

Spokane Authors & Self-Publishers

Member Web-Page



Dave Reynolds

Hi. My name is Dave Reynolds. I am a history geek.

I was born in Spokane, Washington, and have lived nearly my entire life here and in the Palouse region of Eastern Washington (except for three years I lived in Oregon's Willamette Valley). It wasn't until I was in my 40s that I learned that my family's Pacific Northwest roots reached back to the 1840s.

My interest in researching the histories of family and friends is not so much about dates and places, but who the people were, what they dreamed, and how they survived incredible hardships we cannot imagine in the 21st century. I am also interested in those moments of stubborn, gritty independence that run through our American family's DNA.

In 1992, I started researching the life and death of my mother's eldest brother, Lester LaVerne "Verne" Zornes, who died during World War Two, sixteen years and six days before I was born. It seemed every time I got one question answered, three new questions would come up. Some stories were so bizarre, I really had no choice but to press for answers. Those answers would bring our young uncle and his memory out of the shadows. They would also help our family heal.

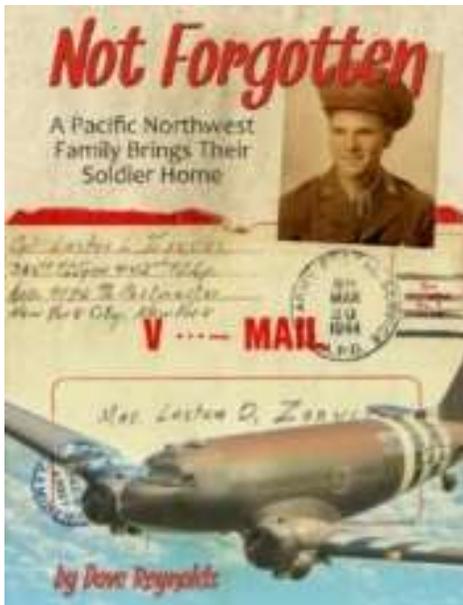
It wasn't until the 70th anniversary of his death, March 22, 2014, that my own family and friends suggested I write about what I learned about Uncle Verne. We hope our story will paint a full picture of this one young man, who was both ordinary and extraordinary, who was funny and sensitive, who stepped up when he was called, and who made his family proud.

I am a member of the *Spokane Corral of Westerners International*, the *Bing Crosby Advocates of Spokane*, and am a founding member of *Access 4 All Spokane*. I had a part in historical photo research for William Stimson's 1985 book *A View of the Falls: An Illustrated History of Spokane*.

Visit Dave's web-site at www.inonitpublishing.com

Continue below for information about Dave's book.

Not Forgotten: A Pacific Northwest Family Brings Their Soldier Home



This is the story of Lester LaVerne “Verne” Zornes, a Spokane native with deep family roots in the Palouse Region of Eastern Washington. Like hundreds of thousands of other young men and women, this 1942 graduate of Lewis & Clark High School stepped up to serve his country in the U.S. Army Air Forces. Verne died just 11 days into his first overseas mission. The circumstances surrounding his death were kept in the shadows.

This is the story of his family’s decades-long search for answers. Through de-classified records, interviews with those who knew him, Internet archives and other documents, they sorted through stories of organized crime, international espionage, and paranormal visions to discover the part he was trained to play in the largest secret mission in military history. Along the way, they found 67 hand-written letters, one

postcard and one Government Issue Mother’s Day Card that he mailed home to his mother, father, and younger siblings during his service. Through those letters, they got to know the uncle most of them had never met.

They learned about **Verne’s sense of humor**: *“The weather forecast is a military secret,”* he wrote from Sioux Falls, South Dakota in July 1943, *“but a rumor has been going around that the Devil has been seen in a real estate office looking for some land near here. (I can’t figure out what they mean.)”*

His love of gardening and home-cooked food: *“When I get home, that’s all I’m going to do is eat and sleep, mostly eat,”* he wrote in early October 1943, *“so can up lots and lots of tomatoes and strawberries and raspberries and rhubarb and beans and peas and how about some good old sourkraut, huh? By the way, how is the cabbage and lettuce this year? Oh yes, I nearly forgot! I want several sacks spuds all ready and waiting for you to ‘fry’ for me, cause we never get any fried foods, I sure miss them. So, when you’re stocking up on winter goods and canning stuff, etc., make a BIG allowance for me.”*

His longing to be back at his rural home in the inland Pacific Northwest: *“New York is a nice village,”* he wrote after his one-day visit to the Big Apple in February, 1944. *“It has a main street called Broadway, and is considerable larger than 9 Mile Falls... Listen you country folks, from now on call me the ‘Big City Boy’ direct from Times Square, almost!! New York is okay, but Spokane’s just as good, as far as I’m concerned.”*

His sense of adventure: “No fooling, we are having a nice trip,” he wrote in his last letter, mailed from Brazil on March 18, 1944. “I never thought I’d get a chance to make a trip like this, especially by air. I’ll have lots to tell you when I get back.”

“Yes, Mom, it’s quite a thrilling adventure, but farming is just as much fun,” he closed. “Say, I’d send you a little monkey if I could send it V-mail.”

This is the story of how this family — on the 70th anniversary of his tragic death — was able to bring Verne back home in their own way, to celebrate his life, honor his service and sacrifice, grieve for their loss, and heal generational wounds.

Verne was our uncle. We would like to share these stories and his letters with you.



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