Floyd Carlyle Bryant

The Fallen Cougars Project

Background: Moving Around Mount Vernon, Bellingham, Lummi, and More

Many Fallen Cougars have a simple enough backstory. Most are from rural towns in Washington State, making their background easier to uncover. Others, like Floyd Bryant, moved around quite a bit in his youth, making some of his exploits more difficult to track over time. With stops in La Conner, and the Lummi Reservation, and Bellingham, Washington, one can say he was truly raised in Bellingham and educated in Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon was named by the city founders after George Washington's plantation estate in Virginia. As one might expect of a town founded hugging the banks of the Skagit river, it was a timber town in the 1870s and 1880s. Discovery of mineral wealth, though, made for a shift toward mining in the 1890s and early 1900's. In 1891 the Great Northern Railway connected Mount Vernon to the larger metropolitan centers in nearby Seattle to the South, as well as Bellingham and Vancouver B.C. to the north. Noted for its forestry, mining, and farming, Mount Vernon became the County seat of Skagit County and quite an idyllic location. This is the town where Floyd Bryant was truly raised and educated. It is likely where he developed his fascination with the natural world, in particular a focus on mining that he carried with him to his college days. And it is the town that molded a young man that was willing to join the military in a time of war to protect his family, his home, and his nation.

On February 21, 1909 Alger and Esta Bryant welcomed their son Floyd to the world. In 1910 the family lived in La Conner, Washington. Alger was a farmer in the local area, taking in a boarder from Norway named Chris Apeland to help with the farm work.[1] By 1920 the family had

[1] 1910 census

moved to the Lummi Reservation in Whatcom County. They had also welcomed another son, John, to the fold and were doing well enough financially to have a "servant", Raherta Maime from Germany, listed in their census.[2] Alger now listed his employment as working on "own account." One may assume he had purchased his own land in Whatcom County and was operating his own farm. By 1930 the family had moved to Bellingham, Washington in Whatcom County. Alger was working as a salesman for a fruit company. It is possible that, given the fact that the depression hit farmers first and hardest, several years before it brought the whole economy down, that men like Alger were left out in the cold when the system they trusted collapsed around them.[3] As the family made their way in the world, their eldest son Floyd had completed High School, graduating from Anacortes High School in the Bellingham School District. He then made the decision to go into a more technical field than his father. After graduating in 1926, in 1928 he picked up and moved across the state to attend Washington State College in little Pullman, Washington where he would major in mining engineering.

Education and Adventure: From Pullman to Australia, Annapolis, and Hawaii

The story only gets weirder from this point on. Floyd spent his freshman year at Washington State College when, In 1928, instead of heading back to Pullman for school, an interesting opportunity presented itself. *The Bellingham Herald* reported that, instead, young Floyd was set to leave for Maryland. He had been appointed to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis and was set to enroll there on July 1, 1928. Congressman Lin H. Hadley appointed him previously to West Point Military Academy, but he declined in favor of the Navy.[4] By 1930 he was back in Pullman and unfortunately, I cannot find any sources on how his time in

[2] 1920 Census
[3] 1930 Census
[4] *The Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, Washington)

Annapolis went, or if he ever actually made it there. Regardless it is another impressive accomplishment for the boy from small towns all over Washington.

Arriving back in Pullman was just the first move in what turned out to be a very mobile existence for the young Floyd. In his two years on campus, he did the usual things that an excellent academic student would do. He majored in mining engineering, and he was accepted as a member of the Sigma Chi Fraternity.[5] *The Chinook* yearbook lists his hometown as both Bellingham and Mount Vernon, speaking the mobility he had known all his life.[6] But his role in a fraternity and as a student paled in comparison to the mischief he and a friend got into in 1931. A seemingly innocuous article in *The Bellingham Herald* that year reported that Floyd's mother "recalled that last fall in Melbourne, Australia, her son, Floyd Bryant, saw a moving picture of the festival given in 1930. He is on a world mines tour from Washington State College and is now at Wonchaggi, Australia. He will leave soon for South Africa."[7] This all seems innocuous enough; a mining engineering major is on a world tour of mines through his college. However, Floyd had other ideas. In a rather hilarious article published in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* we learn more about what, exactly, Floyd was up to on his trip around the world.

