

Grenville Neil Porter Biography

Pre-WSC Years

Grenville Neil Porter was born on February 15, 1915 in Hibbing, St. Louis County, Minnesota to George T. and Florence “Flossie” Neil Porter. Porter was his parents’ first child; his brother, George, was born in 1917, followed by Warren Arthur in 1919. George Porter worked as a fireman when his firstborn was young, but by 1930 he had moved his family to Elko, Nevada, where he worked as a salesman.¹ They again relocated to Tacoma, Washington, where George, Sr. worked as a foreman for a Works Progress Administration parks improvement project.² Public works programs helped rebuild Washington State, with the construction of the Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams being two of the most famous, but also included the Lake Washington Floating Bridge, Olympic National Park, and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.³

Porter attended Lincoln High School in Tacoma. He played on the “Midget Football” team, and it is unclear what the meaning of that outdated term denotes for this activity. However, today Pop Warner Football includes such a division for eleven through fourteen-year-old boys who weigh between 105 and 160 pounds.⁴ It is reasonable to conclude that such a team was

¹ “Grenville Porter in the 1920 United States Federal Census,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=6061&h=47945116&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=9196 (Accessed July 28, 2020); “Grenville N Porter in the 1930 United States Federal Census,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=6224&h=107852027&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6061 (Accessed July 28, 2020).

² “George L Potter (sic) in the 1940 United States Federal Census,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2442&h=64675716&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6224 (Accessed July 28, 2020).

³ “The Great Depression in Washington State,” *Civil rights and Labor History Consortium/University of Washington*, [depts.washington.edu, https://depts.washington.edu/depress/wa_new_deal.shtml](https://depts.washington.edu/depress/wa_new_deal.shtml) (Accessed July 28, 2020).

⁴ “Grenville Porter in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999,” *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=1265&h=104818971&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6224 (Accessed July 28, 2020); Ryan Wood, “Breaking Down Pop Warner’s Age-Weight Chart,” *active.com*, <https://www.active.com/football/articles/breaking-down-pop-warner-s-age-weight-chart> (Accessed July 28, 2020).

based on its athletes' smaller size. Porter also played on the "Midget Basketball" team at Lincoln. During his senior year in 1934, he served as the "hard-working" manager of the Varsity basketball team.⁵ Porter was a member of the Archery club, the senior prom committee, and the Knights of Lincoln. He was included in a group shot of Boys' Student Leaders for the 1933 yearbook. The Boys' Student Leaders were described as a "group of boys...fast showing its influence among the students at Lincoln as a result of the high standards and ideals that motivate it...the club holds meetings in the evening and have programs of music as well as serious talks by prominent men of the city and state."⁶

Porter also belonged to the Lincoln Letterman's Club, a branch of the National Athletic Scholarship Society of Secondary Schools. The organization was organized to encourage high scholarship among boy athletes, to "arouse a desire for balanced training," to elevate sportsmanship, and to develop outstanding leaders in the high schools around the United States. Members were required to have earned an athletic letter in one of the four major sports (football, baseball, basketball, or track) or two letters in minor sports. Their scholastic average for three consecutive semesters "must equal or surpass the general average of their school," and they must have displayed the "highest type of citizenship and scholarship."⁷ Porter graduated from Lincoln High School in 1934.

WSC Experience

⁵ "Grenville Porter in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999," *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=1265&h=249041074&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=6224 (Accessed July 28, 2020).

⁶ "G Porter in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999," *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=104819505&tid=&pid=&queryId=4938a1063dfce7ae6488c12cd7db2580&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1492&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 28, 2020).

⁷ "G Porter in the U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999," *ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=1265&h=249040836&tid=&pid=&queryId=a19338c3979a61eac901f98456c6ece7&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1495&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 28, 2020).

Porter attended Washington State College (WSC) from 1936 through 1941, graduating with a BA in Economics on June 1, 1941.⁸ He joined the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, commonly known as Phi Delt, a fraternity built on three pillars: the cultivation of friendship; the acquirement of a high degree of mental culture; and the personal attainment of a high standard of morality.⁹ He was a “yell duke” for the men’s basketball team until 1939, at which time he was unable to continue in the role for unknown reasons. It is likely that a “yell duke” was a main cheerleader, complete with a hierarchy and even a “Yell King.” Each fall, the “Yell King” held instructions for those trying out for a place as “yell duke.”¹⁰ However, he later returned and won “Yell King” honors later in the semester. He was also elected to the junior class executive committee.¹¹

Porter was quoted in *The Evergreen* in April 1938 when asked his opinion about whether there should be a Drum “Majoress” in the WSC band; he noted, “It is a fine idea. If the girl is cute, snappy, and full of fire, she would add attraction to the band.”¹² During his senior year, Porter was chosen to act as the honorary president of the college for the super Senior day held on Friday, March 21, 1941.¹³ Porter was a member of the WSC R.O.T.C., achieving the rank of

⁸ C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends*, Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 190.

