

## Malcolm V. Fortier Biography

### Pre-WSC Background

Malcolm V. Fortier's story is a remarkable one, as he is included among the names of former Washington State College (WSC) students who perished in World War II on the WSU Veterans Memorial. However, as I began my research into his life, I found that Fortier did not die as a prisoner of war during World War II and in fact, he lived until 1957. Under normal circumstances, Fortier would be removed from the Fallen Cougars project because the purpose here is to honor the war dead. After due consideration, I believe that Fortier's story is one that needs to be told. One could say he was among the Fallen, but came back against impossible odds to finish his life in the town he was born.

Malcolm Vaughn Fortier, also known as Robert "Bob" Malcolm Vaughn Fortier, was born on June 23, 1890 in Spokane, Washington to William H. Fortier and Ida G. Fortier. Malcolm was their second child; he had an older sister, Dorothy, born in 1888. William, who was born in Canada but moved to the United States in 1885, worked for Great Northern Railroad in Spokane, where he began his career as a clerk and worked his way up to a general officer.<sup>1</sup> He and Ida divorced in late 1915 or early 1916 after thirty-one years of marriage, and he married Harriet Eaton on May 27, 1916.<sup>2</sup> This union produced one child, Malcolm's half-sister, Jeanne, born in 1918.

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<sup>1</sup> "1900 United States Federal Census for William H Fortier;" "1930 United States Federal Census for William H Fortier," *Ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=6224&h=112684431&indiv=try&o\\_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=7602](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=6224&h=112684431&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=7602) (Accessed May 20, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> "Washington, Marriage Records, 1854-2013 for William Fortier," *Ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2378&h=5650988&indiv=try&o\\_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=7602](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2378&h=5650988&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=7602) (Accessed May 20, 2020); "Much Property in Divorce Suit," *Spokane Chronicle*, November 9, 1915. Ida referred to herself as "widowed" in each census she participated in for the remainder of her life.

In a September 4, 1906 newspaper article in the *Spokane Chronicle*, both Fortier and his sister, Dorothy, were the subject because of a surprise party given at the home of their father, W.H. Fortier. The party acknowledged the organizing of a club called “The Jolly Ten,” of which Fortier and Dorothy claimed membership.<sup>3</sup> He also served as the class organizations editor for the South Central High School newspaper, the *Orange and Black*, as well as its editor-in-chief.<sup>4</sup> Fortier acted in school plays, including playing the part of Burton, a young businessman, in “The Ulster.” He was a member of the senior B class awarded the baseball championship for the school year of 1908, where he played left field.<sup>5</sup> Fortier graduated from South Central High School, later Lewis and Clark High School, in 1909.<sup>6</sup>

### **WSC Experience**

Fortier began his university career at Whitman College, where he played basketball, baseball, tennis, and was captain of the football reserves.<sup>7</sup> He was a member of the Delta Phi Delta fraternity at Whitman. His athletic career cut short due to a surgical operation, he transferred to WSC in 1911.<sup>8</sup> He was a member of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, an organization founded at the Virginia Military Institute in 1865 based upon “Christian, not Greek, principles.”<sup>9</sup> During his sophomore year at WSC, he also participated in the Freshmen-Sophomore Rules Committee, Dramatic club, and Masque and Dagger, a student organization

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<sup>3</sup> “‘Jolly Ten’ Club Formed,” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 4, 1906.

<sup>4</sup> “Miss Falk is Editor,” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 21, 1908.

<sup>5</sup> “Senior B Class Awarded School Championship,” *Spokane Chronicle*, June 19, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> “Malcolm Fortier To State School,” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 27, 1911.

<sup>7</sup> “Malcolm Fortier To State School,” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 27, 1911.

<sup>8</sup> “Malcolm Fortier To State School,” *Spokane Chronicle*, September 27, 1911; James G. Adams, *Review of the American Forces in Germany*, 1921, 241.

<sup>9</sup> Adams, *Review of the American Forces in Germany*, 241; “Why ATO?”, Alpha Tau Omega, *omegafi.com*, [https://websites.omegafi.com/omegaws/alphatauomegawsu/about-us/why-ato/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1590040532.1531579494476318359375](https://websites.omegafi.com/omegaws/alphatauomegawsu/about-us/why-ato/?doing_wp_cron=1590040532.1531579494476318359375) (Accessed May 20, 2020).

providing theatre-based opportunities.<sup>10</sup> During the summer of 1912, Fortier worked with the Great Northern railway engineers on the Wenatchee-Oroville line.<sup>11</sup>

Fortier achieved the rank of Cadet Colonel in the Washington State college cadets. The cadets consisted of six companies, accompanied by a “band of 40 pieces,” under the command of Lieutenant C.R. Bennett of the Seventeenth United States infantry.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the cadets was to give young men experience with military life, and they performed maneuvers, parades, entrenching work, and staged battles. They also performed competitive drills, with medals awarded to the best-trained privates and non-commissioned officers.<sup>13</sup> He graduated from WSC with a Bachelor of Science degree in horticulture in 1914.

