

Not Once, Twice

Lionel Russell Cox was a scholar recognized not once, but twice for his academic achievement at Clemson College. Russell, a vocational agricultural education major from the Berkeley County crossroads of Russellville, was a high honors student and a member of the campus chapter of Future Farmers of America. He was selected for membership in Phi Kappa Phi, the national honor society for the promotion of scholarship among college students. He was also tapped for membership in Alpha Tau Alpha, the national honorary fraternity for agricultural education. Both organizations emphasized character as well as scholarship. As a senior, Cox was appointed a cadet second lieutenant and was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion of the 2nd Regiment. With the United States finally on the offensive in the world war, Cox's Class of 1943 headed into military service following graduation.



Cox was ordered to the 78th Infantry Division which had been activated the year before at Camp Butner, North Carolina. Cox likely joined the division while it was training in the Carolina Maneuver area in the fall of the year. After additional army-level exercises in Tennessee in January 1944, the 78th proceeded to Camp Pickett, Virginia to draw equipment for its expected combat deployment. It then headed to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey in preparation for shipment overseas. The 78th sailed for England in October and after brief combat training there crossed the Channel to France on November 22.

Cox was a staff sergeant in Company C of the division's 311th Infantry Regiment. They moved first into Belgium and then advanced into the Third Reich itself, reaching Roetgen, Germany on December 7. Cox's regiment was attached to the 8th Infantry Division in the Hurtgen Forest. By mid-December, the 311th was fighting inside Germany. When the Germans launched their winter offensive to the south through the Ardennes Forest, the 78th went on the defensive to hold the gains it had made on the north shoulder of what would become known as the Bulge. But defensive operations didn't mean no fighting. On January 3, 1945, Sergeant Cox twice dashed across fifty yards of open ground to ignite the fuses on a bee-hive charge. These explosives were specially designed to blow holes through the walls of houses so American troops could move through a village without exposure to German lines of fire down streets and roadways. For his heroism in braving enemy heavy machine gun and small arms fire, Sergeant Cox was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

By late January, the Allies had generally restored the lines to those existing before the German offensive. The 78th resumed its advance into Germany on January 30 and captured the town of Kesternich on February 2. The division's next objective was Dedenborn, a town on the opposite bank of the Roer River, the last major water obstacle between the 78th and the Rhine. On February 3, a month since the action that had earned him his Bronze Star, Cox was one of thirty-six soldiers who swam the icy cold waters of the Roer to attack the town. Cox reached the far bank, but was killed by German machine gun fire. For his gallantry in action against the enemy, Cox was awarded a second Bronze Star.



Cox's heroism under fire was recognized not once, but twice. In a ceremony in October 1945, Cox's father Ira, a captain in the State Guard, accepted the Bronze Star Medal and oak leaf cluster awarded to his son. Sergeant Cox was also awarded the Purple Heart and Combat Infantry Badge. Cox was survived by his parents and two brothers, both of whom were then serving in the Navy. Cox was initially buried in the American Cemetery at Margraten, Netherlands. After the war, his body was returned to South Carolina and reinterred in the Episcopal Church Cemetery at St. Stephen's.

