

Horace Sumner Corbett Jr.

Horace Sumner Corbett Jr. was born to Horace Sr. and Alice Corbett in Tiller, Oregon in 1922. A letter sent to the WSC registrar from Horace Sr. in response to a correspondence letter sent to the Corbett's from former WSC President E.O. Holland revealed that prior to attending WSC, Horace Jr. lived exclusively in Tiller, a Southern Oregon town with a population of less than 1,000 and East of Roseburg.¹ Corbett was involved in football through high school before attending WSC from the spring of 1940 to the fall of 1941. Horace Sr.'s letter to the WSC registrar also referenced his work as a beef cattle rancher in Tiller, which was and still is almost exclusively a ranching town. Tiller was put up for sale in April 2017 and was sold to a couple from Ashland, Oregon, about a 90-minute drive Southwest from Tiller, for \$3.85 million dollars in June.² The town is driven by its logging and ranching community, which both Horace Sr. and Horace Jr. participated in on the family's ranch. Once a town of over 1,000 residents, Tiller's estimated population currently is less than 300 people.³ Horace Jr. attended the now-defunct Tiller Secondary School from 1937-1940, where his participation on the football team was documented in a roster displayed in a newspaper clipping from *The News-Review*, the local publication based out of Roseburg, in 1939.⁴ Tiller Secondary School has since been converted to Tiller Elementary School.⁵ WSU registration records indicated that Horace Jr. enrolled in WSC in the summer of 1940 upon graduation from Tiller Secondary School.

¹ "The Registrar: State College of Washington." Horace Corbett Sr. to E.O. Holland. June 16, 1945. =, Tiller, Oregon.

² Eastman, Janet. "Guess who's buying tiny Tiller, Oregon?" *The Oregonian*, 9 June 2017, www.oregonlive.com/trending/2017/03/buy_oregon_town_tiller_photos.html.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

⁵ Eastman, 2017.



While at WSC, Horace Jr. pursued a degree in general studies and was a member of the Kappa Sigma fraternity.⁶ Corbett's involvement in football coexisted with his life as a fraternity man, as the 1940 edition of the *Chinook Yearbook* documented his participation on the Kappa Sigma intramural football team, which was crowned the champion among fraternity and

⁶ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

residence hall teams.⁷ Corbett had pledged Kappa Sigma at the time of the intramural championship and is listed as a freshman member in the 1941 edition of the *Chinook Yearbook*.⁸ Corbett remained tied to his fraternity even after his death, as Kappa Sigma collected his life insurance.⁹ Corbett was married on July 26, 1942 to Elizabeth Heffner in Phoenix, Arizona.¹⁰ The couple had a son, James Ryon Corbett, on Oct. 19, 1943.¹¹

Horace Jr. did not graduate from WSC, as he was accepted into the Army Air Forces on Nov. 7, 1941.¹² Between high school football, his fraternity life and intramural sport participation at WSC, the social and extracurricular opportunities pursuing a college degree at WSC presented, one could argue that Horace Jr. did not have to enlist prior to Pearl Harbor. His life appeared outwardly great, and, as Horace Sr.'s correspondence letter hints at, he remained close with his parents. Yet perhaps early victories by the Wehrmacht and the prevalence of fascist regimes in the news media grew on Horace Jr and ousted him, like other U.S. infantrymen and servicemen, to enlist early. Horace Sr.'s correspondence letter indicated that Horace Jr. went through basic training in Tulare and Merced, California, before earning his wings in July 31, 1942 in Lake Field, Arizona, where he was also a cadet commander. Horace Sr. did not explicitly state where Horace Jr. met Heffner in his correspondence letter, but it is likely Horace Jr. met Heffner while stationed in Lake Field, as James was born in the Phoenix area. A Summer Session edition of the *Daily Evergreen* newspaper, the student-run publication and voice of WSC

⁷ Schell, Gary E. *The Chinook Yearbook* . Vol. 41. Pullman, WA: Associated Students Washington State University, 1940.

⁸ Schell, Gary E. *The Chinook Yearbook* . Vol. 42. Pullman, WA: Associated Students Washington State University, 1941.

⁹ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

and WSU since 1895, published on July 14 announced Horace Jr.'s departure to the AAC.¹³ An edition of the *Daily Evergreen* published on March 30, 1943 confirmed that Corbett rose to the rank of first lieutenant with the AAC.¹⁴ The edition was dedicated to alumni serving in the army or navy in the European and Pacific theatres.

