Ora Raymond Bolinger

The Fallen Cougars Project

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Context and Background

The story of Ora Raymond Bolinger is quite different from many of our other Fallen Cougars. It is fitting, then, that his background is very different as well. Unlike most of our Fallen Cougars who were born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Ora's story begins in the Midwest, in the tiny town of Argos, Indiana. While Ora Bolinger was born in Blue Island, Illinois and attended school there for a time, he spent the flower of his youth in Argos. Argos was the product of some good old fashioned small-town political manipulation and intrigue. The town of Sidney held the post office that served the local area, meaning that it would likely become the county seat when the towns were incorporated, and county lines drawn. After some clever political maneuvering the post office was moved to neighboring Fremont. However, the two townships consolidated into Argos, named after the ancient Greek city state made famous in Homer's Iliad. The town became a notable farming center and the crossroads for those continuing west using the Michigan Road.[1] It was in this crossroads town in Indiana that Ora Bolinger was born. It was the community that made him the kind of man that took up arms for the Republic in its time of need. The kind of man that defended his community and his country, and the kind of man that sacrificed his life so that others may live free.

Early Life

[1] Argos Public Library, History of Argos, Indiana. Located: https://argospubliclibrary.com/history-of-argos Accessed: August 2, 2022.

Ora was the first son of Oliver and Lois Bolinger. Born in Blue Island, Illinois, on September 15, 1924. According to the 1930 census the family grew apace in the 1920s. Edward Bolinger was born one year after Ora, followed by his sister Esther three years later, and the last member of the Bolinger brood, little Dorris, in 1931. The family also moved to the township of York, in Dupage County, Illinois likely for Oliver's career. Oliver Bolinger was a veteran of the first world war and worked as a mail clerk for the U.S. Government Railway Mail Service. Oliver's work supported a fine living for his family. They owned their own home in York township, valued at $8,000 in 1930 (approximately $140,000 in spending power today) outright.[2] The family were members of the Church of the Brethren, an anabaptist Christian denomination. Ora attended school in nearby Villa Park, Illinois before the family moved to Argos, Indiana.

Ora completed his last two years of high school in Argos and made the local newspapers with some regularity, though not always for good things. The family joined the local chapter of the Church of the brethren, located in nearby Walnut township. On August 29, 1940 Ora did a reading in front of the church's Friendship Class, his baby sister Doris did a reading as well, followed by their father, and Esther Bolinger played a piano solo for everyone.[3] On May 29, 1941 *The Argos Reflector* reported that "Week-End accidents Involve Argos Cars: Bolingers Collide with Indianapolis Auto; Mr and Mrs. Fish injured," detailing the car accident the Bolinger's suffered on their way to Sunday School, none of the Bolinger's were hurt beyond "slight bruises and much nervousness." On the plus side, a later article in the same paper noted that Ora was elected vice president of the Walnut Township 4H club that same weekend. And

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[2] United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. Located: https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/25855724:6224?tid=&pid=&queryId=5a389f62a4495bc47ba31d2292a4799f&_phsrc=xkp77&_phstart=successSource Accessed: August 2, 2022.

[3] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) August 29, 1940.

lastly it included the "shot of the week," a photograph of the High School band in snazzy new uniforms. Ora is in the back row on the far right of the photograph.[4] Ora once again found his way into the *Argos Reflector* on October 2, 1941. The article titled "Walnut Brethren Community News," held "A short business session. . . conducted by the President of the class, Ora Bolinger."[5] In another article detailing the town meeting conducted on November 27, 1941 "Mrs. O.E. Bolinger lead the meeting and gave a splendid report of the farm Bureau convention in Indianapolis, Nov. 13 and 14." At the end of the meeting "A play entitled 'When Duty Calls' was well given by the young people. Those taking part were Ione Albright as Phoebe, Gene Carithers, Zeke; Norma Pfeifer; Patty: and Ora Bolinger; Ronnie."[6] Ora became a track and field star for Argos high school. *The Argos Reflector* on April 23, 1942, reported that "two firsts by Ora Bolinger and one by Sid Wint weren't enough for Argos in the quadrangle track and field meet last Friday for county teams and Bourbon took the meet with 69 ½ points. 35 for Argos." That same paper also covered Ora's other prominent positions in school in the band. The article covered the spring concert in which "proceeds . . . are to be used to buy sweaters for seniors in the band." Which included first clarinet, Ora Bolinger.[7] Upon graduating from Argos High in June of 1942 Ora received "three sweaters as honors. . . One for being a member of the band for four years, the other two for track and softball."[8] Ora's life after high school would be as full and busy as his life was in high school.

Fort Wayne, ASTP, WSC, and War Years

[4] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) May 29, 1941.
[5] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) October 2, 1941.
[6] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) November 27, 1941.
[7] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) April 23, 1942.
[8] *The South Whitley Tribune* (South Whitley, Indiana) March 15, 1945.

After graduating from Argos High, Ora moved to Fort Wayne Indiana where he attended International Business College Fort Wayne. Unfortunately for Ora and many others, the world outside American borders was descending further and further into chaos. World War II in Europe had raged in Europe since Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. The fascist government, under the leadership of Austrian-born dictator Adolf Hitler, waged war throughout Europe. They conquered both Denmark and Norway in April of 1940, followed by Belgium, the Netherlands, and tiny Luxembourg in May of that same year. Most astonishingly the Germans managed to conquer France in just 39 days, following up that light-speed victory with a massive aerial campaign against the United Kingdom. In 1941 the Germans turned their military aims to the east, conquering Yugoslavia and Greece in April before betraying and invading the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. They then made a mistake they did not need to make. Largely to appease their Japanese allies and to satisfy Hitler's ideological fanaticism, but also with an eye to destabilizing American politics, Germany then declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941. When 1942 gave way to 1943 the United States was suddenly involved in the largest conflict in human history, in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Worse yet, the United States lacked a large military, and especially a well-trained officer corps to lead American troops into combat. It was with this deficiency in mind that the United States government launched the Army Specialized Training Program.

