

Same County, Same Class, Same Unit, Same Day

James Giles Ellis and John Charles Pratt had a good bit in common. Both grew up in the same county, just nine miles apart; Ellis from Greenwood and Pratt from Ninety Six. Both enrolled at Clemson as members of the Class of 1945, each majoring in a branch of engineering. And both were called to military service during the summer of 1943.

Ellis was a graduate of Greenwood High School and continued his education as a textile engineering major at Clemson. Pratt was an industrial engineering major. The world crisis interrupted the lives of these young men, each of whom found himself assigned to the 393rd Infantry Regiment of the 99th Infantry Division.

The 393rd spent the long summer of 1943 training at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. Beginning in late September, the regiment commenced maneuvers with three other divisions in the unpopulated country between Alexandria, Louisiana and the Texas border. These large scale exercises ended in mid-November with a crossing of the Sabine River.

From there, the regiment moved to Camp Maxey, Texas and intensive small unit training began. This specialized training included combat operations in towns and villages as well as preparations for overseas movement.

In September 1944, the 393rd began the long journey from Texas to combat. It traveled first to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts before embarking for the Old World. The movement took nearly a month and the 393rd finally reached barracks in England in October.

On November 3, the regiment boarded LST transports for the voyage across the English Channel, arriving at Le Havre, France on the morning of November 4. From there, the 393rd traveled by truck convoy northeast to Belgium. On Armistice Day, November 11, the 393rd relieved another regiment, taking its front line positions near Krinkelt, some 25 kilometers east of Malmedy. Pratt's Charlie Company anchored the regiment's right flank, forming next to neighboring regiment, the 394th.

In often deep snow, the regiment's first offensive kicked off on December 13. Despite the rough terrain and unfriendly weather, morale was high and progress was good. Then "All Hell broke loose." Recounted one regimental history:

"AT 0530 ON 15 DECEMBER 1944 ... this once regarded static front became an inferno of bursting shells of every conceivable type and caliber. The Krauts plastered our entire Regimental area with a gigantic barrage that lasted for two hours. And at 0730, while it was still dark, hordes of infantry charged our positions "screaming and yelling like madmen" as flares and huge searchlights hunted out targets for them. The main thrusts struck at the boundary between the First and Third Battalions and hit the southern Regimental flank. The Great German Counter-offensive that turned into the Battle of the Ardennes, more commonly called the Bulge, was on."



Ellis



Pratt

The brunt of the German offensive, which would come to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, fell on the 393rd, in particular on Charlie Company where it bordered with the neighboring 394th Infantry Regiment. Wave-after-wave of fierce German attackers were beaten back until the Americans risked being cut off and surrounded. As the Germans tightened their ring around Charlie Company, the unit's cooks, clerks and anti-tank platoon raced into the fight.

The main German force, mindful of its mission to puncture Allied lines and capture supply depots in order to fuel the offensive, by-passed 393rd units and continued to the west. But, that didn't relieve the pressure on the 393rd, especially 1st Battalion, which now found itself surrounded. Sometime on Sunday, December 17, Ellis and Pratt experienced another of those events that bound them together. During the savage fighting, both made the ultimate sacrifice for their comrades and for their country.

The valiant stand of the 393rd helped slow the Germans long enough for Allied leaders to mobilize other units to drive into the flanks of the German bulge, to pinch it off, halt the advance and deal the final blow to Hitler's desperate gamble.

Private First Class James Giles Ellis was survived by his father and stepmother; two brothers, one of whom would be wounded in Belgium on Christmas day; and his half-brother. Ellis was awarded the Purple Heart and was buried in the American Cemetery in Henri-Chapelle, Belgium.

Corporal John Charles Pratt was survived by his parents and one brother. He is buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Ninety Six, South Carolina.

