STANLEY WILSON BENNETT

1917 –1945

U.S. ARMY, PRIVATE

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WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

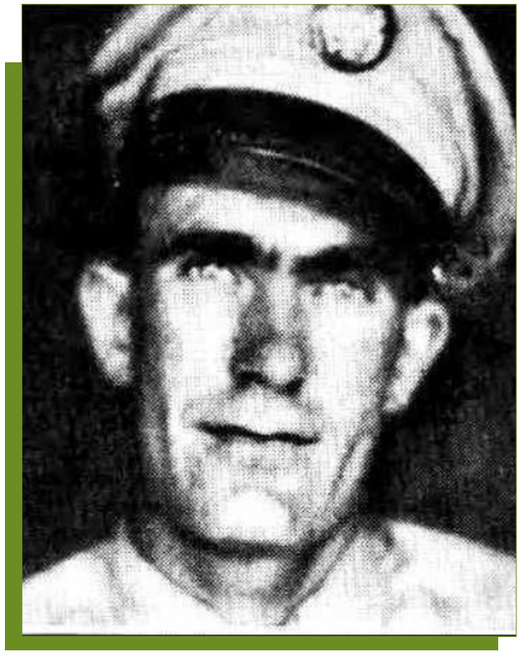
Stanley "Dutch" Wilson Bennett was born on April 25, 1917, in the small coal mining town of Junior in Barbour County, West Virginia. Stanley was the third child in a family of ten, which included two older brothers, Talbert and Virgil, and five younger siblings, Ernest, Avis, Robert, Beatrice, and Wilbur. His parents, Charles "Charlie" and Frances "Fannie" Victoria Bennett (née Poling) were native Mountaineers and had chosen the town of Junior for employment reasons.

Stanley's father Charlie worked as a timberman in Mine Number Four of the West Virginia Coal and Coke Company. Coal mining was one of the leading industries in the state and employed over 88,000 workers when Stanley was born—a figure that included far more than just the coal miners themselves. Timbermen constructed and maintained the wooden structures supporting a mine shaft's walls and ceiling. It was a job that favored large men, and Charlie fit the description at six feet, four inches tall.

The United States was mobilizing to enter World War I when Stanley was born. Congress authorized a draft to expand the military's size and allocated $3 billion to pay and equip the new forces to fight. Charlie Bennett registered with the Selective Service two months after the United States entered the war, but was never called to serve.

Instead, while over 58,000 Mountaineers did enter the armed forces, Charlie remained in the ranks of over 91,000 laborers in vital industries like mining. West Virginians extracted over 90 million tons of coal to help fuel the war effort with 93,131 tons coming from Charlie's mine in 1917 alone.

The Bennett family moved around Barbour County after the war as Charles worked in various mines. His wages supported Fannie, the children,



Postcard view of Philippi in the early 1900s. The Barbour County seat had a U.S. Census population of 1,543 in 1920. *West Virginia and Regional History Center, WVU Libraries*

Opposite: Bennett in uniform. *Young American Patriots*

and his mother, Palima, until she passed away in 1918. In the first decade of his life, young Stanley gained four new siblings but lost a sister, Marie, to pneumonia at age 3. By April 1930, the Bennett family had resettled permanently in Philippi, the seat of Barbour County.

As Stanley entered teenagehood and acquired the nickname "Dutch," his town, state, and the nation spiraled into the Great Depression. Economic hardship and unemployment affected West Virginia particularly hard as jobless rates reached as high as 80 percent in some counties. Coal mines closed as industrial demand dwindled, and thousands of laborers struggled to feed their families.

Charlie managed to stay on at Simpson Creek Collieries in the nearby community of Galloway, while the family remained in their rented Philippi home among other coal mining families. Stanley left school to support the family, or he might have enrolled at Philippi Graded School to complete his secondary education—not an uncommon quandary for families at the time.

Despite the difficulties imposed on the family and community by the Great Depression, Philippi still offered Dutch and his older siblings opportunities outside the mines. Dutch worked highway construction. His older brother Virgil found odd jobs, including one at the Grand Theatre, a downtown fixture that opened in the 1930s as a vaudeville venue and malt shop. The eldest, Talbert, joined their father at the Simpson Creek Collieries Company. By the late 1930s, Stanley and his older brothers could afford to move out and establish familes of their own.

It was then that Dutch met Toots. Mary Virginia "Toots" Weaver was the daughter of a coal miner-turned-farmer, and she first encountered Dutch Bennett early in the decade. On June 2, 1935, 20-year-old Virginia and 21-year-old Stanley got married just outside of Philippi in Mansfield. The couple rented a house off Route 31 close to their respective parents and siblings in Philippi.