While in Lake Field, Horace Sr. said his son received much publicity for his “photogenic personality,” which was in turn used for various propaganda releases.¹⁵ As such, his first assignment with the AAC was at Headquarters, Washington D.C. for a photoshoot. Horace Sr. said the work “palled” on Horace Jr., giving way to his son taking on a temporary assignment at a Florida air base, where he “was sent to various places in the country to return with planes for the particular base to which he was attached.”¹⁶

¹³ "Former student departs for AAC." *The Daily Evergreen*, July 14, 1942.

¹⁴ "Special Service Issue Asks for News of Men in Uniform." *The Daily Evergreen*, March 30, 1943.

<http://content.libraries.wsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/evergreens/id/16180/rec/1>.

¹⁵ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

CORBETT, HORACE SUMNER, JR.
Lafayette, California
General, 1940-41

HORACE CORBETT sends a card announcing his graduation from the U. S. Army Air Corps. Training Center at Lukes Field, Arizona. Congratulations Lieutenant Corbett!

After graduating from the AAC, Horace Jr. was ordered as a co-pilot on what Horace Sr. described as a "Navy type" plane visiting Brazil, and because of the success of the operation, Horace Jr. was allowed his pick of fighter schools to visit and train at upon his return.¹⁷ He was also made a first lieutenant as a part of completing the operation.¹⁸ Horace Sr. said that details

¹⁷ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

¹⁸ "Corbett earns rank of 1st Lieutenant." The Daily Evergreen, July 31, 1942.

are unknown about what events led to Horace Jr.'s success on the mission and what it entailed. Horace Jr., according to Horace Sr., visited several fighter schools before deciding on the P-51 Mustang training base in Bartow, Florida.¹⁹ On completion of this course, he was attached to the 15th Air Force.²⁰ The 15th Air Force was established on Nov. 1, 1943 and stationed across the Mediterranean and Italy, covering the Balkans and South Germany. The unit also was responsible for bomber missions and air cover in France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia as needed.²¹

Horace Sr. said of his son, "As we understood it, he could fly anything."²² Horace Jr. trained as a fighter pilot flying P-51 Mustangs, however, Horace Sr.'s correspondence letter indicated in the bombing missions Horace Jr. participated in and at the time of his death, no P-51's were available. But because of his versatility as a pilot, he flew P-38's instead.²³ Likewise, Horace Jr. was instructed to fly the P-38 instead of the P-51, whose bases he originally trained at, because of its longer-range capabilities and wider wingspan, which was crucial for navigating bombing missions over the Alpine Mountain Range.²⁴

Horace Jr. was a member of the 71st fighter squad in the 15th Air Force.²⁵ He participated in a number of bombing missions over Germany and Yugoslavia before being shot down in an early-morning air raid over Germany on Jan. 6, 1944.²⁶ He was declared missing a

¹⁹ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Letter from the Registrar. Information From Registrar's Files. June 4, 1945. Raw data. Washington State College, Pullman.

²⁶ "The Registrar: State College of Washington," 1945.

day later before being declared dead on May 15, 1944.²⁷ Horace Jr. is buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, Nettuno, Italy.²⁸ Corbett was awarded a Purple Heart, American Campaign Medal, and World War II Victory Medal for his service.²⁹

INFORMATION FROM REGISTRAR'S FILES

Name of Deceased HORACE SUMNER CORBETT, Jr. - Lt.

Parent's Name Mr. and Mrs. Horace Corbett

Parent's Address Spring Hill Farm, Tiller, Oregon

College Course General Dates of Attendance 1940-41 Graduation? ---

Source of Information Letter from the mother

Remarks Lt. Corbett was killed over Germany during early raids there.

6/3/45

Various publications in Pullman commemorated Horace Jr.'s service following his death. *Powwow 1945: September (WSU Alumni Newsletters)* shared an obituary on Horace Jr., reading, "Lt. Horace S. Corbett, Jr'., who attended W.S.C. in 1940-41, was killed over Germany during early raids, according to word reached the campus this summer. Lt. Corbett's home was in Oregon." Similarly, *Powwow 1946: February* lists his hometown and year of death in an insert dedicated to servicemen/women who were killed during WWII, entitled "They Gave Their Lives."³⁰ A football program from the 1945 Apple Cup list's Corbett's name as one of the

²⁷ "Horace S. Corbett." Honorstates.org. January 7, 1944.
<http://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=18182>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "They Gave Their Lives." *Powwow*, 1946, February 1946, 16.

estimated 300 WSC servicemen killed in WWII combat.³¹ The 1986 edition of *Hilltopics*, the former campus magazine, references Horace Jr. as one of the 300 former students who were killed in WWII.³² The magazine also listed Corbett as one of the fallen servicemen from WSU/WSC whose name was to be inscribed on the WSU War Veteran's Memorial, which was still in development at the time.³³



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³¹ "Tribute." *Football 1945: Washington vs. WSC*, November 24, 1945, 6-7.

