

John Vincent Fryslie Biography

Pre-WSC Years

John Vincent Fryslie was born on February 28, 1916 in Flasher, Morton County, North Dakota to Arthur and Alice “Lucile” Fryslie. Fryslie, who went by his middle name, Vincent, was a twin; his brother, Norman Henry Fryslie, was born on the same date but it is unclear who came into the world first.¹ The twins were the first children for Arthur and Lucile; their sister Alice followed in 1917; brother Arthur Willard in 1921; sister Gladys in 1923; and brothers Gordon, James, and Everett in 1925, 1926, and 1928, respectively.² Alice died of an unknown cause in 1934 two weeks before her seventeenth birthday.³ Arthur worked as a farmer, as did his father before him.⁴ The town of Flasher was established in 1902 after being claimed by multiple German families from Russia; by 1910, there were 2,005 farms in Morton County with 225,886 acres under cultivation.⁵ A 1909 description and history of the county noted that with the completion of the western North Dakota branch of the Northern Pacific Railway and the Cannon Ball branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound Railway, the “past year has seen not only a wonderful development of its farming industry and the breaking of thousands of acres of virgin

¹ “John Vincent Fryslie in the U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60525&h=2299458&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1335&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 10, 2020); “Norman Henry Fryslie in the U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947,” *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2238&h=299728290&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6061 (Accessed July 10, 2020).

² “Vincent J Fryslie in the 1930 United States Federal Census,” *Ancestry.com*, <https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1930usfedcen&indiv=try&h=108712985> (Accessed July 10, 2020).

³ “Alice V. Fryslie Funeral Service,” *Fremont Nebraska*, September 14, 1934.

⁴ “Arthur D Fryslie in the 1920, 1930, 1940 United States Federal Census,” *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2442&h=99936505&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6224 (Accessed July 11, 2020).

⁵ “Morton County, North Dakota Genealogy and History,” *genealogytrails.com*, <http://genealogytrails.com/ndak/morton/history.html> (Accessed July 11, 2020).

soil but the springing up of a number of new, thriving towns with banks, newspapers, and stores of all kinds.”⁶

There is little record of Fryslie’s youth in North Dakota aside from census reports showing he lived with his family in 1920 and 1930. In the 1940 census, he is listed as living in North Dakota and working as a miner, with two years of college under his belt. Somewhere between 1930 and 1940, Fryslie ended up attending high school in Buckley, Washington, located on the eastern shore of Puget Sound in west-central Washington. The town sits on the plateau between the Carbon and White Rivers, and once was a transportation hub for a “booming economy” reliant on logging, coal mining, and farming.⁷ Given that Fryslie grew up on a farm, and he later worked as a miner, it is possible he moved out to Washington for work and finished his high school education in Buckley. Perhaps he moved in with family; his high school years were in the midst of the Great Depression and many families made difficult choices about how best to support their children. Whatever the case may be, photographic evidence from the Buckley High School yearbooks clearly match the portrait provided by Fryslie’s mother following his death in World War II.

Fryslie participated on the debate team in the oratorical category at Buckley High School in 1935 but failed to get his letter because he only competed in one contest and not the required two.⁸ He also participated in the Future Farmers of America (F.F.A.), where he did earn a letter in 1935, and he served as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Student Council.⁹ Fryslie also

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “The Foothills Historical Museum,” *cityofbuckley.com*, <https://www.cityofbuckley.com/museum> (Accessed July 15, 2020).

⁸ “Vincent Fryslie in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=445893928&tid=&pid=&queryId=3c4ad4143696bcb721cdcbc0396d0ea5&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1345&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 15, 2020).

⁹ “Vincent Fryslie in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999,” *ancestry.com*, <https://search.ancestry.com/cgi->

participated in the Honor Society, an organization dedicated to students learning how to fly solo. He was in charge of creating a scrap book highlighting all of the stunts and flights made by the Society.¹⁰ Fryslie also participated in athletics, and lettered in football during the 1934 season. He graduated from Buckley High School.¹¹

WSC Experience

Fryslie began his college experience at North Dakota Agricultural College but transferred to Washington State College (WSC) for the 1936 to 1937 academic year as an Agriculture major. He dropped out after 1937, but returned in 1940.¹² However, he did not finish his degree and there is no further record of him at WSC after 1940.

