36847986&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh632&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 30, 2019).

¹⁰ "Jesse L Colley in the U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=8939&h=4112946&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2238 (Accessed July 30, 2019).

¹¹ Charles R. Anderson, "Guadalcanal: The U.S. Army Campaign of World War II," U.S. Army Center of Military History, *history.army.mil*, <https://history.army.mil/brochures/72-8/72-8.htm> (Accessed August 5, 2019).

only the north central coast offering suitable invasion beaches. On land, soldiers faced a hot and humid climate that supported malaria and continual threats of “fungal infection and various fevers to the unacclimated.”¹² The U.S. First Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, establishing a 2000-yard beachhead and capturing an airfield built by the Japanese, quickly renamed Henderson Field. However, they were uneducated about the topography of the island, and some Marines even had World War I-era rifles.¹³ Henderson Field became a contested spot for many months, resulting in multiple Japanese attacks successfully defended by the Americans.

For the remainder of 1942, Guadalcanal served as the site of multiple battles both on land and on sea. During the last weeks of 1942 and into 1943, American forces were able to strengthen their hold on the island as they reorganized and brought in fresh troops. The goal was to destroy the Japanese on Guadalcanal “rather than simply to push them farther away from the Henderson Field perimeter.”¹⁴ A January offensive was planned and Colonel William A. McCulloch’s 27th Infantry was to play a part. At first light on January 10, 1943, the 27th, led by the 1st and 3rd Battalions, found their progress impeded by the Guadalcanal landscape as they attempted to move up the “slopes of objectives” and faced enemy resistance from hidden bunkers.¹⁵ In addition, they also experienced water shortages.

¹² Anderson, “Guadalcanal.”

¹³ C. Peter Chen, “Guadalcanal Campaign,” *World War II Database*, https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=9 (Accessed August 5, 2019).

¹⁴ Anderson, “Guadalcanal.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

By January 13 a heavy rain began to fall, helping relieve the thirst of the men, and McCulloch's men were able to overtake their objective. Colley was killed in action on January 12, 1943 during the 27th Infantry's attack on what would become known as Mitchell Ridge.¹⁶

Postwar Legacy

Colley posthumously received the Purple Heart. His remains were returned home on March 4, 1948 for burial and he was laid to rest in the City View Cemetery, Pasco, Washington.¹⁷ The American Legion Post of Connell was named in his honor.

¹⁶ Letter from Mr. and Mrs. C.L. Colley to T.S. Meade, August 18, 1948, Box 1, Folder 5, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

¹⁷ "Jesse Lloyd Colley," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/183062605/jesse-lloyd-colley> (Accessed August 5, 2019).