

Pierre Bontecou

Pierre “Robert” Bontecou

First Lieutenant, U.S. Army

Born August 9, 1921

Killed in Action April 5, 1945

During the last days of fighting in Europe during World War II, the families back home knew the war was coming to an end and hoped their service members would soon be returning home. That was not to be the case for Pierre Bontecou, who lost his life one month before Germany surrendered.

In 1904, Pierre’s mother, Eva Archer, emigrated as a child from Wallingford, England with her parents, Mary Lindsey and Walter C. Archer. Pierre’s father, Dr. Howell S. Bontecou, was from Beacon, New York and was a lieutenant in the chief examiner’s office at Camp Lee (now Fort Lee) when he and Eva got engaged before marrying in Hopewell in 1919. Pierre Bontecou was born on August 9, 1921, at the Highland Hospital in Beacon, New York. Named after his great-grandfather, Pierre would be the only child of Dr. and Eva Bontecou, although he had a half sister from Dr. Bontecou’s previous marriage.



January 1923, Pierre at age 1 year, 5 months



May 1924, Pierre with his dog.

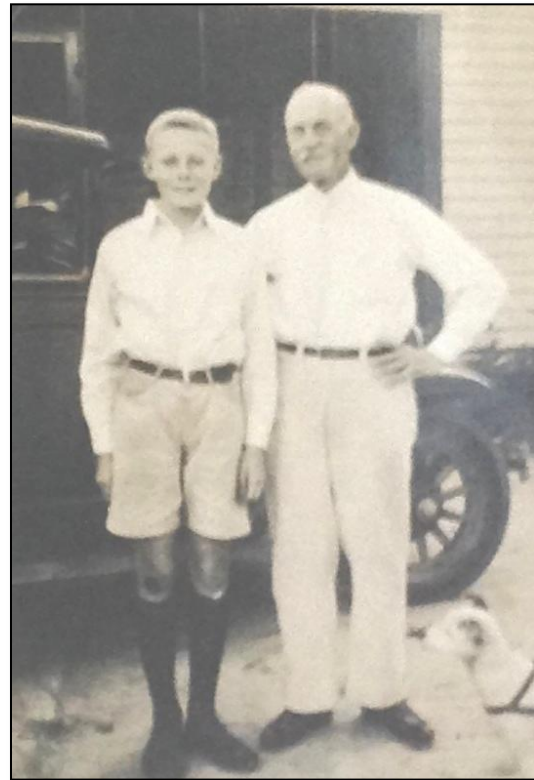
Pierre’s parents divorced when he was two years old, after which Pierre and his mother moved back to Hopewell about 1925 to live with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Archer. In 1930, they all lived on West Broadway, later on 5th Avenue and finally on Brown Avenue in the City Point area of Hopewell. Pierre’s father later passed away from illness at Beacon, New York in 1926.

Pierre's Grandfather Archer took on the role of the father figure in Pierre's life. Mr. Archer was an accountant and a realtor. He worked for several different companies, including ocean shipping, railroad companies and building contractors, serving as secretary-treasurer, vice-president and president of the various companies. He was also a member of the Hopewell Chamber of Commerce, Hopewell Rotary Club and the local Masonic Lodge. Pierre's grandmother, Mary Archer, was president of the Hopewell YWCA during World War One and a member of the Christian Science Society.

Both of Pierre's grandparents had a great influence on his character and his development in his younger years. At age 12, Pierre became a Boy Scout and later a Patrol Leader where he began to develop his leadership capabilities.



July 1932 – age 10



*Pierre, age 13, and his grandfather,
Walter C. Archer - July 1935*

In addition to the Boy Scouts, Pierre was very active at school in various organizations and achieved high academic success. The Hopewell High School yearbook for his senior year listed his school activities and accomplishments as follows.

