STANLEY JOSEPH YESKULSKY TECHNICIAN 5 U.S. ARMY

WORLD WAR II 1921 - 1945

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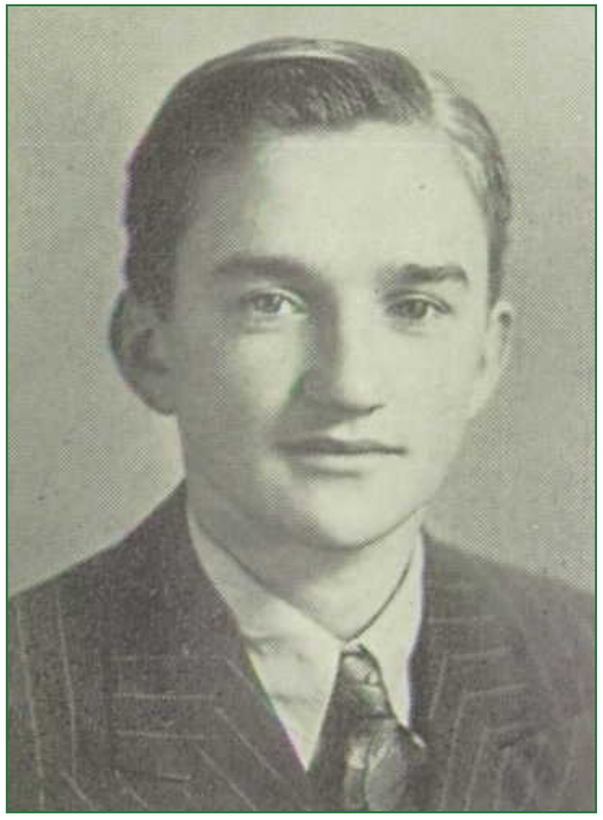


Stanley Joseph Yeskulsky was born on December 16, 1921, in Westmoreland, Pennsylvania. He was of Polish heritage, the child of Anna Yeskulsky (née Tuk) and Charles "Stanislaw" Yeskulsky. Their marriage produced a total of four children, including Stanley. He had an older brother named Bernard and two sisters, Frances Mary and Eva Joanne. Neither of the two youngest children, Stanley and Eva, were to have the opportunity to know their father well.

Charles Yeskulsky toiled in the mines of Humphreys Coal & Coke to support his growing family. He was not a wealthy man, or even a naturalized citizen, but the Yeskulskys could afford to rent a house. The children were too young to seek employment, the oldest being seven in 1925, and Anna did not have a second job. She tended to the family hearth and performed the domestic labor necessary for maintaining the household. She would have spent much of her time with the children as her husband worked in the mines. The coal mines were a dangerous profession, and it is probable that Anna understood the risks. On August 24, 1925, when Stanley was just three years old, an accident took his father's life. Charles Yeskulsky succumbed to internal injuries caused by falling slate and rock. His family of four children, including one-year-old Eva, was left without a father.

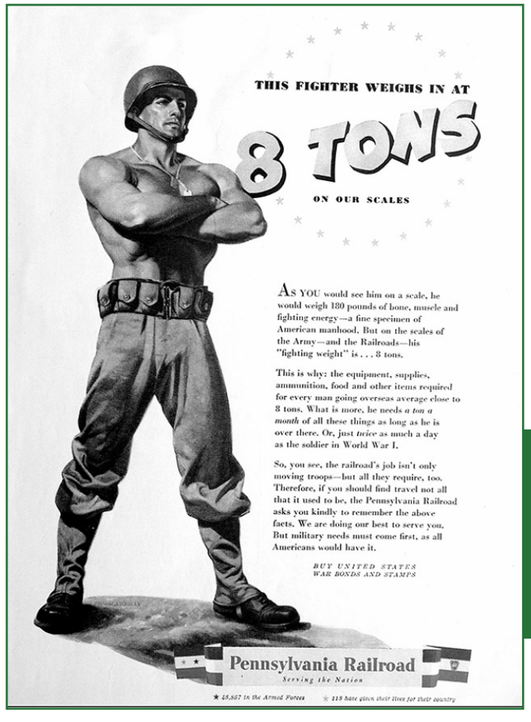
Anna remained in Westmoreland with her children after Charles's death. Her parents, who also lived in Westmoreland, could provide additional support until she remarried in 1927. Anna's second marriage to Frank Bulebosh initiated a legal transformation. She became "Mrs. Bulebosh" on May 26 and Stanley became a stepson, though he retained his birth father's surname. The dynamics of the Bulebosh-Yeskulsky family continued to change when Anna gave birth to Stanley's half-sister, Elizabeth Bulebosh, on Christmas Day, 1927.

