

It was hot; the air thick with humidity and a breeze was blowing in from the ocean. The forecast called for afternoon showers. Young Jimmie Dyess, taking a break between his freshman and sophomore years at Clemson College, was enjoying the beach when his attention was attracted to a young woman in a bathing suit. That made it a fairly typical summer day on Sullivan's Island. But this day was shaping up to be anything but typical.

Cries of distress jerked Jimmie Dyess' attention toward Lucy Holley, who had been swept 600 feet out into the ocean and was in danger of drowning. With every muscle in his body focused on reaching Miss Holley, Dyess pulled himself through the rough water. Although a fit 20-year-old, Dyess was unaccustomed to swimming either in the ocean or for long distances. With arms and legs burning from exertion, Jimmie pushed himself until he reached Miss Holley. With great effort, Dyess and another rescuer swam more than 400 feet holding Miss Holley between them until they reached the safety of shallow water. For helping save Lucy Holley from drowning, Jimmie Dyess was awarded the Carnegie Medal for heroism.

Aquilla James Dyess returned to the sleepy, tree-shaded lanes of Clemson's still young campus later that summer of 1928. The Seneca River flowed below Fort Hill and the college grounds. Hoke Sloan's men's store advertised "Gent's Furnishings to Clemson Men at the Right Price," but if you wanted to order a class ring, you had to venture farther down College Avenue to L. C. Martin Drug Company.

At Clemson, Jimmie, a native of Augusta, GA and an Eagle Scout, was already a recognized leader. He'd been chosen by his sophomore class mates as their vice president. He rounded out his rigorous architecture studies with extracurricular activities. He played on the football team and was a member of the Block C Club. As he progressed through his studies, Jimmie's leadership qualities were frequently on display. He served as president of the Inter-Fraternity Council and the Minaret (architecture) Club, on the class ring committee and the Junior and Senior Dancing Clubs.



In the military arts and sciences he excelled. As a junior, he was appointed a company first sergeant. He competed as a member of the rifle team which he served as captain, and was an officer of the Sabre Club. As a senior, Jimmie was promoted to cadet major and commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.

Following his commissioning as a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve and his graduation from Clemson, Jimmie returned to Augusta where he joined his father's lumber business and worked as a general contractor. Jimmie married Connor Cleckley and was active in Augusta's civic circles, even serving as assistant director of a boy's summer camp.

In December 1936, the 19<sup>th</sup> Fleet Battalion, a reserve unit of the United States Marine Corps, was organized in Augusta. Jimmie Dyess, based on his reserve commission earned at Clemson, was appointed a first lieutenant. In 1937, First Lieutenant Dyess was awarded the bronze star as a shooting member of the Marine Corps Rifle Team which won the Hilton trophy in the National matches. The Marine Team won the same award in 1938 capturing the Rattlesnake trophy in the matches. By the time the battalion was mobilized in November 1940, Dyess had been advanced to captain.



Following mobilization, the 19<sup>th</sup> was split up. Dyess was sent to Lakehurst, NJ for training in barrage balloon operations. Once it was determined that the Marines wouldn't be using the balloons, he was reassigned to Marine Corps Infantry, now as a major. His outstanding abilities and performance soon earned him a further promotion to lieutenant colonel.

In December 1943, Jimmie was ordered to San Diego. His wife Connor and their young daughter spent the Christmas holidays with him there before he sailed for the South Pacific in mid-January as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, a regiment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division.

After the fall of the Solomon Islands and New Guinea to the Allies in 1943, the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific became the next step in the Allies' island-hopping march to Japan. The Marshall Islands had been German colonies until World War I, after which they were assigned to Japan in the post-war settlement. The Japanese closed the islands to the outside world and built fortifications throughout the atoll, however the precise extent of these fortifications was unknown. The Japanese regarded the Marshall Islands as part of the "outer ring" of Japanese territory and considered that any assault on them would be the first on "Japanese" soil. The attack on the Marshalls was code named Operation Flintlock. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, including Dyess' 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, was assigned to attack the island of Roi-Namur.

For Jimmie Dyess, the attack was another in a long line of leadership challenges—and it came with a premonition. Shortly before the landing, Dyess visited in private with Buck Schechter, one of his company commanders. Just before joining the Marine Corps in early 1940, Schechter had been admitted to the New York State bar. Dyess

#### **Congressional Medal of Honor Citation**

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of the First Battalion, Twenty-Fourth Marines, Reinforced, Fourth Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the assault on Namur Island, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands, February 1, and 2, 1944. Undaunted by severe fire from automatic Japanese weapons, Lieutenant Colonel Dyess launched a powerful final attack on the second day of the assault, unhesitatingly posting himself between the opposing lines to point out objectives and avenues of approach and personally leading the advancing troops. Alert, and determined to quicken the pace of the offensive against increased enemy fire, he was constantly at the head of advance units, inspiring his men to push forward until the Japanese had been driven back to a small center of resistance and victory assured. While standing on the parapet of an antitank trench directing a group of infantry in a flanking attack against the last enemy position, Lieutenant Colonel Dyess was killed by a burst of enemy machine-gun fire. His daring and forceful leadership and his valiant fighting spirit in the face of terrific opposition were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

Signed, Franklin Roosevelt

called the young captain aside and confided that he expected to be killed in the coming battle. He asked Schechter to help him make out his will.

The 4th Marine Division captured several islets on January 31 then landed on Roi-Namur on the first of February. The airfield on Roi, the eastern half of the island, was captured quickly, and Namur (the western half), fell the next day. Throughout the battle, Dyess led his men from the front, encouraging and motivating them by his willingness to face the same withering enemy fire they faced. On February 2, while standing on the parapet of an anti-tank trench directing a group of his men in a flanking attack against the last Japanese position in the northern part of Namur Island, Dyess was killed by a burst of enemy machine gun fire.

Dyess' comrade-in-arms, Major Thomas Fry of Augusta, wrote that he'd seen "...Jimmie fall. They picked him out from in front of his men as he led the attack. It was the bloodiest battle you can imagine, and he was out in front. He was one swell guy and an officer the Marine Corps was proud of."

The Marines weren't the only ones proud of Jimmie Dyess. The Medal of Honor citation signed by President Franklin Roosevelt memorialized the "gallantry and intrepidity" of this man who had again at the "risk of his life" performed heroic deeds.

Jimmie Dyess was initially buried in the 4th Marine Division Cemetery on Roi-Namur Island, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands. In 1945, the destroyer USS *Dyess* (DD-880) was named in his honor. In 1948, he was re-interred in Westover Memorial Park Cemetery, Augusta, Georgia.

Jimmie Dyess set his personal safety aside to help others live. He remains the only person to have received both the Carnegie Medal for Heroism and the Congressional Medal of Honor.