In an article with the headline "Wealth of Experience Won by 2 Students, Out to Make a Fortune: Washington State College Youths Reach Honolulu As Stowaways on Golden Rod When Their Quest After Funds Fails In Australia. Police Set Them Free." It turns out that Floyd and his

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[5] *The Chinook*, Washington State College Yearbook, 1930. Located: https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/chinook/id/14504/rec/31

[6] *The Chinook*, Washington State College Yearbook, 1930. Page 339. Located: https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/chinook/id/14504/rec/31

[7] *The Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, Washington) May 6, 1931, "Brief Local News." Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/768882847/?match=1&terms=Floyd%20Bryant

friend Charles Cartwright of Youngstown Ohio stowed away on a ship called the Golden Rod and made their way back to Hawaii instead of keeping on track with the scheduled trip. "The youths stowed away aboard his ship at Sydney" reported the Captain. After being discovered on their return journey, the boys fessed up to what they were trying to accomplish. "Bryant and Cartwright declared that they had both been working their way through Washington State College and had completed two years of work. They decided to go to Australia to earn more money with which to complete their college courses in mining engineering." The pair then made their way to Australia, via Honolulu, intend on working in the famed mines there. But "they discovered to their dismay that most of the mines were shut down because of the depression and that Americans were none too popular." Bryant recalled that the locals "blamed us for the depression." Seemingly undeterred by what should have been an obvious end to their ventures and an embarrassing letter home. Instead the two young men did exactly what you think they would do, that's right, they pooled their money together, bought some golfing equipment and opened up a put-put golf business in Melbourne. This made them enough money to keep them afloat, but "the Australians became bored with miniature golf and we were once more out in the cold. After numerous fruitless attempts to land jobs, we stowed away aboard the Golden Rod." After their discovery on the return trip, the boys were pressed into service aboard the ship to pay for passage back home. They were then interviewed by a bewildered Chief Detective John Nelson McIntosh and sent on their way.[8] Floyd graduated from Washington State College in 1931 and moved back to a place he had apparently fallen in love with in his many travels; Honolulu.

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[8] *The Honolulu Star Bulletin* (Honolulu, Hawaii) August 27, 1931, "Wealth of Experience Won by 2 Students Out to Make a Fortune." Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/274974412/?match=1&terms=Floyd%20Bryant

Living in Paradise: Marriage, Naval Intelligence, and Tragedy

While his brother John "Jack" Bryant finished his own schooling, Floyd made a good living for himself in Honolulu. He took a job as "First Inspector" for a mining company before he took a job for a large Retail Credit Company.[9] The move to Hawaii and solid career were important moments in Floyd's life, but perhaps the most important one happened in 1935. While in Hawaii he met the young Ruth Marie Robinson. She was educated in the Philippines and attended University in Manila before completing her education in Seattle. The couple's engagement was announced in the *The Honolulu Advertiser* on March 24, 1935, and they were married at Ruth's family home in Honolulu on December 1, 1936. "The bride was attractively gowned in silver lame designed along Grecian lines, and long dolman sleeves. . . a reception for fifty relatives and intimates was held." The newlyweds followed their nuptials with a honeymoon cruise for six weeks along the Pacific Coast of the United States.[10] The couple seemed to be Japanophiles, or at least appreciated the Japanese art aesthetic. Small Japanese fans were sitting at every table for their guests, and chrysanthemums were the primary decorative flowers. Six years later, however, wedding decorations like that would likely not have been so welcomed.