Fryslie married a woman named Nettie Pryor, but at this time no record of their marriage has been found. However, as of 1948 Nettie referred to herself as Nettie Fryslie still.¹³ In 1940 she was a 16-year old living with her family in Oklahoma, where she was listed as an unpaid family worker with a seventh-grade education.¹⁴ It remains unclear where and when she and Fryslie met, but they had a daughter together, Janice Arlene, born six months following her father's death.¹⁵

bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=445894366&tid=&pid=&queryId=3c4ad4143696bcb721cdcbc0396d0ea5&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1348&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 15, 2020).

¹⁰ "Vincent Fryslie in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=445893853&tid=&pid=&queryId=3c4ad4143696bcb721cdcbc0396d0ea5&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1353&_phstart=successSource)

bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=445893853&tid=&pid=&queryId=3c4ad4143696bcb721cdcbc0396d0ea5&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1353&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 15, 2020).

¹¹ C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends*, Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 180.

¹² Quann, *WSU Military Veterans*, 180.

¹³ "Nettie Pryor in the U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60901&h=45713362&tid=&pid=&queryId=8f744d124d0a95e1ae8cd86378a186fb&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1394&_phstart=successSource)

bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60901&h=45713362&tid=&pid=&queryId=8f744d124d0a95e1ae8cd86378a186fb&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1394&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 15, 2020).

¹⁴ "Nettie Pryor in the 1940 United States Federal Census," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2442&h=86173437&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=60525) bin/sse.dll?dbid=2442&h=86173437&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=60525 (Accessed July 15, 2020).

¹⁵ "Janice Arlene Thurman," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/176395481> (Accessed July 11, 2020); Letter from Mrs. A.D. Fryslie to E.O. Holland, September 9, 1944,

Military Experience and Death

Fryslie registered for the draft on October 16, 1940 when he was living in Pullman.¹⁶ At some point after 1940, several of his family members moved to San Francisco. It is unclear if Fryslie moved with them. However, at the time of his death his parents corresponded from a new address in San Francisco, with his mother relaying to WSC President Emeritus E.O. Holland that her son, Everett, was attending Commerce High School in the city.¹⁷ In addition, at the time of his death in 1962, Arthur Fryslie was a member of the International Association of Machinists Local No. 68 in San Francisco.¹⁸ Fryslie's daughter, Janice, was born in Bakersfield, California.¹⁹

The available records reveal at the time of his death, Fryslie was a Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps (USMC). He was working as an aerial photographer during the Bougainville campaign, and was only in the South Pacific for three weeks before his death. The island of Bougainville was part of the Solomon Islands campaign, which began with the Allied forces taking Guadalcanal in late 1942, early 1943. This campaign was vital to Allied strategy because several of the islands contained strategic air bases. The first attack on Bougainville began on August 15, 1943, when eight corsairs from Marine Fighter Squadron 214 (known as the "Black Sheep") "flew up from the Russell Islands to strafe the Kahili airfield during American

¹⁶ "John Vincent Fryslie in the U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2238&h=36900637&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=8750 (Accessed July 11, 2020).

¹⁷ Letter from Mrs. A.D. Fryslie to E.O. Holland, September 9, 1944.

¹⁸ "Vital Statistics," *The San Francisco Examiner*, September 15, 1962.

¹⁹ "Kern Births Recorded," *The Bakersfield Californian*, July 10, 1944.

amphibious landings on the island of Vella Lavella.”²⁰ Airstrikes continued through October in order to reduce air opposition to the Marines eventual landing at Bougainville.

Admiral William F. Halsey, USN, Commander South Pacific, ordered Task Force 39 to begin bombarding airfields on Buka and Bonis northwest of Bougainville in order to keep the Japanese off-balance and to preclude “air harassment” of the landing force.²¹ The 3^d Marine Division landed at dawn on November 1, 1943 at Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville. The bay was located some distance away from heavily fortified Japanese airfields at the other end of the island, and it was here they were able to establish a beachhead to bring in supplies and equipment to build a landing strip for fighters. However, they still faced significant obstacles. Aerial reconnaissance photos did not reveal the extensive system of bunkers in the jungles away from the beaches, and the Marines faced some harsh terrain, causing problems for their amphibious craft. The landing force was able to ultimately drive the Japanese defenders away, and by nightfall all 14,000 troops, 6,200 tons of fuel, rations, and ammunition, were landed along a 200-yard perimeter.²²

The 3^d Marine Division’s purpose is to execute amphibious assault operations, among others, and it is supported by Marine aviation. It officially activated on September 16, 1942 at Camp Elliott in San Diego, California and was built around the 9th Marines. The Division was stationed on Guadalcanal by August 1943, and began training and rehearsal for the Bougainville operation there. It is reasonable to conclude that Fryslie was part of the 3^d Marine Division.²³ His

