Robert Lachlan Campbell

The Fallen Cougars Project

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The modern city of Spokane is a sprawling and continuously growing metropole. While the state of Washington is a singular political unit, the cascade mountains that divide the state into eastern and western regions have had a serious impact on the development of the state over time. While the city of Olympia is the recognized political capital of Washington State, people living east of the cascades only pay it nominal attention. "East-siders" are much more likely to recognize Spokane as the economic and political hub of their region. Today Spokane is the de facto capital of eastern Washington's "Inland Empire." Many towns sprouted up around Spokane in the late nineteenth century as the city grew into the hub of the region and a nexus for rail lines. The tiny town of Spangle, Washington was one such town. Established just twenty miles south of Spokane as a farming community, Spangle's population never exceeded the high-water mark of 331, reached in the 1900 census. U.S. Route 195 showed some promise in maybe allowing the town to grow. Route 195 was an important North-South highway originally constructed as gravel roads that connected the small towns of the region to Spokane since 1898 before being made into a legitimate highway in 1913.[1] Unfortunately, the town was later bypassed in a restructuring of the road systems meaning the people of Spangle still had their highway, but it was not going to be a throughway for travelers. This tiny farming community on the outskirts of the capital of the Inland Empire was the place where Robert Lachlan Campbell grew up, the community that

[1] Otis W. Freeman, "Early Wagon Roads in the Inland Empire," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly,* (October 1954), vol. 45 no. 4. 127 – 128.

shaped him into the man he became, the kind of man that did incredibly dangerous counterintelligence work in the deadliest war in human history.

On March 4, 1923, Helen E. Campbell gave birth to her only son, Robert Lachlan Campbell. By 1930 the small family lived on Bradshaw Wells Road, in now non-existent "Pioneer Township" near Spangle, Washington. John J. Campbell and Helen had been married for eight years. John's father was born in Canada, Helen's mother was born in Germany, and yet somehow their children ended up in rural Eastern Washington. Like most people living in this region, John Campbell was working on a local wheat farm.[2] By 1940 the family was living in Spangle, Robert was seventeen-years-old and finishing high school. John now listed himself as a "farmer" working in "his own employ," presumably this means the family purchased its own farm in Spangle sometime between 1930 – 1940.[3] After completing high school in Spangle Robert decided he wanted to continue his education and enrolled in Eastern Washington College of Education, but quickly decided to transfer to nearby Washington State College in Pullman, Washington.

Robert arrived on Campus in Pullman in 1940, where he is listed as majoring in education, and is listed as a member of the "Men's Physical Education" school in the WSC 1940 yearbook, *The Chinook*.[4] According to newspapers and letters of those that knew Robert in his

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[2] National Archives of the United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. (Located:https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/6224/images/4547532_00393?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=112675576 Accessed: August 3, 2021).

[3] National Archives of the United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. (Located: https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2442/images/m-t0627-04363-00441?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=65089569 Accessed: August 3, 2021).

[4] Washington State College, "Chinook" (1940), 284. (Located:https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/chinook/id/27384/rec/41 Accessed: August 3, 2021).

time at WSC he was well-liked and respected by his peers on campus. *The Spokane Chronicle* reported that Robert was a member of the Theta Chi Fraternity on campus.[5] After Robert's death in World War II, Dr. E.O. Holland, President of Washington State College during Robert's time on campus, wrote the Campbell's that "Since I was President of W.S.C. until a few months ago I knew Robert during the three years he was a student at our institution, and it is a personal grief to me to learn of his death. He was a fine fellow, a young man of superior ability and promise. But both of you must not forget to be proud of what Robert has done for his country."[6] Robert was just one year away from graduation when global events turned what should have been his senior year as a Washington State Cougar into his first year in the United States Army Counter-Intelligence Corps.

World War II in Europe began when 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 and snapping up North Africa from the French and British in the process. They followed up those light-speed victories 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 colossal Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. They then made a mistake one of the most

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[5] *Spokane Chronicle* (Spokane, Washington), "W.S.C. Service Flag Has Two New Stars," May 12, 1945. (Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/563606579/?terms=Robert%20L.%20Campbell&match=1 Accessed: August 3, 2021).