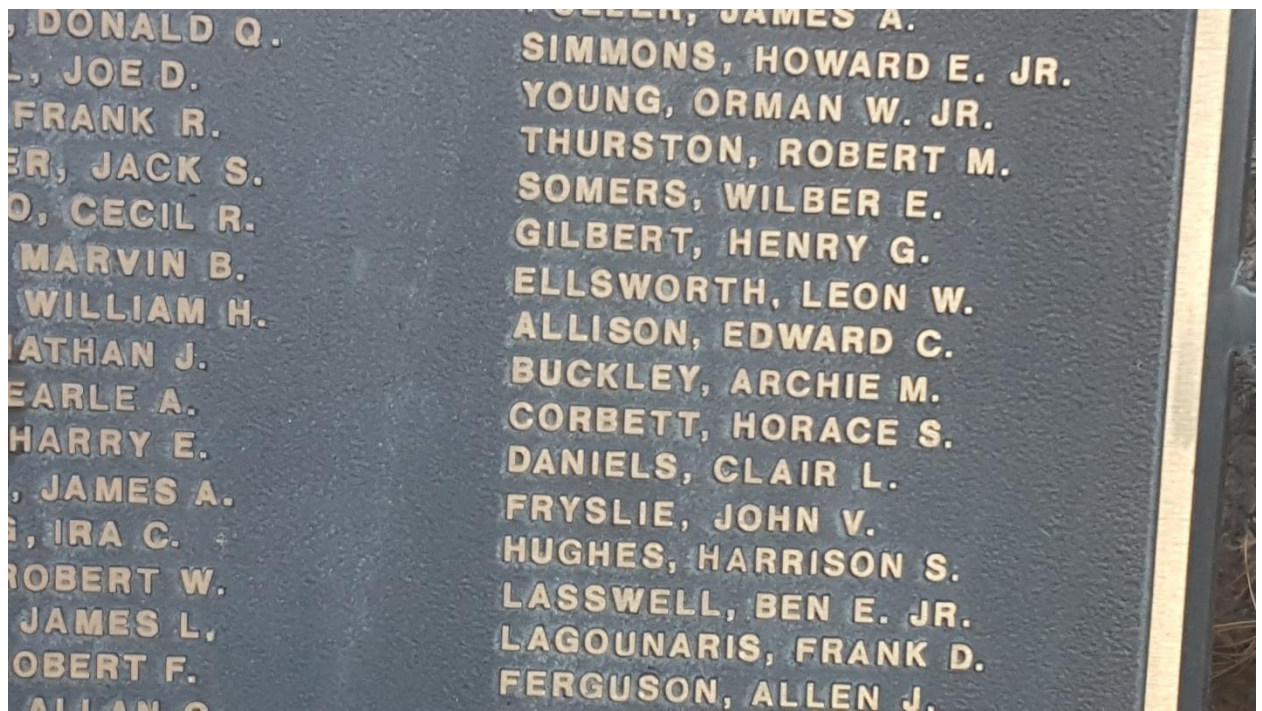
³² "WSU War Veteran's Memorial in Development." *Hilltopics*, October 1986, 18-19.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Johnson, Braden. *WSU War Veteran's Memorial: WWII*. December 6, 2017. WSU WW2 Community Service Project, Pullman.