The new couple welcomed their first child, Elizabeth Ann, within their first year of marriage. Two sons followed, Stanley Lee and Edward Darl, in 1938 and 1940, respectively. After earning only $485 in 1939, Stanley relocated the family temporarily to Westmoreland County,

Camp Fannin, Texas, where Bennett and 200,000 more Army recruits underwent basic training during World War II. *CampFannin.net*

Pennsylvania, in 1940. Virginia raised the three children while Stanley worked 44-hour weeks.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor and shattered American outposts throughout the Pacific. British and Dutch territories across the Pacific also fell to the Japanese onslaught. Filipino and American troops in the Philippines—then a U.S. territory—held out a few months longer. From December 1941 to April 1942, the defenders attempted to hold off the Japanese with obsolete weapons and insufficient supplies. Their defenses gradually shrunk to encompass only the Bataan Peninsula (on the capital island of Luzon) and Corregidor Island in Manila Bay, which fell on April 9 and May 6, respectively. General Douglas MacArthur famously vowed to return and liberate the Philippines—a promise that would one day carry great significance for Dutch Bennett.

Meanwhile, Dutch remained a civilian as the war grew in scope and ferocity. His older brothers Talbert and Virgil were also still at home in Philippi, working in the mines or the theatre, respectively. Husbands and fathers were initially exempt under the Selective Service Act, and none of the Bennett brothers were called. As the war claimed more American lives, Congress ended exemptions for married men, particularly those with children, and Stanley became eligible for service.

It was no coincidence when three of the four eligible Bennett brothers were drafted between 1943 and 1944. Fighting in every theater was at a fever pitch following bloody Allied invasions in France and the Mariana Islands. Previous fighting across the South Pacific and the Mediterranean had also been costly. The Allies needed men wherever they could be obtained, and this time the Bennetts' numbers were called.

Virgil was inducted into the U.S. Army first, in November 1943. Stanley was selected on July 9, 1944, and Ernest was sent to the Army Air Corps almost a month later. Stanley soon found himself designated with Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 745 for service as a rank-and-file rifleman in the infantry.

The U.S. Army Infantry Replacement Training Center at Camp Fannin, Texas, was Stanley's next stop for 17 weeks of basic training. Through the summer and early fall, Stanley learned military discipline, basic military organization and regulations, infantry tactics, maneuvers, weapon drills, and technical training.

Private Stanley Bennett completed basic training in October 1944. Graduates from Camp Fannin then entered the replacement depot, where administrative clerks allocated them to a regional theater—usually Europe or the Pacific—and sent them to a depleted front line unit. Stanley's MOS determined his placement with just such a hard-luck formation.

The Army assigned him to Company K, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. The Taro Leaf Division, as it was known, had earned its name in April 1944, during hard fighting against the Japanese on New Guinea. Capturing the island allowed Allied commanders to begin planning the liberation of the Philippines after three long years of Japanese occupation.

On October 20, 1944, General Douglas McArthur made good on his old promise and landed on the island of Leyte. Coming ashore with his invading forces was the 24th Infantry Division—not yet including Stanley Bennett. It was hard fighting on Leyte that created Stanley's vacancy: the Taro Leaf Division suffered 1,084 casualties early in the campaign. Stanley likely joined the unit sometime in November or December to help replace some of these losses.

Following the capture of Leyte, the Army reassigned Stanley's regiment to the 38th Division for the capture of Luzon. On January 29, Dutch and the division landed at San Antonio, on the Bataan Peninsula north of the capital city of Manila. The Americans battled the environment and the Imperial Japanese as they struggled to traverse the jungle-covered Zambales Mountains, trading blows along a snaking highway survivors referred to as Zig-Zag Pass. Japanese forces ambushed U.S. forces from honeycomb caves and pillboxes hidden in the heights above the road.

Unit patch showing the taro leaf symbol of the 24th Infantry Division.

USAMM.com

Sweat turned the dust on soldiers' faces into mud masks. Japanese snipers and machine guns delayed the 34th Regiment's advance. Stanley became a combat veteran during those terrible weeks as the regiment cleared the area. Eventually, the 34th captured the city of Olongapo, where they paused in mid-February 1945.

Dutch and his unit did not get a long reprieve. The Army assigned them to the recapture Corregidor, known as "The Rock." The rugged island fortress sat at the mouth of Manila Bay and prevented Allied warships from assaulting Manila. On February 15, 1945, Stanley and his comrades in Company K departed Olongapo and Subic Bay and moved to the staging area at Mariveles, on the southern tip of the Bataan Peninsula. The planners redesignated the invasion troops as "Rock Force" and prepared for an amphibious assault the next day. Dutch and his unit were to be among the first wave of assault troops.

A flurry of aerial activity marked Stanley's morning on the day of the invasion. Flights of bombers pummeled Japanese beach defenses with 500-pound bombs, followed by paratroopers dropping from C-47 transport aircraft.

