

Richard Vernon Copsey, Jr.

20 July 1921 – 23 August 1943

Richard Vernon Copsey, Jr. was born 20 July 1921 in Casper, Wyoming to Richard V. and Mary E. Copsey. The 1930 Census showed the family moved to La Grande, Oregon. The family is joined by little sister Francis M. in 1929. Father Richard is an Insurance Salesman, and a World War I veteran. They own their home, valued at \$5,000, and they have a radio set. In 1935 the family lived in rural Wyoming. The 1940 Census showed the family moved to Alliance, Nebraska where they rent a home for \$30 a month. Father Richard was a manager, working 70 hours a week. Richard, Jr. has finished 4 years of High School and was working as a Filling Station Attendant.

Richard's draft card, dated 14 February 1942, showed he is still living in Alliance, Nebraska, working for L B Ledbetter. He was 5' 11" tall, weighed 155 lbs with blonde hair and blue eyes. Richard enlisted in the Army Air Corp on 25 March 1942 as a Private, at Ft. Francis E. Warren in Cheyenne, Wyoming. His Army Service #17054217. Richard soon qualified for flight training, becoming part of Class 43-A. Starting in June 1942, he went to Primary Flight training in Ontario, California, where Cadets first learn to fly. He flew a PT-13 for a total of 60 Hours, 27:45 dual and 32:15 solo. Next was Basic Flight in Lancaster, California during September and October. He flew BT-15s for 70 hours, 36:53 dual, 33:07 solo. Next was Advance Flight at Luke Field, Arizona from 2 November 1942 to 4 January 1943. He flew AT-6s for over 90 hours. He was Commissioned and awarded his wings 4 January 1943. When he became an Officer, he was given a new Service #0-736124. After some leave time, Lt. Copsey was assigned to the 304th Fighter Squadron, 337th fighter Group at Pinellas Army Air Base, Florida for training in a combat airplane. He flew a P-40 for the first time on 27 January 1943. He was at Pinellas for about 2 months, getting about 60 hours in a P-40 doing mock combat missions. During his time at Pinellas, he came down with Cholangitis, a liver infection. He was treated at nearby Drew Army Air Base and returned to duty. After more leave time, Lt. Copsey was sent overseas as a Replacement Pilot to the 12th Air Force in N. Africa. His first assignment overseas was with the Fighter School Replacement Center at Berrechid Field in French Morocco. He had 2 local flights in a P-40 totaling 5:15. He was then assigned to the 319th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group, the Checkertail Clan (name given by Axis Sally), flying P-40s. In June he flew 8 more training flights and 2 combat missions, on the 10th and 18th. In July he flew 23 times, over half combat missions. During one of these he was credited with shooting down 1 enemy plane, a MA-202. August flight records were not found.



Lt. Richard V. Copsey died 23 August 1943 in a freak traffic accident. On the night of 10 August, he and 2 other pilots, F/O Darr and Lt. Taylor, with 3 Army Nurses, were returning from another base when the jeep they were in collided with a local Arab cart. One of the nurses, Lt. Martha E. Thurmond, was killed at the scene. Richard was taken to the 3rd General Hospital but succumbed to his injuries 11 days later from a skull fracture.

After the war, small battlefield cemeteries were being consolidated and families were given the option of bringing loved ones home or letting them stay close to where they fell. The Copsey

family had a difficult time with this, and the Army contacted the Red Cross to assist. Lt. Richard V. Copsey is buried at the N. African American Cemetery.