

## Charles William Gay Biography

### Pre-WSC Years

Charles “Bill” William Gay was born on February 4, 1924 in Worland, Wyoming to Charles C. and Vesta Pulliam Gay. He was their firstborn, and he had two younger sisters; Betty, born in 1926, and Vesta, born in 1929. The elder Charles Gay worked as a farmer.<sup>1</sup> Worland is a town in Washakie County, in the Bighorn Basin in north-central Wyoming. The area was inhabited by several Native American tribes prior to the arrival of Euro-American settlers, including Arapaho, Shoshone, Crow, and Cheyenne. The county’s name came from Chief Washakie, whose tribe wintered in the Bighorn Basin and ultimately settled on the Wind River Indian Reservation after Washakie decided it was in the tribe’s best interest to make peace with whites. Worland was named after Charles “Dad” Henry Worland, who built a saloon and stage station on the west side of the Bighorn River in 1900 near the present-day site of the Worland Ranch. Worland’s elevation is 4,000 feet, allowing for a longer growing season for agriculture than other parts of Wyoming.<sup>2</sup> The area receives little rain fall, so irrigation projects in the early part of the twentieth century were essential for the town’s survival. On February 9, 1911, the Wyoming Legislature passed a law creating Washakie County, with Worland as the county seat. Washakie is the only county in Wyoming to be named after a Native American.<sup>3</sup>

Gay attended Worland High School, where he was a member of both the boxing and football teams. He played guard for the latter.<sup>4</sup> He graduated high school in 1942.

### WSC Years

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<sup>1</sup> “Charles W Gay in the 1930 United States Federal Census,” *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=6224&h=113256138&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=ixh1316&\\_phstart=successSource](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=6224&h=113256138&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh1316&_phstart=successSource) (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Annette Hein, “Washakie County,” *wyohistory.org*, <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/washakie-county-wyoming>, November 8, 2014 (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> “Worland Eleven May Lack Power But Stress Speed,” *Casper Star-Tribune*, September 14, 1941.

Gay began his college education at Washington State College (WSC) in the fall of 1942 as an agriculture major, but withdrew in order to join the military.<sup>5</sup> Before leaving school, he joined the Alpha Gamma Rho, a fraternity established on April 4, 1908 with the intent of being present in every agricultural college. The four pillars of Alpha Gamma Rho are recruitment, commitment, education, and recognition.<sup>6</sup>

Gay married Alice Joy Bailey on October 9, 1943 in Worland.<sup>7</sup> Their daughter, Kathleen Oro Gay, was born on August 24, 1944.<sup>8</sup>

### **Wartime Service and Death**

Gay registered for the draft on June 30, 1942, at which time he noted he was working for his father.<sup>9</sup> He later enlisted in the United States Naval Reserves as an Electrician's Mate, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class.<sup>10</sup> He was assigned to the submarine USS *Bullhead* SS-332. The *Bullhead* was launched on July 16, 1944 and commissioned December 4, 1944 with Commander W.T. Griffith at the helm. The sub traveled via the Panama Canal to the Pacific, beginning on February 11, 1945.<sup>11</sup> They

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<sup>5</sup> "Several Students Enlist in Service," *Washington State Evergreen*, November 6, 1942.

<sup>6</sup> "Alpha Gamma Rho," *Chinook, 1943*, WSU 46, WSU Publications – Chinooks at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC), <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc> (Accessed June 14, 2020); "History," *alphagammarho.org*, <https://www.alphagammarho.org/history> (Accessed June 14, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> "Charles William Gay," *familysearch.org*, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CST8-B7VG-9?cc=2837991&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3A7D92-KGPZ> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> "Kathleen O Hansen in the U.S. Public Records Index, 1950-1993, Volume 1," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=1788&h=238844829&indiv=try&o\\_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=9279](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=1788&h=238844829&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=9279) (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> "Charles William Gay in the U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2238&h=10030880&indiv=try&o\\_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=9279](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2238&h=10030880&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=9279) (Accessed June 14, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> "Charles William Gay in the U.S., Navy Casualties Books, 1776-1941," *ancestry.com*, [https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2324&h=101143&indiv=try&o\\_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2238](https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=2324&h=101143&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2238) (Accessed June 14, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> "USS Bullhead (SS-332)," *pacificwrecks.com*, <https://pacificwrecks.com/subs/SS-332.html> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

arrived at Pearl Harbor on February 26, 1945, where they conducted exercises for the next few weeks. On March 9, 1945 the USS *Bullhead* departed from Pearl Harbor for her first war patrol in the South China Sea.<sup>12</sup>

On March 19, 1945 the *Bullhead* reached Guam, where they remained until March 21, 1945. The submarine bombarded the radio station at Patras Island, Taiwan on March 31, 1945, with the first 18 rounds landing “beautifully in the area near the base of the radio tower with one positive hit in the building nearest to the tower.”<sup>13</sup> On the afternoon of April 16, 1945, the *Bullhead* picked up three U.S. aviators from a crashed B-25 bomber to the east-south-east of Hong Kong. Eight days later, they again bombarded the radio station at Patras Island. However, after “10 minutes decided that the military value of Patras does not warrant the expenditure.”<sup>14</sup> The USS *Bullhead* then set course for Hong Kong.