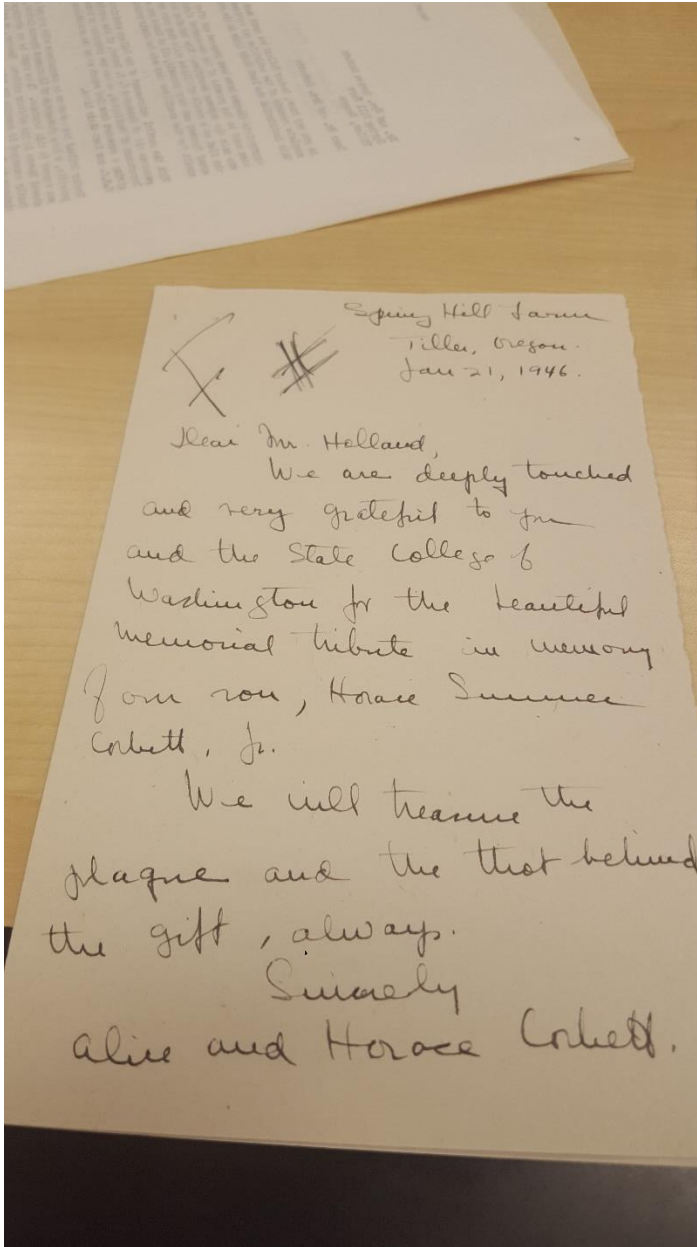


³⁵ Johnson, Braden. WSU War Veteran's Memorial: Horace S. Corbett. December 6, 2017. WSU WW2 Community Service Project, Pullman.



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³⁶ Johnson, Braden. WSU War Veteran's Memorial: Horace S. Corbett (close-up). December 6, 2017. WSU WW2 Community Service Project, Pullman.



Horace Jr.'s life story, military service, and death details reference several prevailing themes that I have observed over the course of my research. The first, with regards to his early life in a rural town well south of the college he briefly attended, is that he, like those he served with, was clearly impacted by the fact that his first 18 years were sandwiched between the two world wars. Horace Jr. was born less than four years after the German surrender in WWI and graduated from Tiller Secondary School less than a year after Germany invaded Poland in

September 1939. As such, it is entirely plausible to assume that his life story teaches us, in retrospect, that higher education and other extracurricular activities outside of family life were second to military service. This is confirmed by Horace Jr.'s acceptance into the AAC exactly one month prior to Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and after little more than a year spent at WSC. The second of these themes harkens on the ways in which the Second World War entirely underscored all other activities and organizations present on college campuses. Entire sections of the Daily Evergreen newspaper were dedicated to the war effort in the Pacific and Europe with special consideration given to servicemen from WSC. Likewise, the content included in the Chinook Yearbooks of this era revealed somewhat sparse participation in campus events, exemplified by Horace Jr.'s absence of on-campus leadership positions beyond membership in Kappa Sigma and intramural football participation. From this, I gathered that Horace Jr., like so many other servicemen across the country in a similar position, viewed his time in college as means to an education that possibly granted him the opportunity to start a career opposite from his pre-college upbringing, yet saw his inevitable service as his true purpose and calling post high school. Thirdly, Horace and Alice Corbett's dialogue with WSC President E.O. Holland dramatizes the seriousness with which college faculty and officials attempted to pay respects to students who served in either world war and were killed in action. Granted, WSC's campus had a population of little more than 4,000 students during WWII, but it illustrates the degree to which combat influenced the career paths of students as well as the reverence professors and other parties held toward colleagues who devoted their lives to the war effort, even if it meant suspending a higher education. Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, the various memorialization and clippings Horace Jr.'s service was documented in, both immediately after the Allied victory and more than 40 years following the Axis surrender, highlight how the

profound loss of life and mannerisms with which afflicted family members and higher education institutions like WSC dealt with it enable WWII to remain relevant and celebrated nearly 80 years after its beginnings. Further, the aforementioned memorials and tokens of remembrance Horace Jr. is associated with draw on both local and national perspectives, in the sense that the United States' endured the same conundrum at all college campuses: does a student at an opportune age to serve pursue an education and stay out of the war, or do threads of duty, honor, and country take precedence? More than anything, Horace Jr.'s life and military service put into perspective the notion that WWII impacted every facet of American society, whether it be in the buildup to the outbreak of war, ideologies and behaviors displayed on the home front, or the willingness to step away from college, marriage, and other leadership opportunities to serve even, or especially, facing the possibility of death.

