

Major Cornelius Louis “Lonzo” Burdette

I would like to introduce you to Cornelius Louis "Lonzo" Burdette. He was born November 6, 1878, in Sandstone WV. His father was W. H. Burdette and his mother was Sidney Burdette.

It was during his service with the West Virginia National Guard as a rifle instructor that he was chosen as one of a six-man team of the National Rifle Assn. to compete in the fifth Olympics at Stockholm, Sweden, in the summer of 1912.

Maj. Burdette, firing a 1903 model Army Springfield rifle scored 288 of a possible 300 and was acclaimed world champion. He was decorated personally by King Gustavus V. of Sweden.

In 1953, in recognition of his long career in the Army Ordnance Department before retirement, Maj. Burdette was awarded the West Virginia Distinguished Service Medal by order of Gov. Marland.

During his long military career, Maj. Burdette served in both the Army and Marine Corps. In 1908 he was awarded the Distinguished Marksman Medal by the Marine Corps, its highest award for marksmanship.

During his long military service, which began in 1898, he served in the Philippines and the Far East and was a member of the Cuban Expeditionary Force.

The order citing him for the West Virginia Distinguished Service Medal said in part: "Maj. Burdette may be truly classed as a genius in the firing and design of weapons, and his instructional ability is unsurpassed. Many of his recommendations were adopted by the Ordnance Department to improve the Army rifle."

Family and Childhood

Cornelius Lonzo Burdette was born on **November 6, 1878**, in **Sandstone, Summers County, West Virginia**, into a large and hardworking family. He was the son of **William Harrison Burdette** and **Sydney Ward**, who raised their children with strong values of discipline, resilience, and service.

Cornelius grew up alongside several siblings, including **Joseph G., Mary Jane, Cynthia Ann, Zillea M., Ocie**, and **Martha Ellen**. The Burdette household was known for its industriousness and close-knit bonds. From a young age, Cornelius was expected to contribute to the daily responsibilities of rural life, which likely included farming, hunting, and helping maintain the family property.

His early years were shaped by the rhythms of mountain life—quiet, demanding, and deeply rooted in community. Though formal education was limited in the area, Cornelius would have attended local schools and learned the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. More

importantly, he learned the values that would carry him through a distinguished military and athletic career: precision, perseverance, and pride in one's duty.

Early Signs of Discipline and Skill

Even as a boy, Cornelius showed signs of the discipline and focus that would later define his military and Olympic achievements. In a region where marksmanship was both a necessity and a tradition, he likely developed his shooting skills early—whether through hunting or informal competitions with neighbors and family.

His ability to concentrate under pressure and his steady hand were noticed by those around him. These traits, combined with a quiet determination, made him stand out among his peers. Though records from his youth are sparse, the foundation of his later success was clearly laid during these formative years.

Major Cornelius Lonzo Burdette was a man of discipline, skill, and quiet excellence. Born in the hills of West Virginia, he rose to national prominence as a military officer and Olympic champion. His life story is one of service, achievement, and legacy—woven into the fabric of American history and deeply rooted in the community that shaped him.

Birth and Family Roots

Cornelius Lonzo Burdette was born on **November 6, 1878**, in **Sandstone, Summers County, West Virginia**. He was the son of **William Harrison Burdette** and **Sydney Ward**, both lifelong residents of the region. His father was 36 and his mother 30 at the time of his birth.

Cornelius was one of at least eight siblings, including **Joseph G., Mary Jane, Cynthia Ann, Zillea M., Ocie**, and **Martha Ellen**. The Burdette family was known locally for its strong work ethic and deep ties to the land. Cornelius grew up in **Green Sulphur Springs**, a small community in Summers County, where he learned the values of discipline, resilience, and service.

Early Life and Education

Life in rural West Virginia during the late 19th century was demanding. Cornelius's childhood was shaped by the rhythms of farm life, community responsibility, and limited but meaningful education.

