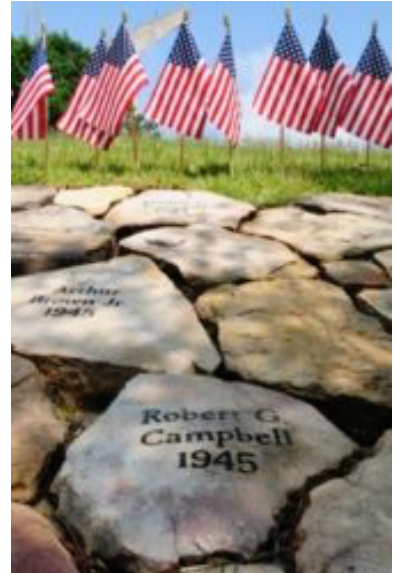


Fine and Clean and Decent

Robert Gilbert Campbell graduated from Greenwood High School and enrolled in Clemson College in 1941. As a cadet, Campbell was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Regiment. He remained in school until the end of his sophomore year when Clemson transitioned to a training school for the military. Campbell headed to Fort Jackson, entering the Army on June 30, 1943.

He was soon dispatched to Fort Benning, Georgia and then to Ohio State University where he was assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program. The ASTP was designed to train soldiers in the specialty and technical skills needed to prosecute a modern war. The mounting losses among front line soldiers soon caused the Army to curtail the training for many ASTP sections whose members were reassigned to frontline combat units. Campbell was ordered to Camp Campbell, Kentucky where he joined the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion of the 14th Armored Division.



The division left its port of embarkation in New Jersey in October 1944 and landed at Marseille on the Mediterranean coast of France on the 29th of the month. The 14th was attached to 7th Army, which was attacking northward parallel to the Rhine River in eastern France. The 7th Army was seeking to drive the Germans out of the Vosges and Alsatian Plains and capture Strasbourg, the region's largest city.

Two combat commands of the 14th Armored Division were moving north on roughly parallel highways about thirty miles west of the Rhine River, which in that region forms the Franco-German border. Late on the afternoon of November 27th, Campbell's B Company moved into the seemingly docile French farming village of Gertwiller. Not a shot was fired and there was no sign of the enemy. As darkness fell and the night grew cold, the soldiers set up a defense perimeter.



In the darkness, a German patrol slipped through the American lines. Soon enemy machine gun fire pinned the Americans in their positions. Artillery and mortar fire began to fall and shortly the soldiers were caught in a precarious position.

According to Louis Allen, a comrade of Campbell's in 3rd platoon, their unit got cut off from its parent Company B. Campbell, serving as a runner, made repeated trips through the German lines carrying messages and ammunition. The order to withdraw was given and when Allen started out to inform neighboring 2nd Platoon, Campbell went with him. In a letter to Campbell's parents, Allen explained what happened next:

We reached the platoon without much difficulty, and soon rejoined the company. It now became apparent that the entire company was cut off, and we had to fight our way out of the town. Bob was killed by a bullet through the head while we were fighting our way out. I saw him fall, and yelled if he were all right; he did not answer. He died instantly. I was grateful that he suffered no pain, and had not realized that he was about to die. God spared him that much misery and pain.

Allen continued:

Bob was one of the best friends I ever had. He stood for everything that was fine and clean and decent. He was a gentleman and one of the most courageous men I ever knew. I am sure that the way he died was not the most horrible way – it was violent, yes, but he died for his family and home. I find comfort in that every man dies OF something, but not every man can die FOR something.

Private First Class Campbell was survived by his parents, a sister, and a brother. After the war, his remains were returned to South Carolina and were reinterred in the Whitefield Baptist Church Cemetery near Williamston.