Tragedy followed the Bulebosh-Yeskulsky family into the next decade. On November 3, 1934, just a month before Stanley's 13th birthday, his mother Anna died of complications related to childbirth. Her diagnosed cause of death was "puerperal convulsions," an antiquated term for muscle spasms occurring at the time of delivery. The baby she was carrying must have died, as well, because Elizabeth was the only child living with Frank Bulebosh in 1940. At the height of the Great Depression, the Yeskulsky children were now orphans.

With the exception of Eva, the Yeskulsky children found refuge with their maternal grandparents, John and Mary Tuk. The Tuks had a small income, but they owned their Westmoreland house. The eldest Yeskulsky sibling, Bernard, also took employment as a clerk at a department store to assist his grandparents. Stanley did not work outside of the house. He pursued his studies at Hurst High School in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania, instead. It was a testament to his grandparents' financial stability that he was able to complete his education. The majority of young men had to seek employment at the expense of graduating during the Great Depression. Despite losing both parents at such a young age, Stanley graduated with 140 of his classmates on May 24, 1940, and began a career with a rail company.

At the time of Stanley's graduation, World War II was already in progress. Europe had been at war since the German invasion of Poland in 1939, capping years of Nazi encroachment and annexation with the violence of a new global conflict. War in the Pacific had progressed even further, though it did not yet involve European or North American combatants, having begun as early as 1931 when Japan staged the Mukden Incident as a pretext for invading Manchuria. The United States declared its intention to remain neutral, but it could not ignore the looming threat of war with Japan. In the months preceding December 1941, the United States had implemented a trade embargo against Japan to hinder its militarism in China and French Indochina (Vietnam). The combined impact of the embargo and decades of Japanese hostility toward American territorial and military expansion into the Pacific culminated in the attack on Pearl Harbor, forcing the United States to abandon its neutrality. Young Americans volunteered or were subsequently drafted into the United States Armed Forces to fight in Europe against Italy and Germany or in Asia against Japan. A fraction of those sent to Asia faced the unlikely prospect of being stationed in the "forgotten theater" of China, Burma, and India—as would be the case for Stanley Yeskulsky.

The attack on Pearl Harbor did not prompt Stanley to enlist in 1941, though he was old enough to do so. He continued to perform "semiskilled construction operations" for the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) in Pitcairn, Pennsylvania. Once a tiny settlement on the banks of Turtle Creek, Pitcairn had become a railroad hub by World War II. Stanley and other PRR employees understood that their work was crucial to the war effort. The success of the "Home Front" depended on the railroads, which transported soldiers as well as supplies. Passenger cars moved soldiers from one location to the next whenever they were available. On other occasions, PRR employees converted X32 round steel boxcars into troop coaches and "sleepers." Work of this nature needed men with Stanley's qualifications.



Pennsylvania Railroad advertisement trumpeting the company's war transportation record.

STANLEY JOSEPH YESKULSKY

Loading mules into C-47 transport planes to go over the Himalayas into China. *NARA*

Like many American companies, the PRR touted its service during World War II. An advertisement from a PRR magazine advertised its own work transporting equipment, supplies, ammunition, food, and other items to men deployed overseas. "So, you see," the PRR concluded, "the railroad's job isn't only moving troops—but all they require, too." If regular customers noticed that travel was "not all that it used to be," the PRR gently reminded them that "military needs must come first, as all Americans would have it" in order to win the war.

Working for the railroads was a considerable way to contribute to the American war effort, but Stanley eventually felt compelled to do more. On July 28, 1942, he enlisted with the U.S. Army in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Stanley initially held the rank of private in the ordnance department, but he was granted a higher rank akin to corporal—that of technician 5th grade (T/5 or Tec 5)—to recognize the special technical skills he had acquired in construction.

The ordnance department developed, designed, stored, maintained, and procured supplies and equipment for the Army. Supplies could include but were not limited to tanks, artillery, small arms, bombs, grenades, pyrotechnics, and spare parts. The prerogative to furnish the Army with equipment also extended to men. The ordnance department used its resources to train specialized troops capable of servicing "commands and units of the field forces" with fire power and mobility. The ordnance department may have felt familiar to Stanley insofar as it was another organization concerned with the transportation of wartime supplies.

Stanley trained and served with the ordnance department in the United States for approximately one year before he was deployed overseas. The decision to deploy Stanley was not an unusual one. Ordnance soldiers received numerous assignments to places such as Iceland, Iran, the Pacific Islands, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Although it is not clear if Stanley began in one country before moving to another, his final destination was India.