Military Career

Cornelius registered for military service in **1909**, beginning a distinguished career in the **United States Army**. He rose to the rank of **Major**, a testament to his leadership, technical expertise, and dedication.

He became a **nationally recognized authority on small arms design**, contributing to the development and refinement of military rifles. His work influenced training protocols and equipment standards across the armed forces.

Though specific deployment records are limited, his rank and reputation suggest he played a key role in preparing American troops during the early 20th century, possibly including World War I.

Olympic Glory

In **1912**, Major Burdette represented the United States at the **Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden**. He competed in four shooting events:

- 🏅 **Team Military Rifle – Gold Medal**
- 600 metre free rifle – 8th place
- 300 metre free rifle, three positions – 21st place
- 300 metre military rifle, three positions – 52nd place

His gold medal performance helped solidify the United States' reputation in precision shooting. The team military rifle event required not only individual skill but coordination and discipline—qualities Burdette exemplified.

His Olympic success was celebrated nationally and locally, and he became a symbol of excellence for both the military and the sport shooting community.

Personal Life

Cornelius married **Nellie R. Whitney** on **August 26, 1908**, in **Belding, Ionia County, Michigan**. They had at least one daughter together. After their separation, he married **Mamie Ethel Good** in **1912**, with whom he had three children:

- **Cornelia A. Burdette** (b. 1914)
- **Lawrence Donovan Burdette** (b. 1920 – d. 2000)
- **Helen G. Burdette** (b. 1923 – d. 2012)

He lived in **Charleston, Kanawha County, West Virginia**, where he remained active in civic life and continued to contribute to military training and marksmanship.

Final Years and Legacy

Major Burdette passed away on **February 28, 1955**, at the age of 76, following a long illness. He was buried in **Spring Hill Cemetery**, Kanawha County, West Virginia.

His legacy lives on through his Olympic achievements, military contributions, and the family he raised. In his home region, he is remembered not only as a champion but as a man of integrity and service.

Conclusion

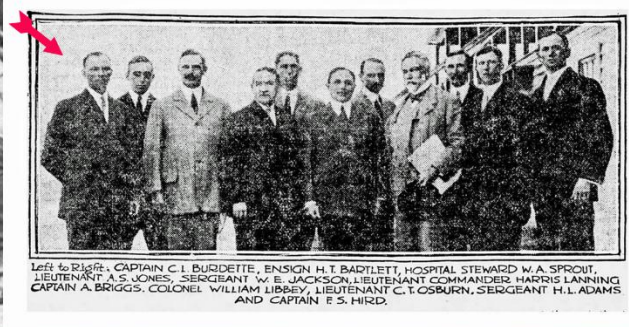
Major Cornelius Lonzo Burdette's life is a testament to what quiet excellence can achieve. From the hills of Sandstone to the podiums of Stockholm, he carried the values of his upbringing into every arena he entered. His story deserves to be told, preserved, and celebrated—especially by those who share his roots.

Major Cornelius Lonzo Burdette

We Salute You!



U.S. Olympic Rifle Team, Stockholm, Sweden – 1912
Summers County native Capt. Cornelius L. Burdette is on the far left.
 Burdette, firing a 1903 model Army Springfield rifle scored 288 of a possible 300 and was acclaimed world champion.
 He was decorated personally by King Gustav V (Oscar Gustaf Adolf) of Sweden.
 (From the Tacoma, Washington Daily Ledger - June 2, 1912)



Left to Right, CAPTAIN C. L. BURDETTE, ENSIGN H. T. BADILETT, HOSPITAL STEWARD W. A. SPROUT, LIEUTENANT A. S. JONES, SERGEANT W. E. JACKSON, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HARRIS LANNING, CAPTAIN A. BRIGGS, COLONEL WILLIAM LIBBEY, LIEUTENANT C. T. OSBURN, SERGEANT H. L. ADAMS AND CAPTAIN F. S. HIRD.

