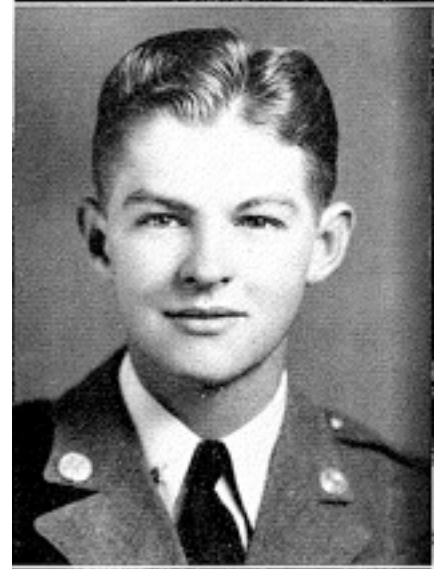


Monte Pantano

“The war in Italy was tough,” wrote syndicated columnist Ernie Pyle. “The land and the weather were both against us. It rained and it rained. Vehicles bogged down and temporary bridges washed out... The hills rose to high ridges of almost solid rock. We couldn’t go around them through the flat peaceful valleys, because the Germans were up there looking down upon us, and they would have let us have it. So we had to go up and over. A mere platoon of Germans, well dug in on a high, rock-spined hill, could hold out for a long time against tremendous onslaughts.” Tom Crayton of Anderson was one of the soldiers fighting Pyle’s “tough” war.



Thomas Waco Crayton was a member of Clemson’s Class of 1941. He was a general science major and a member of Sigma Tau Epsilon and the Anderson County Club. He journeyed to Fort McClellan, Alabama in the summer of 1940 where he participated in ROTC training camp and qualified as a marksman on the firing range. As a senior, Crayton was appointed commander of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment in the Cadet Brigade and was a member of the Company Commanders Club.

Following graduation, Crayton reported for active duty and was assigned to the 168th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division. The 34th was a National Guard Division drawn from Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas. It was federalized in February 1941 and was transported to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. The division trained through that summer and participated in the large-scale Louisiana Maneuvers. In January 1942, the 34th traveled to Fort Dix, New Jersey and prepared to embark for Europe. The first elements sailed from Brooklyn on January 14 and arrived in Northern Ireland twelve days later. The division trained in Northern Ireland until it boarded transports for the invasion of North Africa in November.

The 34th landed at Algiers on November 8 as part of the invasion’s Eastern Task Force. The division battled its way westward toward Tunisia. In February or March 1943, Lieutenant Crayton was wounded during a firefight. According to his comrade John Appelhons, Crayton was grazed across his cheek and injured his thumb. When the Allies defeated the German and Italians in North Africa, they next turned their sights on Sicily. The 34th was held out of this operation and instead trained for the coming invasion of Italy.

The bulk of the 34th Infantry Division landed at Salerno on September 25 and three days later was in combat. The division was fighting as part of VI Corps which pushed the Germans relentlessly north toward Benevento. In difficult terrain and worsening weather, against a disciplined enemy fighting from prepared defensive lines, the Allied advance soon stalled. The 34th found itself struggling to capture one of the “rock-spined” ridges described by Ernie Pyle.

Lieutenant Crayton's Company C of the 168th Infantry Regiment was part of the main effort to secure the high ground of Monte Pantano, a 3,300-foot peak of bare rock about twelve miles northeast of Cassino on the Germans' Winter Line of defenses. Attacking across a rock face with little cover, the infantrymen of the 168th sheltered behind any rock walls or boulders in their path. On November 30, the 168th secured one of the four peaks atop Monte Pantano. Once the



This painting by Donna Neary depicts the 168th Infantry's attack to seize Monte Pantano.

<http://www.ngb.army.mil/resources/galleries/heritage/redbull.html>

Germans were pushed off the hill, they immediately called in artillery fire on their vacated positions. The American GIs had to create secure fighting positions on the stony ground to protect themselves from the German fire.

On December 1, Lieutenant Crayton was alone in his foxhole near that of his platoon sergeant, Elmer Popejoy, when an intense enemy mortar barrage began. Crayton called out to Popejoy, "Is there any room in there for me?" Just after that, a mortar round came directly in on Crayton. Tom Crayton said, "Oh Pope, oh Pope..." and then died.

Allied forces would continue to battle through the brutal cold and over the inhospitable terrain, sacrificing lives for yards, into the spring of the coming year. Only then would the Allies breakthrough to Rome. Even then, the tenacious Germans would continue to hold out in Northern Italy for another eleven months.

Lieutenant Thomas Waco Crayton was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents. After the war, his remains were returned to South Carolina and buried in Anderson's Silverbrook Cemetery.

See also *Brave Men* by Ernie Pyle, Henry Holt & Co., 1943.