²⁰ “The Battle of Bougainville,” *Marine Corps University*, usmcu.edu, <https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Brief-Histories/Marines-in-World-War-II/The-Battle-of-Bougainville/> (Accessed July 12, 2020).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ “3d Marine Division: The Fighting Third,” *3rdmardiv.marines.mil*, <https://www.3rdmardiv.marines.mil/About/> (Accessed July 15, 2020).

mother described his position as “photographer and tail gunner in the aerial squadron.”²⁴ The Division ended up fighting for nearly two months on Bougainville against heavy Japanese resistance. On January 16, 1944 the transfer of command on the island went to the Army’s XIV Corps, and the last of the 3^d returned to Guadalcanal.²⁵

During World War II, the Allied Powers relied heavily on aerial reconnaissance in order to obtain important intelligence about the location, activities, and movements of the enemy.²⁶ The photographs taken by aerial reconnaissance pilots like Fryslie was the quickest method of obtaining key information about the enemy. These pilots also helped record damage assessments. According to his parents, Fryslie only worked three weeks in the South Pacific before he died. Given his date of death was November 28, it is likely he arrived on Bougainville on November 1. Due to intelligence sensitivity, his parents were given limited information about the circumstances of their son’s death, except that his plane crashed and his remains were recovered. His mother later wrote, “Where or how, of the crash, we know not.”²⁷ The location of the crash was Palmyra Atoll, in the North Line Islands in the west-central Pacific Ocean roughly 1,000 miles southwest of Honolulu. During World War II the atoll’s central lagoon and connected islets served as airstrips.²⁸

Postwar Legacy

²⁴ Letter from Mrs. A.D. Fryslie to Office of the Registrar, State College of Washington, June 26, 1944,

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Craig Bowman, “A WWII Veteran Recounts Aerial Reconnaissance Missions,” *War History Online*, warhistoryonline.com, <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/wwii-veteran-recounts-aerial-reconnaissance-missions.html> (Accessed July 15, 2020).

²⁷ Letter from Mrs. A.D. Fryslie to Office of the Registrar, State College of Washington, June 26, 1944,

²⁸ “John Vincent Fryslie,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/3775198> (Accessed July 15, 2020); “Palmyra Atoll,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, britannica.com, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palmyra-Atoll> (Accessed July 15, 2020).

Fryslie was buried at the National Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl), Honolulu, Hawaii.²⁹ His mother wrote that her son, James, serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine, visited his brother's grave in Hawaii, telling his parents of the "beauty, the serenity, and the lovely flowers, so we are greatly consoled."³⁰ Mrs. Fryslie also wrote that it was the "dream and hope" of their son, Everett, to attend WSC, as "Vincent was his 'hero,' always."³¹ She also noted that it was Fryslie's intention of returning to WSC once the war ended. A few months later, Mrs. Fryslie wrote to E.O. Holland that Fryslie's "sweet little daughter, whom he never saw," Janice, was to "someday be a student at 'Washington State,' the college to which her father had planned to return after the war."³² Her college fund was "already in its foundation and its growth, I am sure, will progress nicely."³³

Fryslie's wife, Nettie, remained unmarried for several years; her Social Security records show she didn't change her name until some time between 1971 and 1987, at which time she was known as "Nettie Homer."³⁴ She died in May 1979 at the age of 54. She is buried in Hamilton Cemetery in Tulare County, California.³⁵ Fryslie's daughter Janice didn't attend WSU, but she became an RN. She died at the age of 72 in Oklahoma City on February 13, 2017.³⁶

Fryslie is memorialized on the WSU Veterans Memorial.

²⁹ "John Fryslie in the Honolulu, Hawaii, National Memorial of the Pacific (Punchbowl), 1941-2011, *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2462&h=1284&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=60525 (Accessed July 15, 2020).

³⁰ Letter from Mrs. A.D. Fryslie to Office of the Registrar, State College of Washington, June 26, 1944,

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³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Nettie Pryor in the U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007," *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=60901&h=45713362&tid=&pid=&queryId=8f744d124d0a95e1ae8cd86378a186fb&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1394&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 15, 2020).

³⁵ "Nettie Pryor Homer," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/25449788> (Accessed July 15, 2020).

³⁶ "Janice Arlene Thurman," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/176395481> (Accessed July 15, 2020).