India was the staging ground for Allied operations in China and Burma (modern-day Myanmar). Japan had occupied Burma since 1942, and the British wished to take it back, not least because a Japanese advance could threaten British colonial possession of India. American interests in Burma were more pragmatic. Military planners believed that transporting supplies from India to China through Burma could "tie up Japanese troops and resources" and keep Chinese troops in the war. Not only was China an important ally, but the United States hoped it could be used as a base for launching a bombing campaign against Japan.

With so much on the line, British and American officials approved Project 9, a "commando-style incursion of Burma" by Commonwealth troops and the 1st Air Commando Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces, who would fly over "the Hump" of the Himalayan Mountains into Burma to resupply ground troops and airlift wounded to hospitals in India. Project 9 commenced at the Quebec Conference in August 1943, either shortly before or after Stanley was deployed to India. Stanley did not contribute to Project 9 or assist the 1st Air Commandos, but he may have helped their successors: the 2nd Air Commandos.

Since Stanley was first buried in Kalaikunda, it is possible that he spent the last 18 months of his life in Kharagpur, West Bengal (then Bengal Province), near the Kalaikunda Air Force Station. The British had built Kalaikunda for the Royal Indian Air Force, but they also permitted the United States Army Air Forces to use it. The Tenth Air Force's 2nd Air Commando Group operated out of Kalaikunda while Stanley was stationed in India with the ordnance department. The proposed B-29 bomber squadrons scheduled to operate at Kalaikunda did not arrive until much later in Stanley's tenure, leaving the 2nd Air Commandos as the largest force operating out of the base. If Stanley did support the 2nd Air Commandos—a feasible but not conclusive scenario—he may have executed the duties of an ordnance supply technician for this unorthodox arm of the Army Air Forces. In this role, Stanley would have supervised, directed, and assisted "in the receipt, inspection, requisition, storage, and issue of Ordnance materiel" and examined weapons "and other materiel for defects."

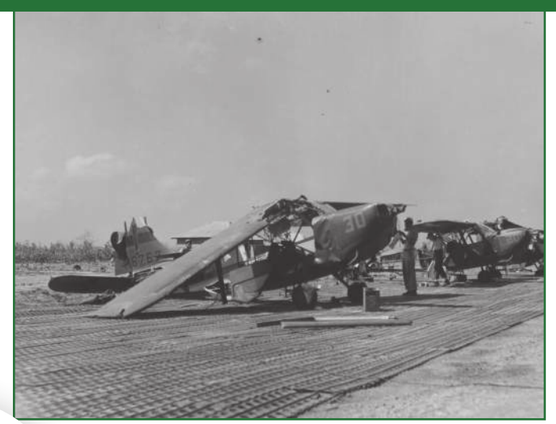
The 2nd Air Commando Group relied on their fellow soldiers in the ordnance department for functional weapons and ammunition. Between November 12, 1944, and October 4, 1945, the 2nd Air Commando Group used the Kalaikunda Air Force Station to resume the unfinished work of Project 9.

They completed a number of difficult tasks, including dropping supplies to Allied troops fighting the Japanese in Burma's Chindwin Valley; transporting men, food, ammunition, and construction equipment to Burma; and attacking enemy airfields and transportation facilities. In a logistically challenging and chronically under-supported theater such as Burma, the diligent work of men like Yeskulsky could mean the difference between life and death for Air Commandos on the front line.

Stanley's time in India appears to have been without incident until 1945. No records indicate that he was ever captured, wounded, or admitted to a hospital for sickness. Instead, just as the war was entering its final year, Stanley died "of injuries suffered in a motor accident while with the Army" on January 28, 1945. The exact nature of the accident is unclear, but it was a cruel coincidence for Stanley to die before his time, like his father, due to an occupational accident. He was subsequently laid to rest in Kalaikunda.

Stanley was repatriated to the United States with 39 other Pittsburgh-district servicemen in 1948. His body was received at San Francisco before it was transported yet again to West Virginia for burial in Grafton National Cemetery, Section B, Grave 1617. The Tuks and Yeskulskys published an obituary for their beloved family member before they buried him on June 2, 1948. The military rites afforded closure for those grieving a life ended too soon.

Not long after Yeskulsky's death, a tornado hit Kalaikunda in India and destroyed many buildings and planes. *NARA*



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WEST VIRGINIA NATIONAL CEMETERIES PROJECT

SOURCES

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY TO BE INCLUDED IN FINAL VERSION

SOURCES

Full bibliographies will be included in the final draft of each biography, available later in the summer of 2024.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Grant Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first National Cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. Since the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, Grafton High School, and University High School.

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