

# Wilbur Stevens Hall

U.S. Army, Staff Sergeant

1924 - 1944

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**Young Wilbur Hall in his football uniform. John Hendershot via EdWilson.org**

Wilbur Stevens Hall was born on May 16, 1924 to parents Samuel S. Hall and Frieda Iona Langford. Hall was raised alongside seven siblings: James, Madeline, Gladys, Anita, Grace, Ray, and Mavis. Growing up during the Great Depression meant the family often had to move wherever there were employment opportunities. Hall spent his early childhood in Coxs Mills, Gilmer County, West Virginia where his father found work as an oiler at a local gas station. By 1940, when Hall was around 16, the family moved to Center, Calhoun County, so his father could work as a station operator with the Hope Natural Gas Company.

Hall attended Calhoun County High School in Grantsville, where he participated in 4H and class government, served for two years as captain of the varsity football team, and graduated with academic honors. After graduation, Hall attended a trade school in Arthurdale, Preston County. Arthurdale was an experiment in government assistance undertaken by the federal government's short-lived Subsidence Homesteads Division, created as a model for helping rural communities become self-sufficient. Because of Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement, Arthurdale is nicknamed "Eleanor's Little Village."

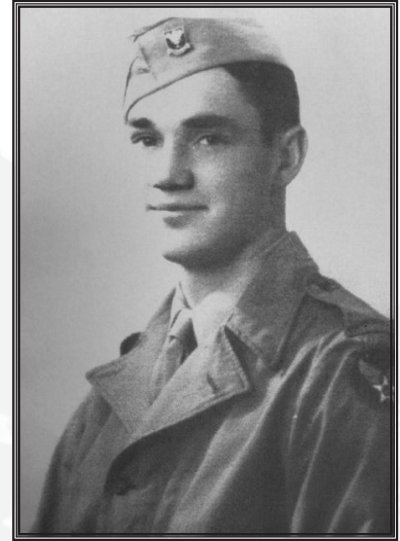
Though Arthurdale taught its residents a number of trades, Hall studied welding. It paid off, since by June 30, 1942, he had moved to Baltimore, Maryland where he found work at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard. At its peak, Bethlehem-Fairfield employed about 47,000 workers as one of only two "emergency shipyards" put into action by the U.S. Maritime Commission after World War II broke out in Europe. The Baltimore facility produced over 400 vessels during the war, including a larger number of Liberty ships than any other shipyard.

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On March 11, 1943, Hall was drafted into the United States Army Air Force at the age of 18. He shipped off for training in Texas and later South Dakota where he learned how to operate a radio on a B-17 Flying Fortress Bomber. Between his training in South Dakota and later Louisiana, Hall found time to return to West Virginia. On January 4, 1944, Hall married Anna Mae Barker of Marion County. Anna gave birth to a daughter nine months later named Judith Ann.

By early June 1944, Hall had been promoted to staff sergeant. He and his crew relocated to Chelveston, England, where they were attached to the 305th Bombardment Group of the 422nd Bomber Squadron, 8th Air Force. The 305th, known as the "Can Do" unit, was organized on March 1, 1942, and deployed to the United Kingdom during the fall of 1942. In November 1942, the Group conducted its first air raid against German U-boat facilities at St. Nazaire, France.

By the time Hall and his crew arrived, the 305th had been in the fight for two years. Wilbur's comrades were replacements for veterans who had completed their thirty-mission tour, or been shot down in the dangerous skies over German territory. Fresh bomber crews were sent immediately into the fight.



**Hall in his Army Air Force uniform. [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)**



**The crew of Hall's B-17 bomber, the *Foxy Lady*, during their training in Louisiana. Hall is in the back row, second from left. [EdWilson.org](https://www.edwilson.org)**

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On July 21, 1944, Wilbur's B-17 was dispatched to bomb an oil facility in Werzburg, Germany. It was the crew's seventh mission. Ten minutes after crossing the English Channel, they were hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire, knocking out two of the bomber's four engines and forcing them to turn back. Hall radioed American air units in England, and fighter planes were sent to escort them back. The crew jettisoned their payload of bombs to lighten the aircraft, but the situation continued to worsen. Finally, the airmen decided to bail out.

Only three of the ten crew members managed to escape the plane before it exploded midair. Sergeant Lloyd Peacock, one of the gunners, said he shouted a warning to Hall before jumping out of the doomed bomber. Wilbur didn't have time to follow them.

Peacock was the only survivor. Though two other men successfully descended with their parachutes into the English Channel, amphibious rescue aircraft could not land due to the rough seas. An Allied rescue boat picked up Sgt. Peacock about forty-five minutes later, but the body of only one other crew member was recovered.

Hall was posthumously awarded the Air Medal and Purple Heart. Though his remains were never recovered, a marker is dedicated to him on the soil of his native state, in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown. The airman is also remembered on a monument commemorating the service of the 305th Bombardment Group in Chelveston, England, whose people he died to defend.



**A welder at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyards in Boston, where Hall was also briefly a welder before joining the Army Air Force. *Library of Congress***



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## Resting Place

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

Section MA  
Site 50

Date of interment: December 4, 1996

## 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.

**Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council**  
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