⁹ “Our Mission,” *phideltatheta.org*, <https://www.phideltatheta.org/about/> (Accessed July 28, 2020).

¹⁰ “Bob Lee Announces Yell Duke Tryouts For Vacant Place,” *The Evergreen*, January 6, 1939, in WSU 1, WSU Publications: Evergreens <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

¹¹ “1191 Students March to Polls: Seniors Elect Hunter President,” *The Evergreen*, March 3, 1939, in WSU 1, WSU Publications: Evergreens <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

¹² “Evergreen Poll Reveals Students Want Band Drum Majoress,” *The Evergreen*, April 25, 1938, in WSU 1, WSU Publications: Evergreens <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

¹³ “Seniors Plan Super Day,” *Washington State Evergreen*, March 19, 1941, in WSU 1, WSU Publications: Evergreens <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

First Lieutenant in Company C.¹⁴ He was also a member of Scabbard and Blade, an honorary military society.

Military Service and Death

Given Porter's later citations for his service and the circumstances of his death, surprisingly little record exists about the specifics of his military career. After graduating in 1941 and given his R.O.T.C. experience, Porter likely entered the United States Army right away. He was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the Infantry, and given that he went to the Philippines he likely belonged to the United States Army's Philippine Department, which made up the combined defense forces in the Philippines under the umbrella of the US Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). General Douglas MacArthur was brought out of retirement and made commander of the USAFFE on July 26, 1941.¹⁵ The Philippine Department included a total of 22,532 men, with 11,972 of them Philippine Scouts and 1,340 officers. The largest group of men were the 7,293 assigned to the infantry, with almost the entire strength of the command stationed on the island of Luzon.¹⁶ The largest single U.S. Army unit was the Philippine Division, commanded by General Jonathan M. Wainwright, and the only American infantry unit in the Islands composed entirely of Americans was the 31st. Two other Infantry units included the 45th Infantry Regiment and the 57th Infantry Regiment, both composed primarily of Philippine Scouts. Of the three, each had roughly the same number of officers, between 114 and 118, so Porter most certainly belonged to one of the three.¹⁷

¹⁴ "Many R.O.T.C Changes Made," *The Spokesman-Review*, March 2, 1941.

¹⁵ Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines – US Army Center of Military History* (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1993), 18, https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/5-2/5-2_2.htm#p25 (Accessed August 1, 2020).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The same day Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, Formosa-based Japanese bombers struck Clark and Iba airfields in the Philippines, destroying more than fifty percent of the U.S. Army's Far East aircraft.¹⁸ Japanese forces began landing on the island of Luzon in the Philippines on December 10, and Manila fell unopposed to the Japanese on January 2, 1942. U.S. and Filipino forces under General MacArthur prepared to defend Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island, but by March 11, MacArthur received orders to leave for Australia. Bataan's defense transferred to Lieutenant General Jonathan M. Wainwright.

The Battle for Bataan lasted from January to April 9, 1942. MacArthur originally planned to hold his ground on the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island until the U.S. Navy could bring reinforcements and supplies, but the attack on Pearl Harbor precluded any deliveries. The Japanese navy blockaded both Bataan and Corregidor, ensuring U.S. troops did not receive any food, ammunition, or medicine. The troops on Bataan survived on half-rations but still fought back Japanese attacks for three months.¹⁹ Troops lost as much as 30 percent of their body weight, and malaria, dysentery, and other tropical diseases decimated the ranks. Less than half of the remaining forces could be considered "combat effective," defined as "a man who could walk 100 yards without staggering and still have enough strength left to fire his weapon."²⁰ The fall of Bataan meant that only the "tadpole-shaped fortress island" of Corregidor stood between the Japanese and full control of the Philippines.²¹

¹⁸ John Graham Royde-Smith and Thomas A. Hughes, contributors, "World War II: Pearl Harbor and the Japanese expansion, to July 1942," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II/Pearl-Harbor-and-the-Japanese-expansion-to-July-1942> (Accessed May 24, 2020).

¹⁹ Ashley N. McCall-Washington, "Surrender at Bataan Led to One of the Worst Atrocities in Modern Warfare," November 14, 2015, *USO.org*, <https://www.uso.org/stories/122-surrender-at-bataan-led-to-one-of-the-worst-atrocities-in-modern-warfare> (Accessed May 24, 2020).

²⁰ McCall-Washington, "Surrender at Bataan Led to One of the Worst Atrocities in Modern Warfare."

²¹ Bill Sloan, "Corregidor: The last battle in the fall of the Philippines," *historynet.com*, <https://www.historynet.com/corregidor-the-last-battle-in-the-fall-of-the-philippines.htm> (Accessed August 1, 2020).