By 1941 relations between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan had soured. Japan had been at war with China since 1937. The Japanese home islands were not rich in natural resources and the material needs of conducting a war with a nation the size of China were immense. Japan had only been able to conduct the war successfully because the empire received a large amount of its oil from the United States. Without American oil imports Japan could not

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[9] *The Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, Washington), "Floyd Bryant Dies Suddenly in Honolulu", January 19, 1943. Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/768878580/?match=1&terms=Floyd%20Bryant

[10] *The Honolulu Advertiser* (Honolulu, Hawaii) December 1, 1936. Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/258994337/?match=1&terms=Floyd%20Bryant

hope to win its war in China. When the United States cut off oil shipments to Japan in 1940, a response the Japanese invasion of French Indo-China, the Imperial high command came up with a plan to take the resources by force. Their strategy was to take the resource-rich islands in the Pacific, fortify them against counterattack, and continue their war in China in the West while extracting the natural resources and fending off the United States, Great Britain, and their allies in the East.

The surprise attack on the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, is well known, especially for people like Floyd and Ruth who lived in Hawaii for years at the time. However, the impact of the attack on Pearl Harbor distracts from the broader campaign throughout the Pacific that, when viewed in its entirety, constitutes the largest military campaign in history. Between December 7th and December 10th, 1941, the Japanese empire attacked or invaded British colonies of Malaya, Singapore, and Hong Kong as well as the United States naval bases on Wake Island, Guam, the Philippines, and more. They opened a battlefront that was 6,000 miles wide north-to-south. The United States desperately needed men of intelligence, training, and rarified skills to fill the ranks of their armor if they had any hope of victory against such an organized and motivated enemy, they needed men with the background, bravery, and intelligence of Floyd Bryant.

Floyd had remained in the United States Naval Reserve and was called up for duty after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Given his accomplishments, education, time in Annapolis, and relatively advanced age (32) for the military, he was assigned to the United States Intelligence Corps (Naval Intelligence) and stationed in Honolulu. He served honorably, though his exact services are difficult to ascertain given the naturally secretive nature of military intelligence officers. He attained the rank of Lieutenant while working on behalf of his nation to defeat the

empire that had so brutally attacked his adopted home, likely killing or injuring people familiar to him in the process. However, despite his distance from combat, disaster struck the Bryant clan in January of 1943. In December of 1942 Floyd fell ill. Not terribly surprising, someone working as hard as he was in the intelligence corps it is not hard to imagine his immune system taking a beating. But it was much worse than it appeared. Floyd's illness quickly became advanced pneumonia, and he was admitted to the Naval Hospital for treatment. The illness did its work so quickly that there was almost no time to get necessary information to his parents back in Washington.[11] Tragically, on January 16, 1943, Lieutenant Floyd Carlyle Bryant, the swashbuckling adventurer, the trained engineer, the soldier and intelligence officer, the husband and son, the Washington State Cougar, succumbed to his illness in the Navy Hospital at the age of 34. Even more devastating for his family, it happened so fast that his parents received the cablegram from the Navy notifying them of his illness only one hour before the cablegram notifying them of his passing.[12]

The Funeral Notice listed Lieutenant Floyd of the United States Naval Reserve, and former resident of 4621 Aukai Street in Honolulu, passed away and announced that "Naval Services over the ashes will be held at the Borthwick Funeral Parlor."[13] He was laid to rest with full military honors and his remains were returned to his native Washington. They were laid to rest in Mount Vernon Cemetery, Lot 8, Block 213, Section 6.[14] He is also memorialized on the campus that educated him, that offered him the opportunities to go in his half-mad adventures

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[11] *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (Honolulu, Hawaii), January 18, 1943, "Lieutenant Floyd C. Bryant Dies in Navy Hospital."
[12] *The Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, Washington) January 19, 1943, "Floyd Bryant Dues Suddenly in Honolulu." Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/768878580/?match=1&terms=Floyd%20Bryant
[13] *The Honolulu Advertiser* (Honolulu, Hawaii), January 21, 1943, "Funeral Notices: Bryant, Lt. Floyd C., USNR." Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/259720286/?match=1
[14] Profile of Floyd Carlyle Bryant in the Find-A-Grave Database. Located: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/199307959/floyd-carlyls-bryant

around the world, and that he loved in return. If you take the trip to little Pullman, Washington you can see his name emblazoned in golden letters alongside his fellow fallen cougars on the World War II memorial beneath the iconic clocktower of Bryan Hall.