

The Last Year

Things changed fast on the Clemson College campus after December 1941. Even as college president Dr. Robert F. Poole nixed the idea of early graduation for those who wanted to get into the fight, word came down that cadets would have to register for educational deferments to ensure their studies wouldn't be interrupted by a call to active military service. Robert Entzminger and his classmates in the Class of 1944 would see their time on campus cut short as the military's need for young officers took priority over Clemson's usual academic program.



Robert Ogden Sanders Entzminger grew up in Hartsville, graduating from Hartsville High School in 1939. Europe was sliding toward war that summer, but those troubles must have seemed far removed to Entzminger who enrolled in North Georgia Junior College to continue his education. For the fall semester of 1941, Entzminger transferred to Clemson to pursue a degree in civil engineering. Entzminger served as a cadet sergeant in Company E-2, Second Battalion, Second Regiment in the Cadet Brigade. In February 1943, Dr. Poole announced new War Department rules affecting Clemson's cadets. Following commencement exercises in June, graduating seniors would be ordered to Officer Candidate Schools (OCS). Juniors, in lieu of the second year of advanced ROTC instruction that would normally have occurred during their senior year on campus, would report for three months of infantry training at one of the Army's replacement depots. Those juniors who performed satisfactorily would then be sent to OCS. It was, as *The Tiger* wrote in its final edition that May, "...the last year that Clemson will really be Clemson for a long time." For most juniors, including Entzminger, their time on campus was over.

Following his commissioning as a second lieutenant in the Reserve Officers Corps, Entzminger was assigned to the 272nd Infantry Regiment of the 69th Infantry Division. The division sailed for England in November of 1944. The division arrived in England during the first two weeks of December—just prior to the Germans' launch of their bold winter offensive. On Christmas Day, the division hosted a party for local children—and received orders to provide reinforcements for American divisions which had blunted the German attack that became known as the Battle of the Bulge.

The rest of the division, including Entzminger's 272nd Infantry Regiment, crossed the English Channel on January 23. By then, the Battle of the Bulge was over, the Germans had mounted their last offensive—but two significant barriers stood between the Allies and Germany: the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River.

Arriving at Le Havre, France, the division marched through the bustling port city to the train station, travelling by rail to Forges les Eaux. On February 12, the 69th relieved the 99th Infantry Division, occupying defensive positions in Belgium. The 99th was one of the few American divisions which had held its ground under the heavy armored onslaught of the Germans' December attack. It had held against far superior forces, preventing the Germans from adhering to their risky timetable, gaining time for Allied reinforcements to arrive, and ultimately helping doom the German attack.

The 69th assumed the offensive on February 27, attacking toward the Siegfried Line, the Germans' fixed defenses of pillboxes, tank obstacles, and reinforced gun positions stretching across the country's western border. The division captured the high ridge east of Prether, which allowed the use of the important Hellenthal-Hollerath highway.

On March 7, second lieutenant Entzminger was leading his 1st platoon on patrol, when it was caught in the crossfire of two pillboxes. Entzminger observed the enemy position 200 yards to his immediate front and, upon ordering his patrol to withdraw to safety, he remained in a forward, exposed position, calling for and adjusting artillery fire upon the enemy pillboxes. Although subject to danger from friendly artillery as well as enemy small-arms fire, he remained in the position until after the supporting artillery barrage was lifted. Immediately after the barrage, while shifting his position, he was mortally wounded by enemy small-arms fire. Two others were wounded, and several men of the platoon distinguished themselves by their efficient and courageous leadership.

Immediately afterwards, another patrol led by first lieutenant Coppock was ordered forward to determine the strength of the enemy in front of his position. Coppock pursued his task with such vigor and disregard for danger that, during the night, he succeeded in penetrating 1,200 yards beyond the enemy's defenses.

In part due to Entzminger's and Coppock's heroic actions, the division advanced rapidly to the east, capturing Schmidtheim and Dahlem and penetrating the vaunted Siegfried Line. The following day, the 9th Armored Division captured intact the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen and the Rhine was crossed.

For his gallantry in action, Robert Entzminger was awarded the Silver Star. He was survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Entzminger of Hartsville.

