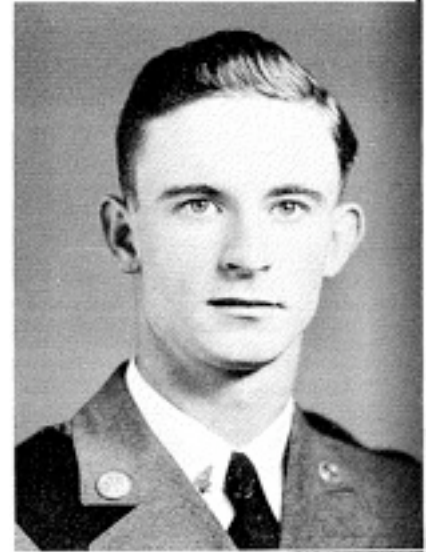


## Monte Gorgolesco

The liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944, and the D-Day invasion of Normandy two days later combined to make the rest of the Italian campaign anti-climactic. Experienced US and French corps that had fought in Italy were pulled out of the campaign and redirected to Operation Dragoon, the August invasion of southern France. To compensate, three fresh divisions were sent to Italy. One of these was the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division which among its officers included Captain Ernest Floyd Bennett, Jr., Clemson College Class of 1941.



Ernest Bennett was a vocational agricultural education major from Vance. Bennett was a second lieutenant assigned to Company C, First Battalion, First Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. He was a member of the Colletonians and the Future Farmers of America. In the summer of 1940, Bennett participated in ROTC training camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Bennett received his Clemson diploma on June 2, 1941, and on June 20 reported for active duty with the Army. He served as an instructor at Camp Wheeler, Georgia and was then ordered to Camp Hale, Colorado where he joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Division (Alpine). He participated in mountain and winter warfare training with the division and moved with it to Camp Swift, Texas in the summer of 1944. In November, the division was reorganized and officially designated the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.

On the evening of December 21, Bennett, now assigned to the division's 85<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, boarded a train heading east. It arrived at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia on the morning of Christmas Eve. For the next week, the division prepared for overseas deployment. On January 3, 1945, the men boarded USS *West Point*, the renamed SS *America* ocean liner, and sailed the following morning.



The division arrived at Naples, Italy on January 13. It then moved north to the front lines which at that time were to the south of Bologna in the northern Apennine Mountains. The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division's first offensive operation was to punch through the major strong point in the German defensive line running from Monte Belvedere to Monte Torraccia to Monte Gorgolesco. The battle commenced on the night of February 18 as elements of the division attempted to outflank the German positions with an assault on Riva Ridge to the west. The following night, Bennett's 85<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment attacked Monte Gorgolesco. The initial

objectives were quickly taken, but German counterattacks continued for several days. Having driven back one of these counterattacks, Bennett was digging a foxhole when a German 88 shell exploded directly above, killing him instantly. The regiment's chaplain wrote Bennett's mother that her son was "an inspiring leader" whose men "respected his judgment and skill as a soldier and would follow him anywhere."

Captain Ernest Floyd Bennett, Jr. was buried in an American military cemetery in Northern Italy. He was survived by his mother and sister. After the war, Bennett's remains were returned to the United States and buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