The USS *Bullhead* finished her first war patrol at Subic Bay, Philippines on April 28, 1945. She departed from Subic Bay for her second war patrol on May 21, 1945, with orders to patrol in the Gulf of Siam, then east of Singapore and later, in the Java Sea between the Indonesian islands of Borneo to the north, Java to the south, Sumatra to the west, and Sulawesi to the east. The sub sank a small sailing vessel with gunfire in the Gulf of Siam on May 30, 1945. Three weeks later, on June 18, 1945, the *Bullhead* sank the Japanese vessel Sakura Maru No. 58, followed by the sinking of the Tachibana Maru No. 57 on June 19, 1945.<sup>15</sup> On June 25, 1945, the *Bullhead* sank a small vessel with gunfire in Lombok Strait, between the Indonesian islands of

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<sup>12</sup> “Allied Warships: Bullhead (SS-332),” *uboat.net*, <https://uboat.net/allies/warships/ship/3078.html> (Accessed June 15, 2020).  
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1szG3cOe2uyTMZ7IDrrLGXxvIrPU&ll=18.1419944941252%2C125.07537078857422&z=5> . This link is an incomplete listing of daily positions of the USS Bullhead’s first war patrol.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> “Allied Warships: Bullhead (SS-332),” *uboat.net*, <https://uboat.net/allies/warships/ship/3078.html> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

Lombok and Bali. Following the cease fire on the vessel, the crew noted that they found ten men hanging on the debris, and from their cries “they sounded like natives so decided to pick them up.”<sup>16</sup> The ten men the sub picked up were Javanese, so they let them stow away.

The USS *Bullhead* ended her second war patrol at Fremantle, Australia on July 2, 1945. They departed from Fremantle on July 30, 1945 for their third war patrol with Lieutenant Commander Edward Rowell Holt, Jr. at the helm. They headed for the Java Sea, and on August 6 reported her arrival. She was not heard from again, and presumed sunk, with the loss of all eighty-four officers and men.<sup>17</sup> At the time of the USS *Bullhead*'s sinking, they were at the west end of Lombok Strait and presumed to be hit by a Japanese air attack. The most current information about the attack is that Japanese Army aircraft, belonging to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Chutai, based on Bali, made an attack with depth charges at “0803 hrs, dropping 2 x 60 bombs which the pilot claimed to have hit, with oil and bubbles surfacing in the aftermath.”<sup>18</sup> The ships, P.I. Capitaine and Puffer were also supposed to patrol in the Java Sea area, but the USS *Bullhead* didn't respond to an order given by the P.I. Capitaine on August 12. On August 15, 1945 the Capitaine reported they were “unable to contact BULLHEAD by any means since arriving in the area.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Postwar Legacy**

As Gay was reported missing in action on August 23, 1945, his official date of death was not listed until one year after the presumed sinking of the USS *Bullhead*, August 23, 1946. The *Bullhead* was the very last US Navy ship sunk by enemy action in World War II. August 6, 1945 also offers significant meaning, as this was the date that an American B-29 bomber dropped the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “EM3 Charles William Gay,” *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56782481> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> “Allied Warships: Bullhead (SS-332),” *uboat.net*, <https://uboat.net/allies/warships/ship/3078.html> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> “U.S.S. Bullhead – S.S. 332,” *submarinememorial.org*, <https://submarinememorial.org/lostboatsfinished/ss332bullhead.html> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

world's first deployed atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. In commemoration of the USS *Bullhead*, the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico commissioned a park bearing the name of the submarine, USS Bullhead Memorial Park.<sup>20</sup>

The USS *Bullhead* is also memorialized in San Diego, California at Liberty Station Park, where Charles William Gay's name is listed along with eight-three other men. He is also memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, along with the WSU Veterans Memorial. There is a virtual cemetery created by John Dowdy on the findagrave.com website, listing all of the names and brief biographical entries for the eighty-four men who lost their lives on the USS *Bullhead*.

Gay posthumously received the Purple Heart, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, and Submarine Combat Patrol Insignia.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "USS Bullhead Memorial Park," *visitalbuquerque.org*, <https://www.visitalbuquerque.org/listing/uss-bullhead-memorial-park/1411/> (Accessed June 15, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> "EM3 Charles William Gay," *findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56782481> (Accessed June 15, 2020).