

D+2

On June 8, 1944, the second day after the D-Day landings in France, American forces were battling to buildup and expand the lodgment area inland from Omaha Beach before the Germans could move armored reinforcements in to stop them. The 116th Infantry Regiment was one of the units that had paid such a steep price to gain a foothold at Omaha. Luther Patton Byars, Jr. of Marion was one of the regiment's soldiers.

Pat Byars was a general science major who arrived at Clemson in the last class before America was plunged into World War II. Assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 1st Regiment, Byars was a member of the Glee Club. As a sophomore in December 1942, Byars enlisted in the Army Reserves while still on campus. In April 1943, he reported for active duty.



The 29th Infantry Division and its three regiments shipped to England while Byars was still a Clemson cadet. He arrived at the division's 116th Infantry Regiment in England in late 1943 and joined the regiment's preparations for the coming invasion of Europe.

The 116th was one of the units selected to assault Omaha Beach in D-Day's first wave. The landing was a disaster. Coming in on the Dog Green sector of Omaha near Vierville, Company A of the 116th landed in what historian Rick Atkinson described as an "abattoir," suffering two-thirds casualties in a span of only ten minutes. A survivor said that his men fell "like hay dropping before the scythe."



Despite the slaughter, American GIs from the 116th and other first and second wave units battled the ferocious German defenders and by afternoon had opened exits inland from the beach. Slowly, the 116th managed to reach the bluff overlooking Omaha and push inland.

As the American beachhead expanded yard by bloody yard, the attention of First Army commander Omar Bradley turned toward Saint-Lô, an ancient village on the right bank of the Vire River. By June 7, Allied aerial bombing had reduced the town to "powder," yet the convergence there of eight roads and a rail line meant that Saint-Lô was still the most vital terrain in the American sector—and the most fiercely defended. As the 116th continued to fight through the Norman hedgerows toward Saint-Lô, Private First Class Byars was killed in action on June 8.

Luther Patton Byars, Jr. was survived by his parents, a sister, and brother. He was awarded the Purple Heart. In 1947, his remains were returned to Marion and reinterred in Rose Hill Cemetery.