Approaching from the sea in landing craft, Dutch and Company K landed on a small strip of shoreline designated "Black Beach" on the island's south side. Black Beach was an infantryman's nightmare. Pre-sighted Japanese machine guns raked the flat, desolate sand as Dutch splashed ashore at 10:30 a.m. on February 16.

Company K's objective was to secure the beach and push inward to Malinta Hill, the central height of Corregidor which overlooked the entire island. Artillery and machine gun fire killed and wounded several men as they struggled to traverse a minefield. Most of this enemy fire came from pillboxes, gun emplacements, and tunnels which U.S. and Filipino forces had vacated following their surrender in 1941.

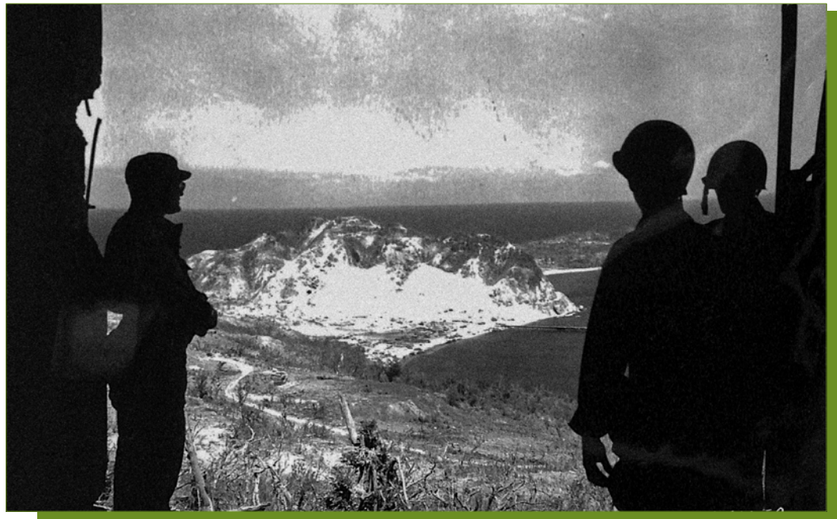
To neutralize some of these positions, the 34th requested armored support, but tank commanders refused to land until troops had cleared a path through the mines. The men got to work and removed 216 mines while under fire. An hour later, tanks landed and cleared the machine gun nests, allowing Stanley and his comrades to move off the exposed beach.

By afternoon, Stanley and his comrades reached their objective and captured the summit of Malinta Hill. Upon arrival, Stanley's company commander, Frank Centanni, radioed their success to commanders offshore and reported that Black Beach resembled the set of a war movie, strewn with destroyed vehicles and casualties. The men dug in for a hard night atop Malinta Hill. Company K was to hold the heights against any Japanese counterattacks, allowing other units the freedom to sweep more of the island.

The next day, February 17, Company K surveilled the surrounding area from their elevated position. Centanni ordered at least five riflemen to scout the lower valley, a place the men had taken to calling Goal Post Ridge after some pipes that resembled football goalposts. The rest of Company K remained atop the hill while the patrol descended and established lookout posts along the lower ridge, digging into their new observation post of the night.

Part of what made Corregidor "The Rock" was its fortress-like warren of underground passages. These granted any defending force—the Japanese, in this case—the ability to maneuver forces around the island without exposing their troops. Underneath Stanley and his comrades' feet, this hidden tunnel network was largely invisible to surface-level observation.

Around midnight, shots rang out as Japanese forces leapt from their defensive positions and attacked across Goal Post Ridge. Machine gun and rifle fire flashed, while mortar rounds landed in the valley



View of Malinta Hill, 34th Infantry Regiment's objective during the recapture of Corregidor Island.

National Archives

separating the tiny scouting party from the rest of Company K. The scouts struggled to hold the position and, after the situation grew hopeless, withdrew to their comrades on Malinta Hill.

Only two men escaped Goal Post Ridge and returned to the company, which was struggling to fend off a Japanese assault of its own. Sometime during the brutal, confused night action, a shell fragment hit Dutch in the back and killed him. He was 27 years old.

The next morning, Captain Centanni and another man tried to investigate the previous night's fight and recover their casualties, but Japanese forces still lurked in the vicinity. Enemy fire ripped through the group, killing Centanni and his aide and forcing Company K back. It was not until two days later, on February 20, that Company K reoccupied the position along Goal Post Ridge and recovered their casualties, including Stanley Bennett.