Fortier married Miss Verda Davidson on April 15, 1916. It was the second marriage for the widowed Verda, an accomplished musician and vocalist.<sup>14</sup> The *Spokane Daily Chronicle* described Fortier as one of the “most prominent of the graduates from Washington State college,” and noted he worked at the Lincoln Trust Company.<sup>15</sup> The wedding color palette consisted of pink and white, with the dining room hosting the wedding banquet decorated in pink and white chrysanthemums arranged from the chandelier. The bride wore a gown of silver lace and cream satin, and carried a bouquet of pink chrysanthemums.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Spokane Leads at Washington State,” *The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Washington)*, April 14, 1912.

<sup>11</sup> “Malcolm Fortier Will Be Employed By Great Northern,” *Spokane Chronicle*, June 24, 1912.

<sup>12</sup> “Pullman Cadets Encamped Here,” *The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Washington)*, May 20, 1914.

<sup>13</sup> “Pullman Cadets Encamped Here,” *The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Washington)*, May 20, 1914.

<sup>14</sup> “Washington, Marriage Records, 1854-2013 for Robert M.V. Fortier,” *Ancestry.com*,

[https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2378&h=7934078&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=ixh1165&\\_phstart=successSource](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2378&h=7934078&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1165&_phstart=successSource) (Accessed May 21, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> “Wedding of Young People At Krause Home Saturday,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, April 14, 1916.

<sup>16</sup> “Wedding of Young People At Krause Home Saturday,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, April 14, 1916.

## Wartime Service and Imprisonment

Fortier enlisted in the United States Army in July 1917, entering officers' training school at Fort Leavenworth and receiving a commission as a Second Lieutenant upon graduation.<sup>17</sup> He received a promotion to Captain of the 42<sup>nd</sup> regiment of the regular Army and was stationed at Fort Dodge, Iowa in March 1918.<sup>18</sup> Following the end of World War I, Fortier received an assignment to join the Army of Occupation in Niedermendig, Germany; Verda would later join him in Mayen, Germany.<sup>19</sup> Fortier remained in Germany as part of the occupation forces for three years. He later transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas as a student at the command and general staff school. In April 1931, he received an assignment to duty with the general staff, Eight corps area headquarters, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.<sup>20</sup>

Fortier's father, William, died on September 9, 1933 at the age of 72.<sup>21</sup> The following year, Fortier received his commission as a Major. He transferred to Fort George Wright in Spokane in 1936, where he worked as a publicity officer for the Second Battalion, Fourth Infantry.<sup>22</sup> While in Spokane, he officiated both college and high school football games, something he did for a total of eighteen years before he went overseas.<sup>23</sup> He later transferred to Lewiston, Idaho, where as the commander of the Lewiston district he oversaw a Civilian Conservation Corps project, the completion of a scenic highway running across the mountains

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<sup>17</sup> "M.V. Fortier Is Promoted Captain," *The Spokesman-Review*, March 2, 1918.

<sup>18</sup> "Malcolm Fortier Is Made A Captain," *Spokane Chronicle*, March 2, 1918.

<sup>19</sup> "People Well Known in Spokane," *The Spokesman-Review*, April 10, 1921.

<sup>20</sup> "Spokane Army Man Honored," *The Spokesman-Review*, April 28, 1931.

<sup>21</sup> "Deaths," *The Spokesman-Review*, September 11, 1933.

<sup>22</sup> "New Major Coming," *The Spokesman-Review*, May 12, 1936.

<sup>23</sup> "Fortier Hails His Real Hero," unnamed newspaper article, December 1945, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

from Lewiston to Superior, Montana in 1938.<sup>24</sup> Fortier transferred to the Philippines in November 1939, and received a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel in August 1940.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1941 Fortier, assigned to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 41<sup>st</sup> Division as a Senior American Instructor at Fort McKinley in Manila, received a temporary promotion to Colonel.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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 Douglas Mac Arthur 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.<sup>28</sup> 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

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<sup>24</sup> "Celebrate Completion of Scenic CCC Road," *Spokane Chronicle*, September 30, 1938.

<sup>25</sup> "Major Fortier Wins Promotion," *Spokane Chronicle*, August 16, 1940.

<sup>26</sup> "Six Empire Men Become Colonels," *Spokane Chronicle*, January 5, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> 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).

<sup>28</sup> 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).