Dramatic Club, including club Vice-President for the 1937 -1938 school year
French Circle, including Treasurer for 1937
Library Club, including club Reporter
Camera Club
School News Editor for 1937
Editor of the Kaleidoscope school yearbook in 1938
Track Squad for 1935- 1936
Sanitation Squad for 1937
Class President for 1937
Junior – Senior Banquet Decoration Committee 1936
Athletic Association 1935 – 1937
Assembly Squad 1938



September 1935, just after turning 14



Pierre's High School Yearbook Senior Picture

Pierre graduated from Hopewell High School in June 1938, third in his class of 139 students. At the commencement exercise, Pierre was one of the student speakers. The topic of his speech was "Preparation for Life". The school system had eleven grades at that time and Pierre was still 16 years old when he graduated, not turning 17 years old until August 1938. That September, just one month after turning 17, Pierre entered Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia, at which the time all male students were in the Corp of Cadets.

Pierre's grandmother died in on June 25, 1941. A week later on July 1, 1941, Pierre received confirmation to his appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Mr. Mac Eubank, a lifelong resident of Hopewell, provided the following information in October 2016 about Pierre from his association with his mother.

"Eva Bontecou and I were great friends until her passing. She often spoke of Pierre and was very proud of his accomplishments and his military career. She was equally proud of him being awarded the Bronze Star.

Eva was a great lady and a wonderful story teller. Eva and I had lunch together a couple of days during the week and I enjoyed hearing her many stories. She relayed to me, on several occasions, the depth and involvement of Pierre's exploits and adventures. Pierre was a natural leader in school and the Boy Scouts. He was the joy of her life.

Eva's father lived with Pierre and his mother. Pierre and his Grandfather had a wonderful relationship. His Grandfather, an English born gentleman, called Pierre by a pet name. He called him Bud and with his British accent it often sounded like Bob. Many of Pierre's playmates picked up on the nickname and commenced to call him Bob. When Pierre entered school, on the first day the teacher had each child stand and give their name. When it came to Pierre, he stood and said Bob Bontecou. The teacher told Pierre, 'In my class you will go by your given name, not a nickname. You may be seated Robert Bontecou.' Consequently, from that first day in school he became Robert and everyone who knew him called him Robert. He was known as Robert in school, at work, in church and in his Boy Scout troop. When he entered college and West Point he finally reverted to Pierre Bontecou."

The following information summarizing Pierre's college career and his military success, as well as the associated West Point picture, is courtesy of the West Point Association of Graduates.

"In September, 1938 he entered Virginia Polytechnic Institute at Blacksburg, Virginia and was attached to Battery "I". His course of study was Mechanical Engineering. He was Staff Reporter and a member of the State Journalism Committee. In his third year he was elected News Editor of "The Virginia Tech". He had membership in the following honorary fraternities: Pi Delta Epsilon, Omicron Delta Kappa and Tau Beta Pi. In his second year he took a course given by the government in aviation and received his Private Pilot's License from the Civil Aeronautics Authority in 1940. A Congressional appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point terminated his career at V.P.I. after three years.

He was admitted to West Point in July 1941, and was first attached to Company "B". He became Regimental Personnel Clerk and a member of the Cadet Chapel Choir during his plebe year. In his third year he was the Company Commander of Company "C", 1st Regiment, and held the rank of Cadet Captain. He was graduated 58th in his class of nearly 500 on June 6, 1944. On the same day he was married to Betty Books, whom he had known since childhood.

He completed the Officer's Basic Course September 30, 1944, at Fort Benning, Georgia and was attached to the 71st Division, which was stationed at Fort Benning at that time. He was promoted to First Lieutenant on January 22, 1945, while on the transport which was to take him to France. His outfit soon moved from France to Germany and after only a few months of combat his promising career was brought to an abrupt end. On April 5, 1945, at approximately 2:30 p.m. Lieutenant Pierre Bontecou was killed at Bad Soden, Germany. Lieutenant Bontecou commanded a rifle platoon in Company "B" of the Fifth Infantry, 71st Infantry Division.