Tiller, Oregon
August 30, 1948.

Mr. F.O.Holland, President Emeritus,
Washington State College
Pullman, Washington:

Attention: Mrs. T.S.Meade

Dear Doctor Holland:

Mrs. Meade's letter of August 17th was indeed interesting; and I am most appreciative of Washington State College's interest in perpetuating the memory of its students who lost their lives in the second World War.

Under separate cover I am mailing the only real photograph of 1st. Lt. Horace S. Corbett, Jr. All others are snapshots, and most of them not in any semblance of uniform. I am certain you will see that this photograph is returned to me as it is the only one I have. I have written his name on the back to facilitate identification.

Sincerely yours,

Horace S. Corbett

Horace S. Corbett
Tiller, Oregon

Apr. 7-49

Tiller, Oregon
August 29, 1948.

Dr. E.C. Holland, President Emeritus,
Washington State College
Pullman, Washington

Mr. Horace S. Corbett
Tiller
Oregon Attention: Mrs. T.S. Meade

Dear Doctor Holland:

Dear Mr. Corbett:
Mrs. Meade's letter of August 17th was indeed interesting and I am most appreciative of Washington State College's interest in the project. We now have packaged and ready to send to you via registered mail the photograph of Horace Corbett, Jr. We want to thank you for your kind cooperation in furnishing us with this material, and I hope you find the contents of the package in order. In the event I have failed to return any material you sent us, please advise immediately. I have been extremely careful with the photographs and data furnished us, and I so hope no discrepancies occur. However, do not hesitate to notify me if such is the case.

I have written him down on the card. Just as soon as additional funds are available, we will pursue the printing of the brochure. You will be notified when it is off the press, and a copy will be forwarded to you.

Thanking you again for your kind cooperation, I am
Sincerely,
Mrs. T. S. Meade

Mrs. T. S. Meade
Secretary to Doctor Holland
Horace S. Corbett
Tiller, Oregon

M/

After visiting several of the fighter schools, he decided on the Mustang training base at Bartow, Florida. On his completion of this course, he was attached to the 15th Air Force.

His full name and number:
1st Lieut. Horace S. Corbett, Jr.
C-727415
71st Fighter Squad. 1st Fighter Group,
15th Air Force.

He was married July 26th, 1942 to Elizabeth Heffner at Phoenix, Arizona. A son James Ryan Corbett, born on October 19th, 1943.

These details are sketchy, and as you can notice, we know very little about his Army career, his missions, his final battle, and his death, and final resting place. His wife too, knows little more, all such knowledge being mostly that of hearsay. Of course, his earlier career is well known, but as we understand it, it will be after Yugoslavia is opened up more before anything further may be learned.

We have written Mrs. Day, Sr., and thank you for forwarding her address. We cannot help but be very grateful to F/O Robert W. Day, for his prisoner's card to us said that he was endeavoring in all the camps he was held to learn more about our son.

Very truly yours,

H. S. Corbett
H. S. Corbett,
Tiller, Oregon



References

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2. Schell, Gary E. *The Chinook Yearbook* . Vol. 41. Pullman, WA: Associated Students
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3. Schell, Gary E. *The Chinook Yearbook* . Vol. 42. Pullman, WA: Associated Students
Washington State University, 1941.
4. Letter from the Registrar. Information From Registrar's Files. June 4, 1945. Raw data.
Washington State College, Pullman.
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March 30, 1943.

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6. "Former student departs for AAC." *The Daily Evergreen*, July 14, 1942.
7. "Corbett earns rank of 1st Lieutenant." *The Daily Evergreen*, July 31, 1942.
8. "They Gave Their Lives." *Powwow, 1946*, February 1946, 16.
9. "Tribute." *Football 1945: Washington vs. WSC*, November 24, 1945, 6-7.
10. WSU War Veteran's Memorial in Development." *Hilltopics*, October 1986, 18-19.
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15. Johnson, Braden. WSU War Veteran's Memorial: Horace S. Corbett (close-up). December 6, 2017. WSU WW2 Community Service Project, Pullman.

*All other embedded photos of Horace Jr. and correspondence letters are courtesy of WSU Libraries and belong to the Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) section of the Glenn Terrell Library.