

## **BILBREY'S IN UNITED STATES MILITARY SERVICE**

By Florence Bilbrey Mathis  
Upper Cumberland Researcher:  
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Starting with my great-great-grandfather Isham Bilbrey, born ca. 1765, many Bilbreys have served in the military forces of our nation. Isham was a teenager Revolutionary War Soldier in North Carolina. My first cousin, Bonnie Baker (*Marietta Bonnie (Dietz) Baker*), found the actual pay vouchers carried by Isham, in the North Carolina Archives. He carried these for so long that he sewed them together. He served from the Halifax Military District. A plaque noting his service was placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution at his grave in the Polk Bilbrey Cemetery in Overton County, Tennessee in 1981. Isham and his brothers, Lawrence and Johnnie, migrated to Tennessee around 1807. They all settled in Overton County, cleared land, built homes and raised families there. Isham died there ca. 1847. (*Isham Hansford Bilbrey was the son of Tom Bilbrey and husband of Ruth Sellers*).

Three of Isham's sons, Benton, James and William, served in the Tennessee Militia during the War of 1812.

Isham's son, Lard, was my great-grandfather. He had 21 children, the youngest of whom was my grandfather, Richard Bilbrey, eight of Lard's sons, Isham Marion, John C., James H. Stephen Decatur, Josiah "Joe" H., Mounce Gore, William C., and Hardy L. Bilbrey served in the Confederate Army in the War between the States. Some served with the local 25<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry Regiment, with troops from Overton, Putnam, White and Jackson counties. Some of them had migrated to Arkansas and served with the 13<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Regiment. One of them, in a pension application, wrote that he got permission to return to Tennessee to fight with his brothers and other kin. He said he had over 100 relatives in the war! Seven of the eight brothers survived. Hardy was captured and fatally shot near Tullahoma.

My father, John Morgan Bilbrey, was called into the army in 1919 during World War I. He was sent to the Student Army Training Corps Unit at Rose Polytechnic Institute in Terre Haute, Indiana. He was there only a short time and scheduled to be sent to Hoboken, New Jersey, for shipment to France when the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. He was discharged the next month. In 1926 he joined the local National Guard unit in Cookeville. At that time it was designated to Troop A., 109<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, later to Troop I, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 109<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. While he served with this unit they were called to riot duty at Wilder, TN, the Mississippi River flood in 1937, and the Third Army maneuvers in the De Soto National Forest in Mississippi in 1939.

In the fall of 1940 they were activated by the Army for the national emergency, the start of our involvement in World War II, and were changed from cavalry to be part of the 181<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Regiment. After some recruiting duty in Cookeville, Daddy was inducted into the unit at Camp Forrest, TN, in February of 1941. At that time he was First Sergeant of Headquarters Battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, and 181<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery. Later he became Regimental Officers Mess Sergeant in the 181<sup>st</sup>. After the war was declared in December 1941, he became ill and was sent to Lawson General Hospital in Atlanta, where he received a disability discharge from the Army in February 1942, at the age of 56. Daddy had served in law enforcement in Cookeville and Putnam Co. in several capacities during the 1920's and 1930's. In 1926 he became Captain of the Cookeville Fire Department. Upon returning to Cookeville, in 1942, he took a job as jailer at the Putnam Co. Six months later an out-of-control gasoline tanker hit the front of the jail, killing my father instantly.

My oldest brother, Robert Edward Bilbrey, enlisted in the Tennessee National Guard while in high school in 1947. The Cookeville unit was Service Co. 765<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, later becoming the Headquarters Co. 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn., 173<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry. He rose through the ranks to Sergeant, to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., and then to Company Commander of Co., D 230<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, 30<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, in Crossville, TN. In 1956 he moved to Maryville, TN, and was assigned to Headquarters Battery 191<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt., then to Captain in 1956. Commander of C Battery, then in 1966 went back to the Headquarters staff after promotion to Major. During reorganization the Artillery units left Maryville and he was transferred to Chattanooga to headquarters, 30<sup>th</sup> Armored Division Artillery, promoted to Lt. Colonel. In

1975 he became Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 181<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery. This was the unit in which our father, John Morgan Bilbrey, entered World War II in 1941. Edward proudly wore our Daddy's 181st insignia.

In 1977 Edward was sent to the Tennessee Military Academy at Smyrna as an instructor in 1979 he was discharged from the Tennessee National Guard and became a member of the US Army Reserve in Knoxville, was promoted to full Colonel and stayed in the Reserve Unit until 1986, retiring from the Army after 38 ½ years of service. He had duty at many active Army sites, graduating from the Advanced Field Artillery School, Ft. Still, Oklahoma, the Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, and the US Army War College, Carlyle Barracks, PA and taught at the Command General Staff school at Hattiesburg, MS.

I am proud of my brother, the Colonel, and equally proud of my younger brother, George Leonard Bilbrey. He served in the Tennessee National Guard for 2 years, then left to go to school in Jamestown, TN. He has been a dedicated and much respected public servant for decades, being on the County Commission for 29 years, on the Jamestown Fire Department, Captain of the Fentress Co. Volunteer Fire Department and Chief of the Auxiliary Police.

In addition to these in my line of Bilbreys, there have been hundreds of other descendants of Isham who have willingly and honorably given service to the military forces of the United States. I'm sure there are many Bilbreys, from the pioneers of North Carolina and Tennessee, now serving in many capacities of our country's presently engaged military troops. I am proud of them all and thankful for their dedication and courage. May God keep all of our troops safe and may he continue to bless the United States of America.

**Source:** Overton County Roll Call: Surnames A-K by Gary Denton Norris, pg. 50  
Revolutionary War Veteran: Buried: Polk Bilbrey Cemetery in Overton County, Tennessee.  
**Bilbrey, Isham Hansford** – b. 1765 – d. 1847 – s/o **Tom Bilbrey**; h/o **Ruth Sellers**.

**Source:** Overton County Roll Call: Surnames A-K by Gary Denton Norris, pg. 53  
Buried: Lard Bilbrey Cemetery, Overton Co., TN  
**Bilbrey, Lard** – b. 27 June 1803 – d. 1 July 1876 –  
s/o **Isham Hansford Bilbrey & Ruth Sellers**

**Source:** Overton County Roll Call: Surnames A-K by Gary Denton Norris, pg. 60  
Buried: Roaring River Cemetery, Overton Co., TN  
**Bilbrey, William** – b. 27 September 1794 – d. 8 August 1876 –  
s/o **Isham Hansford Bilbrey & Ruth Sellers**

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

Zachariah Denny md Catherine/Katharine "Ciddy" "Caty" Stallings =  
John Smith Denny md Nancy Henrietta Carlen =  
Amanda Serena Lee Denney md Samuel Milton Dietz =  
Henry "Harry" Denny Dietz md Emma Jane Bilbrey =  
Marietta Bonnie Dee Dietz md Hollis Baker