A letter received from his commanding officer stated: 'In his short time in combat he proved to be a superb leader. On one occasion, near the town of Trulben, he led a combat patrol to the very edge of the Siegfried Line. Under intense artillery and mortar fire he accomplished his mission, for which I recommended him to be given The Silver Star for gallantry in action. On subsequent occasions he proved himself a superior leader and I considered him one of the most promising young officers I had ever known. The men in his platoon have told me that they would go with him anywhere, anytime. This tribute from his own soldiers confirmed my great admiration for Lt. Bontecou.'

His death was mourned by all who knew him. He had the respect and admiration of his superior officers as well as the men who served under him, because of his abilities as an officer and a leader of all men. All of them recognized his concern for the protection and comfort of his men and noted the brilliancy he displayed in the execution of his office."



Pierre's West Point Picture

Following Pierre's death, his wife Betty, then living in Philadelphia, was informed and she in turn informed his mother. As the news spread, articles were published in the Hopewell News and in the Beacon, New York newspapers about his death.

One of Pierre's Hopewell boyhood friends, Wallace "Wally" Goldsmith, sent the following letter to Pierre's mother dated April 27, 1945, in which he refers to Pierre by both of his nicknames, Buddy and Robert.



UNITED STATES NAVY V-12
GEORGIA SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

27 April.

Dear Mrs. Bonlocou,

After hearing of Robert's death, this should be a letter of sympathy - but it's not!

Remember a while back when Robert, Sonny & Billy Boy, Lester, and the rest were playing in your back yard? Robert was the leader of that bunch! He didn't try to be a leader, he was just born a leader!

Through knowing him, I learned some of the greatest lessons a man will ever know, for he was perfect. Everything he did was perfect. I don't think he had to try to do the perfect thing, I think he was just born to do it.



UNITED STATES NAVY V-12
GEORGIA SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Even in his death he taught me
a lesson. He proved to me a fact that
I long heard but never believed until
now. "The good die first!"

Through being in the services I've
run into several supposedly great
men. Men who had a longer chance
to prove their esteem than Buddy. They
don't compare ^{to} Robert.

My loss of a friend is but small
to your loss of a son. However, I feel
confident that you are taking it as only
a mother as you could. That is with the
pride in your heart which you so richly
deserve, and a few tears.

I hope you will not forget the
boys of 15th as we will never forget
you or Buddy,

Wally

Wallace Goldsmith
on 15th Avenue

Years later, on December 8, 2009, another one of Pierre's boyhood friends, Louis Grover Good, posted the following on the West-Point.org website.

"At Hopewell High School we called Pierre "Robert". I was in the Boy Scouts with him and admired Robert very much. He was a very bright young man. I would visit his home prior to the war years. We would camp together and share our boyhood thoughts for the future. I was stationed in Antwerp, Belgium, in April 1945 when my mother sent word that Robert had been killed in the War."

Due to the war conditions, remains of those that died in combat zones could not be returned home immediately. In a letter to Betty Bontecou from Chaplain Thomas A. Harrison dated June 2, 1945, he said.

"The circumstances of combat were such that those who were killed were sent back to quiet and safe territory for burial and we chaplains with the Infantry had to stay up on the line with the men who were fighting. However, your husband was buried with war time military honors in Alsace, France by a Protestant Chaplain."

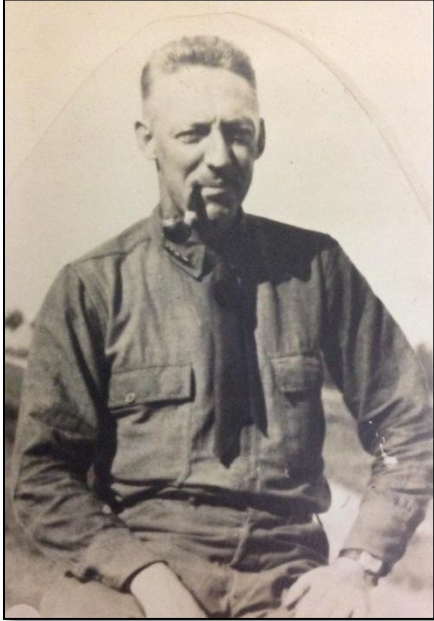
It was a few years later when the military began the process of exhuming and returning the remains of those buried overseas to the United States, depending on family preference. Pierre's family elected to have his remains returned from Alsace, France for burial in the United States Military Academy Post Cemetery at West Point. He had spent three years of his life at West Point and was married there. It was over three years after his death when Lieutenant Pierre Bontecou was interred in the United States Military Academy Post Cemetery on December 6, 1948.