[6] C. James Quann Manuscripts. Willard D. Lasalle Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman, WA. Letter from E.O. Holland to Mr. and Mrs. John C. Campbell. May 18, 1945.

famous mistakes in military history. 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. Because of the nature of this conflict, it was not simply the military defeat of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, or Imperial Japan that weighed on the minds of policy-makers and military men. The question of what to do about the pernicious ideologies of fascism and Nazism, how to combat them in the field during the war, and how to deal with them after the war became an area of intense focus for Allied command. As Axis regimes collapsed and Axis government officials, party functionaries, war criminals, and ideological zealots fled their sinking ship someone had to track them down, monitor them, and stop ultimately stop them before they could do more damage. It was lucky, then, that men like Robert Lachlan Campbell joined the American Military.

Robert enlisted in the United States Army on February 14, 1942, a little more than a month after the Pearl Harbor Attack.[7] He listed his hometown as Spangle, Washington, and his phone number simply as the "Spangle Ex." Presumably the whole town of spangle had a telephone number. He listed his employment as "student at W.S.C.". He was 6'0 feet tall, 180 pounds with blue eyes and brown hair. In "Identifying scars/Marks" he wrote "Scar on top of Left Wrist," growing up on a rural farm in the 1930's is a contact sport after all. Robert joined the United States Army and was assigned to 4th Corps of the United States 5th Army, 204th Counterintelligence Detachment, Headquarters Division. For information on this rather obscure military specialization I turned to Colonel Chris Heatherly, who is graciously assisting the Fallen

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[7] National Archives at Washington D.C.: *Application for Headstones for United States Military Veterans*, Robert L. Campbell, February 1949.
(Located:https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2375/images/40050_2421401757_0014-00913?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=214979 Accessed: August 2, 2021).

Cougars Project with intimate knowledge of the inner-workings of the United States military. Colonel Heatherly informed the Project that the Counterintelligence Corps were initially used for domestic wartime (spies, saboteurs) investigations before being sent to combat zones. It is likely that Robert spent some time conducting investigations in the United States, tracking down leads on American citizens suspected of crimes against the state. However, when the United States found itself in possession of sizeable swaths of formerly Nazi and Fascist held territory these CIC units were sent into Europe, performing every duty required, ranging from combat roles to the exact jobs for which they were trained back home: investigating and tracking people.

By mid-1943 the Allies had successfully pushed the Germans, the Fascist French Forces, and the Italians out of North Africa. They subsequently launched invasions of Sicily and the Italian Peninsula. This so much territory once held by Mussolini's fascist government now under Allied control, the 204th CIC detachment had their work cut out for them searching out fascist party members and others that required arrest. When Robert and his men were not conducting operations as "Special Agents" for the CIC, they were attached to active infantry roles and served in frontline fighting. Robert was so effective on the battlefield and in his counter-espionage work that he was awarded the Bronze Star for valor in combat after his death in 1945. *The Spokesman-Review* newspaper in Spokane, Washington ran an article about Robert's military service entitled "Spangle Private Cited for Valor," Robert had in fact been promoted to Sergeant, but regardless, the article reads "With the Fifth Army in Italy . . . Robert L. Campbell of Spangle, Wash., who served as a special agent in the Fifth Army during the Italian campaign has been awarded the bronze star . . . for meritorious service." The article specifies that the citation for the Bronze Star shows that "He consistently demonstrated outstanding qualities of courage under fire, leadership, initiative and sound judgment." The citation also noted Robert's

"initiative, ability, and devotion to duty under adverse conditions . . . deserving of praise and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the armed forces of the United States."[8] When Robert was not in combat, or hunting fascist ideologues, he somehow found the time to meet and fall in love with one "Jane Terry Ellis of Louisville" Kentucky. Jane Terry Ellis served in the Women's Army Corps in Italy. The Women's Army Corps performed a myriad of functions from medical treatment to logistical support, doing their part to beat back the Germans and Italians. *The Spokesman-Review* again reported in 1945 that Jane was Robert's fiancé, and they were going to be married presumably after the war ended and they both returned to the United States.[9]

Unfortunately for the Allies, the Germans and remaining fascist Italians had managed to stonewall the Allie advance up the Italian Peninsula in 1943. Fighting continued throughout the length of the war to keep as many Nazi troops as possible in the South, and away from the Eastern front and the Western Front where Soviet and Allie forces battled their way to Berlin. In 1945 the Allies devised another offensive, dubbed Operation Grapeshot, that required a joint American-British-Polish assault on the Italian city of Bologna, the seizure of which would allow for attacks on Venice and Milan. The attack on Bologna began at 4:00 P.M. on April 9, with the city falling to the Allied forces on April 24, 1945. The last of the German forces in Italy were encircled and surrendered on April 29, 1945, and Adolf Hitler shot himself in a Bunker under Berlin on April 30, 1945. However, in a most tragic twist of the knife for our Fallen Cougar

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[8] *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Washington) "Spangle Private Cited for Valor," September 1, 1945. (Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/568251020/?terms=Robert%20L.%20Campbell&match=1 Accessed: August 2, 2021).

