

“When He Has Something to Do, He Is About It”

William Joseph Douglass seemed destined for military success even before he entered the Army in World War II. A graduate of Jonesville High School in Union County, he had attended West Point before returning to South Carolina and joining Clemson's Class of 1926. While at Clemson, “Doug,” as he was known on campus, was an agronomy major and member of the Ag Society. He was a standout cadet, serving as the regimental executive officer during his senior year and earning the cadet rank of lieutenant colonel.

Following graduation, Douglass taught school for a time before entering government service as a port inspector along the Mexican border at Nogales, Arizona. He was later transferred to Norfolk, Virginia where he continued in customs inspection work.

Douglass entered Army service with the rank of major and was assigned to the 80th Infantry Division—the “Blue Ridge” Division—composed of men from Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland. After stateside training, the 80th Division set sail aboard the SS *Queen Mary* on July 4, 1944, landing a few days later at Greenock, Scotland. The division traveled by train south to Northwich, England for additional training which included learning how to waterproof equipment for the upcoming channel crossing. The 80th Division crossed the English Channel in LSTs and Liberty Ships landing in Normandy on Utah Beach shortly after noon on August 2, 1944. A few days later on August 8, the 80th was initiated into battle when it took over the LeMans bridgehead in the XX Corps area.

By the beginning of October, Douglass was a lieutenant colonel in command of 2nd Battalion of the 80th Division's 319th Infantry Regiment. The regiment was headquartered at Atton, in northeastern France and was part of the Allies' slowing surge toward the German border less than 40 miles away. Despite some rainy weather, by October 6, the regiment's morning report described “fair” skies, dry roads and high morale. That day, Douglass' 2nd Battalion, as the regimental reserve, moved one mile east of Millery, a small village on the east bank of the Moselle River.

The next day, under clear skies, Douglass set out to reconnoiter hill 340, perhaps as a prelude to the commitment of his troops to the line. During his reconnaissance, Douglass was killed by enemy small arms fire.

In the 1926 Taps, Clemson's yearbook, Douglass' classmates wrote, “Whatever it may be, when he has something to do, he is about it.” That sentiment held true for preparing to lead his men into battle.

William Joseph Douglass was survived by his wife, two daughters and two brothers. He is buried in Lorraine American Cemetery, St. Avold, France.