Pierre was posthumously awarded The Purple Heart and The Bronze Star, in addition to other service awards. As mentioned above, he was recommended for The Silver Star by his commanding officer for his valor in previous combat actions.

At the time of his death, Pierre was survived by his wife, Betty Bontecou; his mother, Eva Bontecou and his grandfather, Walter C. Archer, as well as half-sister Mrs. Thomas H. Lee, Jr. of St. Albans, New York. However when this memorial biography was prepared in 2016, Pierre's immediate family members are all deceased and efforts to contact distant relatives were unsuccessful.

In memory of Pierre, his name is inscribed on the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia and on the Hopewell War Memorial Monument on 15th Avenue in Hopewell, Virginia, part of which was erected after World War One and near where Pierre would have explored with his friends. Pierre is also listed in the book *Gold Star Honor Roll of Virginia in the Second World War*.

In addition to the information credited above, much of the other material and most of the photographs used in this document are from an album that Pierre's mother made of his life. She passed away in 1985 and the album was later given to the Appomattox Regional Library in Hopewell, Virginia where it is preserved in their archives.



Pierre's father, Howell S. Bontecou



*Pierre's mother, Eva Archer Bontecou
Circa 1944*




Pierre in Virginia Polytechnic Institute Uniform

Pierre's Appointment to the United States Military Academy

114. 30 B

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:



Know ye, That the **PRESIDENT** has been pleased to appoint
_____ **Pierre Bontecou** _____ a **CADET** of
the **UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY**, to rank as such from the
_____ **first** _____ day of _____ **July** _____ **19 41** .
Done at the City of Washington this _____ **third** _____ day of
_____ **September** _____ in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred
and _____ **forty-one** _____, and of the Independence of the United States
of America the one hundred and _____ **sixty-sixth** .

Henry L. Sherman
Secretary of War.

W. Adams
Major General
The Adjutant General.

WD, A.G.O. FORM 117079
FEB 22 1905.

*Wedding Picture, Pierre and Betty Bontecou
June 1944*



**Newspaper Announcements of Pierre's Death
From Hopewell, Virginia and Beacon, New York**

Lieut. Bontecou Killed In Action

**Hopewell Man Dies In
Fighting In Germany,
Mother Advised**

(HOPEWELL BUREAU)

Mrs. Eva Archer Bontecou has been advised that her son, First Lieut. Pierre Bontecou, was killed in action in Nuernberg, Germany, on April 5. The news of Lieut. Bontecou's death came to his wife, Mrs. Betty Books Bontecou, of Philadelphia, in a message from the War Department and Friday night she notified Lieut. Bontecou's mother in Hopewell. Details of his death have not been made known.

Lieut. Bontecou was born Aug. 9, 1921, in New York state, son of the late Dr. Howell Sylvester Bontecou of Dutchess County, and Mrs. Eva Archer Bontecou, of Hopewell. A large part of his life was spent in New York, he later coming to Hopewell where he graduated from Hopewell High School in 1938 with third honor. He attended VPI for three years and was appointed to West Point Military Academy in 1941. He graduated June 6, 1944, and on that day was married to Miss Betty Books of Philadelphia. In a class of 500 he graduated 58 on the list. Later he went to Fort Benning, Ga., where he was with Company B, Fifth Infantry, and went to France last February.

While in Hopewell he was active in the Boy Scouts. At West Point he was a cadet captain B and was a member of the following honorary fraternities: Omicron Delta Kappa, Pi Delta, Epsilon, and Tau Beta Pi.

His grandfather, Walter C. Archer, is a prominent citizen of Hopewell, who resides with his daughter, Mrs. Eva Archer Bontecou, of Fifth Avenue and Broadway.

