

Jimmie Darrell Bays

U.S. Army, Private First Class

1932 - 1950

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Jimmie Bays was born on March 20, 1932, in McDunn, Fayette County, West Virginia. He was the son of Emery and Bertha Bays, and sibling to five brothers and four sisters. During Jimmie's youth, the plentiful coal mines of Fayette County were the area's biggest industry. Bays' father was employed as a track layer for the local mine, through which he supported his family on an annual salary of \$1,000. Since coal industry workers at that time often had to pay their employer for tools, supplies, medical bills, rent, and other expenses, Emery Bays probably brought home far less money than he made. According to census records, the family moved west to Rensford, an unincorporated town along Campbells Creek in Kanawha County, when Jimmie was about 8 years old.

By the time Bays reached adulthood in 1950, West Virginia faced an unemployment rate above the national average. Rather than scrape to find a civilian job, Bays decided to enlist in the U.S. Army that spring. The young man from a small mining town in West Virginia was about to find himself halfway around the world just as the Korean War was breaking out.

After basic training, Bays was designated a heavy weapons infantryman, private first class, attached to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division.

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, on June 25, 1950, North Korean troops (the Korean People's Army, or KPA) crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded South Korea. These communist forces seized the capital of Seoul in a matter of days. South Korea's army, along with their American and United Nations allies, were rapidly pushed back into a small area in the southern part of the Korean peninsula near the port of Pusan.



Two years after Jimmie Bays was born in McDunn, Fayette County, a locomotive carrying workers at a local mine exploded, killing eighteen on December 27, 1934. Perhaps the difficult life of coal miners influenced the young man's decision to join the Army as soon as he turned 18. *West Virginia Archives & History*

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The United Nations, and especially the United States, had pledged to protect South Korea militarily, and soon this promise was fulfilled in the form of troops like Jimmie Bays. The entire 2nd Division was rushed into last-ditch defensive positions around the "Pusan Perimeter," the only U.N. foothold remaining in the country. In early September, Jimmie Bays and his regiment were stationed in entrenchments along the Nakdong River.

The Korean People's Army knew it was only a matter of time before American reinforcements started pouring into the country, and resolved to break the Pusan Perimeter and finish the war before that happened. The communists launched attacks against U.N. lines for weeks, stretching American troops to the breaking point.

On August 31, the KPA attacked across the Nakdong River at a point held by the U.S. Army's 2nd Division. The river there made a natural curve, or bulge, and the terrain spread the 2nd Division dangerously thin. Individual companies were often stationed only on hills and ridges with large gaps between units. Given the weakness of the defensive position, the KPA's assault drove straight through the division's lines in a matter of hours, isolating pockets of American resistance and cleaving 2nd Division in two.

Jimmie's Company H was soon surrounded and cut off from other American units in an "isolated position," according to the 9th Regiment's war diary. Company H's commander, Lieutenant Edward Schmitt, refused to surrender or evacuate. Supplies were airdropped to his fifty besieged men at 4:00 PM on September 2, but all regimental command could say by the following day was, "Last report received stated that this small heroic force was still fighting." Most of the 9th's companies were in a similar state, clinging alone to hilltops and ridges.

More airdrops on the afternoon and night of September 3 kept Schmitt's men in the fight "despite desperate attempts by the enemy to annihilate this force." KPA commanders chose not to press the attack that night, allowing the Americans time to rest and regroup. By 9:30 AM the next morning, Company H was still holding its position while some of its sister companies launched a counterattack. At 10:00 PM that night, the twenty-seven survivors of Company H slipped past the enemy and made it back to American lines. Lt. Schmitt was not among them, having given his life earlier in the day.



Lt. Edward Schmitt, commanding officer of Bays's Company H, also did not survive what became known as the "Second Battle of the Nakdong Bulge." HonorStates.org

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By September 5, units of the 2nd Division were counterattacking to contain the enemy breakthrough and take back their original positions. Jimmie Bays did not make it past that day's fighting alive.

The Army recorded his death on September 5, 1950, but action reports do not mention his company participating in the action that day. It is possible Bays fell during the previous days' fighting and the survivors of his company only reported his death upon returning to friendly lines. In either case, the hard battles of September 3-5 made it impossible to recover his body. To this day, the remains of Private Bays rest in foreign soil.

For his service, Bays received over ten different medals, including the Purple Heart, Combat Infantry Badge, Korean Service Medal, and the United Nations Service Medal. Jimmie Darrell Bays is memorialized at the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown. In 2006, the West Virginia state legislature voted to name a new bridge on Campbells Creek "Jimmie D. Bays Bridge." The edifice is located on Point Lick Drive near the state capital of Charleston. Bays is also listed on the Memorial to the Missing in Honolulu, Hawaii.



Soldiers of the 9th Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division prepare to defend their positions along the Nakdong River on September 3, 1950. By that day, Jimmie Bays and Company H were surrounded and fighting for their lives.
NARA File # 111-SC-347856 via Flickr

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section MA
Site 78

Date of interment: June 2, 2006

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the 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 or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, 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. When 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 in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

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, and Grafton High School.

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