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.”<sup>29</sup> After the war, Fortier stated that by April 3, when the Japanese army initiated its final assault on Bataan, in one of his battalions there were only “47 effective out of a 500-man battalion and those 47 were recuperating.”<sup>30</sup>

The Battle of Bataan ended on April 9, with Army Major General Edward P. King’s surrender. Roughly 12,000 Americans and 63,000 Filipinos, including Colonel Malcolm V. Fortier, became prisoners of war.<sup>31</sup> Following the surrender, the Japanese marched the Allied troops toward Camp O’Donnell in Tarlac province; this march became known as the Bataan Death March. The Japanese summarily executed anyone who fell, attempted to escape, or stopped to seek a drink from a puddle. Between 7,000 and 10,000 men died during the Death March, but because no records were kept the exact number is unknown.<sup>32</sup> Fortier would later say he was lucky during the Death March, because he received a ride part of the way.<sup>33</sup>

On August 11, 1942, 179 American POWs, among them Colonel Fortier, boarded a train bound for Manila. From there, they boarded the prisoner transport ship, the *Nagara Maru*, headed for Karenko, Formosa. While generals, including General Wainwright, aboard the *Nagara Maru* were well-treated, colonels and enlisted men slept toe-to-toe in each of the thirteen-foot deep berths, where they also took their meals.<sup>34</sup> Meals included rice with small

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<sup>29</sup> McCall-Washington, “Surrender at Bataan Led to One of the Worst Atrocities in Modern Warfare.”

<sup>30</sup> “Fortier Hails His Real Hero,” undated newspaper clipping, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> “Army Colonel Returns Home,” *The Spokesman-Review*, October 24, 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory F. Michno, “Death on the Hellships: Prisoners at Sea in the Pacific War,” via *Ancestry.com*, [https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/19211204/person/771726169/media/6cc46c61-1433-4c2e-93bb-1b61f2d38f6a?\\_phsrc=ixh1176&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/19211204/person/771726169/media/6cc46c61-1433-4c2e-93bb-1b61f2d38f6a?_phsrc=ixh1176&_phstart=successSource) (Accessed May 26, 2020).

pieces of fish, pickled vegetables, or fruits and seaweed, but unlike later voyages the POWs had access to drinking water and hot tea. Two years later, 259 men, most of who rode on the *Nagara Maru*, were placed on the *Oryoku Maru* for transport to Japan. This time, they rode in a sweltering rear cargo hold, without any concern for sanitation or access to water. The POWs remained in the hold for up to several months at a time and American planes bombed them, thinking they were just Japanese cargo ships. After the war, Fortier provided a unique visual record of his time on the POW transport ships in his published book, *The Life of a P.O.W. Under the Japanese in Caricature*.<sup>35</sup>

At the Karenko camp, Fortier later reported that the 398 prisoners ate vegetable soup with water and rice, and occasionally, barley, three times per day. He lost more than fifty pounds, while some men lost up to 100 pounds. Despite this, the prisoners worked on farms under duress, producing crops they themselves never ate, although sometimes hogs might be fed sweet potatoes the men grew.<sup>36</sup> Fortier noted that General Wainwright received a promotion to goatherder in the POW camp. Once the POWs relocated to Japan, they were bombed twice by American planes. In Korea, the men suffered through temperatures reaching -40 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter. The prisoners ended up at Mukden, in Manchuria, where Red Army troops from the Soviet Union liberated them in August 1945.<sup>37</sup> After riding out a typhoon on Okinawa in September 1945, Fortier returned to the U.S. in October 1945.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Fortier Hails His Real Hero," undated newspaper clipping, MASC; "Yanks Lacked War Equipment," December 1945 newspaper clipping, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>37</sup> "Yanks Lacked War Equipment," December 1945 newspaper clipping, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

During Fortier's imprisonment, his wife, Verda, received word he was missing in action from the U.S. War Department in June, 1942. He received the Distinguished Service medal for "exceptionally meritorious service" in the Philippines in November 1942, which Verda received in his place.<sup>38</sup> She received confirmation of Fortier's POW status via telegram from the Office of the Adjutant General in January 1943.<sup>39</sup> In a letter to his wife dated November 1943 but not received until September 1944, Fortier wrote he received a box of candy from relatives mailed in March 1943. While Verda wrote to him regularly, Fortier noted that he had not received a letter from her. His letter stated, in part, "Climate is fine and we are being well treated. Am in good health...Worry about you and mother. How I wish I could see and be with you. It has surely been a long time since the Washington took you away...Take care of your health and pray for early armistice."<sup>40</sup>

In February 1945, President Emeritus at WSC E.O. Holland attempted to send a letter to Fortier at the Mukden, Manchuria POW camp but the local post office told him they were unable to send mail to that location. Holland then sent a copy of his letter to Verda, asking her to forward the letter.<sup>41</sup> Following Fortier's return to Spokane, he wrote back to Holland, noting his appreciation for Holland's kind thoughts and stating he only received three letters from his wife during the entirety of his forty-month imprisonment. Fortier promised to attend the WSC homecoming game on November 24, 1945.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Medal Awarded to Col. Fortier," *The Spokesman-Review*, November 12, 1942.