Lieut. Bontecou, in addition to his wife, mother and grandfather, is survived by a half-sister, Mrs. Thomas H. Lee, Jr., of St. Albans, N. Y.; an uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Bontecou, of New Rochelle, N. Y., and Mrs. Edna Prinz of the same city.

Beacon Native Loses Life In Germany

First Lt. Pierre Bontecou, son of Mrs. Eva Archer Bontecou, Hopewell, Va., was killed in action in Nuernberg, Germany, on April 5, his mother has been advised.

Lt. Bontecou was born in Beacon Aug. 9, 1921, son of the late Dr. Howell Sylvester Bontecou, and Mrs. Eva Archer Bontecou. He was the husband of Mrs. Betty Brooks Bontecou of Philadelphia.

After graduation from the Hopewell Va., High School in 1938 with high honors he attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute where he was a member of the Omicron Delta Kappa, Pi Delta Epsilon and Tau Beta Pi, all honorary fraternities. In 1941 he was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point and was graduated 58th in a class of about 500 on June 6, 1944. While at West Point he was commander of Company C with rank of Cadet Captain. On his graduation day at the Point he married Miss Brooks.

Later he went to Fort Benning, Ga., where he was with Company B, Fifth Infantry, and received a promotion to first lieutenant just before going overseas.

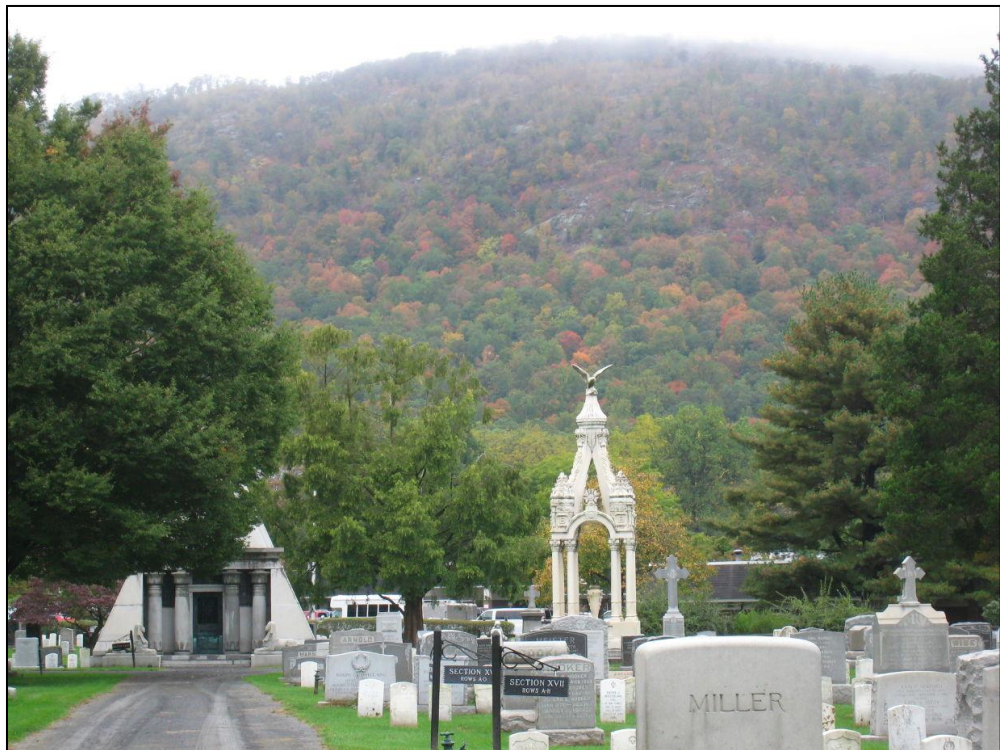
**The City of Hopewell War Memorial Monument
and Pierre's name inscription**



***Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia
and Pierre's Name Inscribed on the Glass Wall***



Burial Location - United States Military Academy Post Cemetery





Final Resting Place

United States Military Academy Post Cemetery

West Point, New York

This memorial tribute made possible by support of:

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