

Across France

The 8th Infantry Regiment had spent countless hours training for this very morning. In individual drills, squad level exercises, and regimental maneuvers, the soldiers of the 8th had practiced assault landings and attacks against fortified enemy positions backed by heavy weapons. Now, on June 6, 1944, the soldiers were charging ashore on Normandy's Utah Beach. The problem was that in the confusion of battle, amidst the smoke and mist, the enemy fire, and the inevitable fog of war, units had landed early, late, and in the wrong places. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, assistant division commander of the 8th Infantry's parent 4th Infantry Division, conferred with regimental commander, Colonel James Van Fleet. Realizing that the regiment was out of position, Roosevelt, son of America's 26th president, made the decision: "We'll start the war from right here." Somewhere in the chaos was Robert Clinton Fellers, Clemson College Class of 1940.



Robert Fellers was a textile engineering major from Prosperity. In the summer after his junior year, Fellers attended ROTC camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama where he qualified as a marksman on the rifle range. Back on campus as a senior, Fellers was a cadet second lieutenant.

Fellers entered the Army in early 1942. Two years later, he shipped overseas as part of the 8th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division. On D-Day, the 8th led the way across Utah Beach, fighting its way inland and linking up with the 82nd Airborne Division which had been dropped behind German lines shortly after midnight.

The 8th attacked to the west after D-Day in order to cut off the Cotentin Peninsula and isolate the German defenders in the important Norman port of Cherbourg. By late July, the regiment was reoriented to the south, ready to participate in the anticipated breakout from the Normandy beachhead.

The 8th was at the point on July 25 when Operation Cobra was launched. The concept of the attack was for American heavy bombers to carpet bomb front line German positions followed immediately by an attack by American ground forces. The first wave of bombers, approaching the bomb line from the north, dropped their loads on target. But a southerly wind blew smoke and dust toward the American lines and obscured the bombers' aiming point. Each successive wave of aircraft dropped its bombs a little closer to friendly positions. By the time the dust cleared, 111 American soldiers had been killed and 490 wounded, but the attack jumped off as scheduled.

Over the next several weeks, American forces, including the 8th Infantry Regiment pivoted to the east and raced across France. During this offensive, Captain Fellers was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. On August 25, Paris was liberated, but the sweep toward the German

frontier continued. In mid-September, the regiment reached the Siegfried Line, Germany's static defensive fortifications along its border with France. Fellers was wounded during this advance.

After a period of recuperation, Fellers returned to the regiment. In November, the 8th entered the Hurtgen Forest, which would become the longest battle of the American Army during World War II. When the Germans launched the Battle of the Bulge in mid-December, the 8th held the shoulder of the German penetration and in January counterattacked across the Sauer River to seize Fohren and Vianden, Luxembourg.

Enemy resistance stiffened as the 8th crossed into Germany proper. The regiment continued to battle deeper into Germany. On March 2, Captain Fellers died of wounds.

In addition to the Silver Star, Fellers was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents, a sister, and a brother. He was buried at the Henri-Chapelle American Military Cemetery in Liege, Belgium.