Roughly 2,000 men sought refuge on Corregidor after the fall of Bataan, making the total number of military personnel on the island roughly 12,000 men and women, and by comparison they lived in some comfort within the Malinta Tunnel complex, the army's underground hospital, barracks, command, and storage facility.²² However, many men were assigned to defend Corregidor's rocky north beach to prepare for the inevitable onslaught of the Japanese forces. Corregidor was imperative to capture for the Japanese as it would give their navy control of Manila Bay. They shelled the island continuously, with more than 300 full-scale air raids and hundreds of thousands of heavy artillery rounds, including up to 16,000 on a single day.²³

All organized American resistance in the Philippines ended with General Wainwright's surrender of Corregidor on May 7, 1942. For the 11,000 men and women who survived the battle, including Lieutenant Grenville Porter, their life as Prisoners of War began. An estimated 4,000 American and Filipino POW's were incarcerated at Fort Santiago and Bilibid Prison, with US Army and Navy nurses remaining on Corregidor for several weeks before being sent to their final prison destinations. The rest were sent to various Japanese prison camps. Porter ended up at Japanese POW Camp 2, Davao, Mindanao, Philippines.²⁴

During World War II, roughly 2,000 Americans were held at Davao, with prisoners treated harshly due to their status as slave laborers for the Japanese. Davao was the site of the only successful, large-scale prison break of Allied prisoners of war in the Pacific theater on April 4, 1943. The men who escaped sought to rejoin American forces and tell the world about the Bataan Death March as well as the horrific conditions in Japanese prison camps, as well as the

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "The Fall of Corregidor," *Malacañan Palace Presidential Museum and Library*, malacanang.gov.ph, <http://malacanang.gov.ph/75587-fall-of-corregidor/#:~:text=On%20May%206%2C%201942%2C%20Corregidor,forces%20against%20the%20Japanese%20invasion.> (Accessed August 1, 2020).

²⁴ "1Lt Grenville Neil Porter," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56784868> (Accessed August 1, 2020).

atrocities committed.²⁵ For the POWs who remained behind, life was bleak. 750 prisoners were moved in early 1944 to begin laboring on Japanese airfields in different locations. Beginning on February 29, 1944, 650 officers and enlistees labored on an airfield at Lasang, while another 100 worked south of Davao.²⁶ On August 19, 1944 all 750 POWs marched, shoeless, to the Tabunco pier, where the next day they were packed into the holds of the ship, *Shinyo Maru*.

Five days earlier a Japanese naval message was intercepted on its way from Manila to Tokyo, in which it was noted that the *Shinyo Maru* was to be “put to urgent use by the Navy.”²⁷ This precipitous message placed the unknowing occupants of the transport ship in danger. The *Shinyo Maru* stopped in Zamboanga on August 24, and by that point the men were covered in dirt, suffering from heat rash and frequent blackouts. On September 7, hatch covers were “placed more closely together and secured by ropes to prevent lifting from below,” and they sailed for fourteen hours without an air raid alert.²⁸ At 4:37 p.m., Lt. Comdr. E.H. Howell, skipper of the U.S. submarine *Paddle*, sighted the convoy and prepared to fire two torpedoes.

1st Lt. John J. Morrett, a survivor of the *Shinyo Maru* sinking, recalled that when the convoy was hit, there was “a terrific explosion immediately followed by a second one,” with bleeding men “all over each other in mangled positions, arms. Legs, and bodies broken.”²⁹ Japanese soldiers who survived the blasts fired at any Americans swimming in the water or attempting to lift themselves up from the holds. Eighty-three men survived the torpedo attack, of the 750 aboard. 1st Lt. Porter was among the missing; his body was never found.

²⁵ J. Lukacs, *Escape From Davao*, World War II Database, ww2db.com, https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=338 (Accessed August 1, 2020).

²⁶ Lee A. Gladwin, “American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell,” *National Archives*, archives.gov., <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/hell-ships-1.html> (Accessed August 1, 2020).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Postwar Legacy

Porter posthumously received the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Prisoner of War Medal, and the Purple Heart.³⁰ He is memorialized at the Walls of the Missing, Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines, as well as the WSU Veterans Memorial. Porter was survived by his parents and both younger brothers. Sadly, his brother George died in 1949 of unknown causes at the age of 32, and his younger brother Warren Arthur, died less than two years later, in 1951.³¹

³⁰ “Grenville N. Porter,” *American Battle Monuments Commission*, abmc.gov, <https://www.abmc.gov/decendent-search/porter%3Dgrenville> (Accessed August 1, 2020).

³¹ “George Thomas Porter Jr.,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/163733733> (Accessed August 1, 2020); “Warren Arthur Porter,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/149344830> (Accessed August 1, 2020).