<sup>39</sup> "Col. Malcolm Fortier Is Japanese Prisoner," *The Spokesman-Review*, January 19, 1943.

<sup>40</sup> "Letter Brings Hope To Wife," *Spokesman-Review* clipping, September 1944, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>41</sup> Letter from E.O. Holland to Verda Fortier, February 20, 1945, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Malcolm V. Fortier to E.O. Holland, November 19, 1945, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).



## Postwar Legacy

General Jonathan M. Wainwright visited Spokane on November 13, 1945 and received a hero's welcome in the lobby of the Davenport Hotel. A newspaper article published by *The Spokesman-Review* on November 14, 1945 noted that upon seeing Fortier and Col. George S. Clarke in the reception committee, all "formalities went by the board while the trio of war-scarred veterans indulged in a round of back-slapping."<sup>43</sup> Wainwright later met with veterans of Corregidor and Bataan at the Davenport, stating "My comrades on Bataan, the honors bestowed on me are due to you." On June 26, 1946, Fortier was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action while serving as Senior American Instructor with the 41<sup>st</sup> Division, Philippine Scouts, in action on Bataan, Philippine Islands, from 8 January 1942 to 24 February 1942. The citation stated, in part, the following:

Colonel Fortier's coolness under fire inspired the inexperienced officers and raw troops of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division to make a determined stand against all enemy attacks. He visited frontline units during operations to give instructions as to improving positions and placing of automatic weapons...Colonel Fortier, although the Command Post was under fire from enemy snipers, remained at the old position to direct operations. Colonel Fortier's gallant leadership and selfless devotion to duty, without regard for his own safety, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "Crowds Throng Lobby of Davenport to Glimpse 'Soldier's Soldier,'" *The Spokesman-Review*, November 14, 1945.

<sup>44</sup> "Silver Star," courtesy of *militarytimes.com*, via *Ancestry.com*, [https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/19211204/person/771726169/media/7bb63645-13b7-4b67-8db9-141c2ee272da?\\_phsrc=ixh1182&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/19211204/person/771726169/media/7bb63645-13b7-4b67-8db9-141c2ee272da?_phsrc=ixh1182&_phstart=successSource) (Accessed May 26, 2020).

Fortier also received the Army Distinguished Service Medal for “exceptionally meritorious and distinguished services to the Government of the United States, in a duty of great responsibility during World War II.”<sup>45</sup> Fortier dedicated his book of sketches, published in 1946 by C.W. Hill Printing of Spokane, to General Jonathan M. Wainwright. Fortier wrote in his forward that if he “could depict prison life by means of sketches I would not only have an interesting and authentic pictorial record of that life but that I would at the same time have pleasantly passed away many otherwise weary and monotonous hours.”<sup>46</sup> The book contained the entire roster of P.O.W.s association with Fortier in Japanese prison camps, along with the names of those who died in the camps.<sup>47</sup>

Fortier served two years in Japan as a member of Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s staff, and he received the Philippine Gold Cross medal in 1949.<sup>48</sup> He retired from the Army in 1950, and he and Verda moved to Seattle.<sup>49</sup> Fortier died on October 30, 1957 at the age of sixty-seven and is buried in the Sanctuary of Truth Mausoleum in Evergreen-Washelli Memorial Park, Seattle. Verda died in 1958 and is buried beside him.<sup>50</sup> He is memorialized at Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane among World War II dead as well as the WSU Veterans Memorial.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> “Malcolm V. Fortier,” *militarytimes.com*, <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/100142> (Accessed June 27, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> “Fortier’s Sketches Depict Life as Prisoner of Japs,” *Spokane Chronicle*, November 12, 1946.

<sup>47</sup> “Outstanding ‘On-the-Spot’ Cartooned Prisoner of War Book,” *The Spokesman-Review*, November 17, 1946.

<sup>48</sup> “Fortier Will Get Philippine Medal,” *Spokane Chronicle*, April 26, 1949.

<sup>49</sup> “Veterans Order Plans Are Made,” *Spokane Chronicle*, August 30, 1952.

<sup>50</sup> “Col Malcolm V. Fortier,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/64470275> (Accessed May 26, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> “World War II Memorial (A-H),” Lewis and Clark High School, *spokaneschools.org*, <https://www.spokaneschools.org/Page/3638> (Accessed May 26, 2020).