The government in need of junior officers, and universities across the country in dire need of students to avoid financial collapse, joined forces to create the ASTP. Intended to train soldiers, the programs were often less effective than advertised, oversold their abilities, and ultimately failed in their mission. The program was launched at the end of 1942 and implemented across many college campuses in 1943. Ora Raymond Bolinger was called up in

December of 1942. Ora's draft card listed his place of residence as Rural Route #1 in Argos, Indiana, telephone number 1861J. He was 5'11 and 157 pounds with brown eyes, brown hair, and a sallow complexion. He was assigned service number 35141312.[9]

Ora completed his basic training at Camp Kearns, Utah, as a clerk in the medical air corps. He was then selected for the Army Specialized Training Program, was transferred into an engineering unit, and began his ASTP training at Utah University, and then Washington State College.[10] ASTP training began on the Pullman campus in June of 1943. While there was supposed to be a clearly defined chain of command and class structure to separate the ASTP cadets from the traditional college students, such distinctions were more formal than real. Cadets like Ora took classes with WSC students, played in intramural sports leagues on campus, engaged in social events with the student body, and generally blended in the fabric of college life in Pullman. Unfortunately for Ora and the rest of the ASTP boys on the WSC campus, the military scrapped the ASTP program in early 1944 and scrambled to allocate the personnel from the programs to combat roles in Europe.

War and Death

Likely because of their supposed training in engineering, ASTP soldiers were shuffled into armored units, specifically as infantry attachments to the 8th armored, the 11th armored, and 70th Trailblazer units, all designated for front-line combat roles in Nazi controlled Europe. Ora was then sent to complete his new armored infantry training at Camp Cooke, California. Upon

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[9] United States of America, Office of the Selective Service, Ora Raymond Bolinger Draft Card. Located: https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/40547747:2238?tid=&pid=&queryId=5a389f62a4495bc47ba31d2292a4799f&_phsrc=xkp71&_phstart=successSource Accessed: August 2, 2022.

[10] *The South Whitley Tribune* (South Whitley, Indiana) March 15, 1945

completion of his infantry training the newly commissioned Private First Class Ora Bolinger was assigned to the 55th armored infantry battalion, attached to the 11th armored division, in General George Patton's famed third army. Pfc. Bolinger was sent overseas in September of 1944.[11]

It was not long after Ora and the 11th armored arrived in Europe that they were thrown headlong into the maelstrom of war. Nazi Germany was pressed from the West, South, and East by Allied forces. In one last attempt to break through allied lines in the west, Hitler and his military high command ordered the stockpiling of weapons, vehicles, tanks, fuel, artillery, and ammunition in northern Germany and Belgium. On December 16, 1944, the Third Reich hurled its resupplied forces against American lines in Belgium and the Netherlands with the coastal port city of Antwerp the primary objective. However, Ora Bolinger and the "Thunderbolt" Division spearheaded into the German advance outside the city of Bastogne, Belgium. The "Battle of the Bulge" as it was known, devolved into a brutal and visceral fight, with war crimes committed by the SS at the town of Malmedy, and members of the 11th armored retaliating at Chenogne. The 11th armored eventually stonewalled the German advance, and turned the German attack into an American counterattack, trapping German forces in a pincer between the Third and the First Army. On January 14 the German forces were near breaking point when Private First Class Ora Bolinger was killed near Bastogne.

[11] *The South Whitley Tribune* (South Whitley, Indiana) March 15, 1945.

Legacy:

Ora Raymond Bolinger Remembered

While Ora Bolinger was not a WSC student in the strictest definition of the word, he spent time on WSC's campus. He lived in Pullman, walked the same sidewalks in town, trudged up the same accursed hills to get to class on time. He studies with WSC students, and took part in the unique experience of what it is to be a Cougar, however briefly. This more than qualifies Ora for among his fallen cougar brethren. The community back in Indiana was informed of his demise and gave him proper treatment in the press. *The Argos Reflector* that so often carried his name during his time at Argos High School, ran one more article for him on February 1, 1945 headlined "PFC Ora Bolinger Killed in Belgium." The obituary described his life's journey from Illinois, to Indiana, to college in Fort Wayne, to military training in Utah, Washington, and California, and of course his sacrifice outside Bastogne. Memorial services were held at the Walnut Church of the Brethren on February 11, 1945, where he was buried at the tragic young age of 20.[12] Ora's brother Edward also served in the war as military police, he survived and went on to live a long life. Oliver spent 37 years working for the railroad before passing away at the age of 94, in 1993.[13] Though Ora's name is inscribed in places one might expect, like his headstone in Indiana, it is also inscribed here, in Pullman, Washington, and now in the pages of the memorial we call the Fallen Cougars Project. His name is emblazoned in golden letters on the World War II memorial here in Pullman, a place that has neither forgotten Ora Bolinger, nor the sacrifice he made so that the Cougars living today could know peace.

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[12] *The Argos Reflector* (Argos, Indiana) February 1, 1945, "PFC Ora Bolinger Killed in Belgium."
[13] *The South Bend Tribune* (South Bend, Indiana) November 24, 1993.