

Inspirational Leadership

After the Battle of the Bulge ended and Allied lines had been restored to where they were prior to the German attack, American forces prepared to return to the offensive. The western Allies had crossed into Germany and were poised to assault across the Roer River. Captain Charles Frederick Dunham, Jr. of the 28th Infantry Regiment was preparing to lead the way.

Dunham was a 1941 graduate of Clemson College from Anderson. He graduated from Anderson's Boy's High School and enrolled at Clemson in 1937. He was a civil engineering major and a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Dunham completed ROTC training at Fort McClellan, Alabama in the summer of 1940, qualifying as a marksman on the rifle range. As a senior, he served as a second lieutenant in Company G, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment of the Cadet Brigade.



C. F. DUNHAM

Immediately after graduation, Dunham, like the majority of his classmates, reported for active duty. He was assigned to the 28th Infantry Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division then training at Fort Jackson. The division's training continued at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; Yuma, Arizona; and Camp Forrest, Tennessee. Dunham and his division embarked for overseas duty in December 1943.

The division reached Belfast, Northern Ireland on December 15 and moved into billets in the town of Enniskillen. Dunham's 28th Infantry Regiment organized, equipped, and trained for combat, emphasizing small unit tactics and night operations. It departed Enniskillen on June 28, 1944 and crossed Utah Beach on July 4.

At dawn on July 8, Dunham's regiment went into action near the French town of La Haye du Puits. Throughout that summer, the 28th continued to fight in western France, attacking the port city of Brest and destroying German forces trapped in the Brittany Peninsula. Meanwhile, other American forces swung toward the east, sweeping the Germans out of France. In late September, the 8th Infantry Division was transported to the Ninth Army's sector along the German border in Luxembourg.

After a period of static defense, the 28th Infantry Regiment engaged in a limited offensive in November, capturing the German towns of Vossenack and Schmidt. Strong German counterattacks led to the 28th's withdrawal. The regiment then joined the attack in the Hurtgen Forest, which its official history called "the hardest fighting the regiment was to experience." Mud, snow, and cold weather combined with terrain favorable to the defending Germans and their minefields and artillery to create a back-and-forth contest featuring heavy casualties and little progress. The Germans' massive winter offensive begun to the south of the 28th's sector on

December 16 brought the Hurtgen fighting to a standstill, as American units struggled to hold the flanks of the enemy salient.

During January and into February, the regiment held its positions, but that did not prevent displays of valor. For his actions on January 11, Dunham was awarded the Bronze Star. When Allied lines were restored in February, the 28th took up new positions at Lendersdorf west of the Roer River, the last major obstacle before reaching the Rhine. The Germans had blown the dams upriver, turning the normally knee-deep Roer into a ten-foot-deep obstacle. Patrols were sent across the river to scout enemy positions and once its flood waters began to recede, plans were made to cross the Roer on February 23.

The crossing commenced at 0245 with Captain Dunham leading the first wave across the swiftly flowing river. Braving enemy fire in small boats propelled by outboard engines, approximately sixty percent of the first wave reached the east bank. The troops reorganized for offensive action and began to secure the far shore. Despite six German counterattacks, the Americans held on to their bridgehead with the help of pinpoint artillery fire from supporting batteries.

A week later, on March 2, Dunham was again leading his men in an attack, this time on a strongly fortified town west of Cologne. When his company became disorganized upon crossing into an enemy minefield, Dunham rushed forward through the mines, reorganizing his men. He continued to lead them until mortally wounded by an exploding mine. For his inspirational leadership and courage under fire, Captain Dunham was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Charles Frederick Dunham, Jr. was survived by his wife and their two-year-old son, his parents, three sisters, and a brother then serving with the Seabees in the Pacific. In addition to the Silver Star and Bronze Star medals, he was awarded the Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster. He is buried at the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium.