[9] *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Washington) "Memorial Services Honor Spangle Man," May 19, 1945. (Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/569349468/?terms=Robert%20L.%20Campbell&match=1 Accessed: August 2, 2021).

community, Robert Lachlan Campbell had been killed in Operation Grapeshot just six days before Hitler's suicide, April 24, 1945.

Robert Lachlan Campbell: Remembrance and Legacy

News of Robert's death so close to the end of the war was staggering to his family, his poor fiancé, and the local community. *The Spokesman-Review* detailed the memorial services held for him:

> Tribute to the memory of Sgt. Robert L. Campbell of Spangle, Wash., who died April 24 from wounds received in actions in Italy, was paid at services Thursday at First Presbyterian Church. Several Hundred heard messages by the Rev. Paul Calhoun, pastor, and Chaplain Charles B. Smith of Geiger field. Sgt. Waldo Winger sand. Cpl. Don Pratt blew taps. Miss Alive Green was the organist. Flowers which banked the front of the church were sent to Baxter and Fort Wright hospitals later. Sgt. Campbell was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Campbell of spangle, and grandson of J.D. Campbell of Spokane. Present at the service was his fiancée, Miss Jane Terry Ellis of Louisville, Ky., who met him while serving with the WAC in Italy.[10]

The *Spokane Chronicle* also reported Robert's tragic death, alongside another Fallen Cougar, Lt. Cameron Daggett, who died April 8 taking the island of Okinawa in the Pacific Theater. In an article entitled "W.S.C. Service Flag Has Two New Stars," the *Chronicle* reported that "Sgt. Campbell was reported killed in action in Italy." Read the articles "He attended Washington State College and was in his senior year when he left to enter the service in 1942."[11]

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[10] *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Washington) "Memorial Services Honor Spangle Man," May 19, 1945. (Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/569349468/?terms=Robert%20L.%20Campbell&match=1 Accessed: August 2, 2021).

[11] *The Spokane Chronicle* (Spokane, Washington), "W.S.C. Service Flag Has Two New Stars," May 12, 1945. (Located: https://www.newspapers.com/image/563606579/?terms=Robert%20L.%20Campbell&match=1Accessed: August 2, 2021).

Dr. E.O. Holland, President of Washington State College, and the rest of the faculty and administration at WSC set about making sure that no student that lost their life fighting for the United States during the war was forgotten, and that their families knew that WSC appreciated them. The WSC administration produced brochures, plaques, pamphlets, and other pieces to memorialize the students that had fallen in service. Dr. Holland also engaged in correspondence with the family members. Exchanging letters, and providing them with framed poems, and later an ornate frame to place a picture of their lost loved one in and to cherish in the family. In one such letter to the Campbell family written in May of 1945 Dr. Holland said that "I hasten to extend to you my sincere sympathy in the death of your dear son, Sgt. Robert L. Campbell. The 'Spokesman Review' on May 9 stated that Robert was killed in action in Italy April 24, 19345. The fact that Robert served for many months in the Counterintelligence Corps is definite proof that he was given important assignments to carry out."[12]

Robert's body was returned home to Spangle in 1949, he is buried at the Spangle Cemetery, Plot 3, Line 510, Section E.[13] The evidence of Robert's importance and place of affection in his community is clearly evidenced by the number of remembrances, kind gestures, written words, ceremonies, medals, and more that were produced after his death. But perhaps the most striking gesture is to be found at Washington State College. Robert's name is emblazoned in gold letters upon the World War II memorial at his alma mater, today called Washington State

[12] C. James Quann Manuscripts. Willard D. Lasalle Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries, Pullman, WA. Letter from E.O. Holland to Mr. and Mrs. John C. Campbell. May 18, 1945.

[13] Robert Lachlan Campbell Burial Information (Located: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/33658068/robert-l.-campbell/photo Accessed: August 2, 2021).

University. His name is listed alongside his fallen cougar brother-in-arms who gave their lives in defense of their country, and in opposition to the vilest of tyrannies.