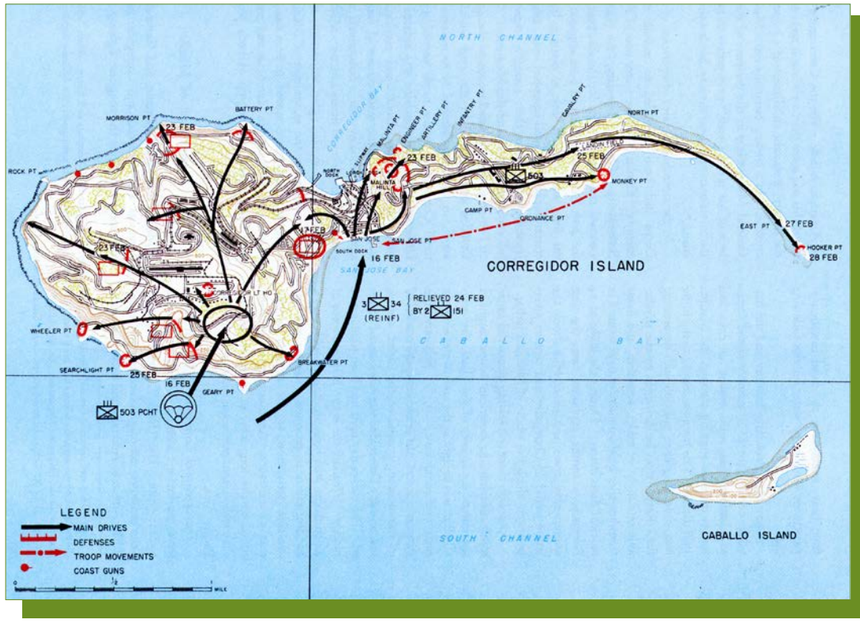
On his body, the Army recovered a Bible, some Japanese souvenir money, letters, and three photographs. Due to the nature of Stanley's wound, most items were bloodstained and soaked through. The Army removed his billfold from the inventory

returned to his family, so saturated was the item with the brave soldier's blood.

The Army buried Stanley at the United States Armed Forces Cemetery it had established at Mariveles Number One, Bataan, Luzon, Philippine Islands. Stanley's remains stayed on Mariveles until December 5, 1945, when the Army relocated his resting place to the more permanent USAF Cemetery Manila Number 2, located within the city limits. By that time, Stanley's younger brother Robert Harold was also enlisted in the U.S. Army.

The Quartermaster Corps' Memorial Division contacted Virginia Bennett at war's end. On July 24, 1948, the Army disinterred Stanley's remains for repatriation. The Graves Registration unit found his skeletal remains wrapped in a shelter-half, with whcih his body had probably been covered from the day his comrades recovered him. He was now placed in a new, sealed casket. First by truck, then by ship and train, Dutch Bennett wound his way to C. O. Phillips Funeral Home in Philippi for an official service.

On October 22, 1948, Stanley Wilson Bennett was laid to rest in Grafton National Cemetery.



Map of Corregidor with troop movements. The large black arrow in the center indicates the 34th Infantry Regiment's assault on Black Beach.

U.S. Army Center for Military History

It is possible his brother Talbert, an ordained Methodist minister, helped with his service. Dutch received the Purple Heart, Combat Infantry Badge, Presidential Unit Citation, and campaign ribbons for the liberation of the Philippines.

Following Stanley's death, Virginia's mother, Emma Weaver, moved in with the young widow on Chestnut Street in Philippi to help with the children. Stanley's father, Charles, continued working in the mines until his untimely death in 1951, while working as a timberman inside a mine shaft at Galloway. Fannie died in 1954 in Upshur County, where she may have resided with her son, Talbert. Stanley's youngest son, Ed, became an educator in Lewis and Upshur counties.

PLACE OF INTERMENT:
Grafton National Cemetery
SECTION B
SITE 1808

Men of the 34th Infantry Regiment on the beach near Malinta Hill on the day Stanley Bennett was killed in action.

National Archives

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Grant Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. Biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students and West Virginia University graduate students and PhD candidates, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first national cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—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. Since 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.

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, Grafton High School, and University High School, among many others.

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SOURCES AND COPYRIGHT

For readability, bibliographies have been omitted from this publication. Student research for these biographies relies heavily on primary sources—census records, city directories, draft cards, muster rolls, and more—made available digitally through Ancestry and Fold3. Yearbook repositories and the digitized collections of many universities and archives have been invaluable resources. Most newspaper research was conducted digitally via Newspapers.com, NewspaperArchives, and the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* database.

Servicemembers' Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) and Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) are another essential part of project research, provided free of charge in most cases by the National Archives through standard records requests.

As the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project has grown and matured, the team has found that new sources sometimes surface for veterans researched in prior project years. To better maintain a "living bibliography" of all its veterans, a single master document is kept up on the project's webpage under the "Programs" tab at **www.wvhumanities.org**.

Views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives of the United States, or any other federal agency. For more information about the Veterans Legacy Memorial and the Veterans Legacy Grant Program, visit **www.vlm.cem.va.gov**.

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