

## **“The world is debtor to him.”**

By the time Captain Alfred Julius Folger and the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division rolled across Omaha Beach on June 24, 1944, the Allies had established a sizeable lodgment area in Normandy. Still, the defending Germans had prevented the break through that would put the Allies on the road to Paris... and on to Berlin.

Al Folger grew up in Pickens and enrolled as a textile engineering major at Clemson College. Folger and the rest of the Class of '38 entered Clemson during the second year of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. The United States was still reeling from the economic havoc and wide-spread unemployment of the Great Depression as Al and his classmates donned the gray uniforms of the cadet corps. Al was a two-sport athlete, playing for head coach Jess Neely on both the football and baseball teams. As a letter winner, Al was also a member of the Block C Club. He also attended ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama between his junior and senior years.



1938 was a tumultuous year. In March, Chancellor Adolf Hitler completed Germany's *Anschluss* with Austria. He next turned his attention to neighboring Czechoslovakia. As Clemson's commencement approached, the editors of Taps looked to the past in anticipation of the future. *"...our gray-clad cadet corps, awakened by the bitter lessons of the World War, looks into the dim past to pay tribute and to honor the sons of Clemson who answered the call to arms..."* Before long, Clemson's newest sons would answer a call of their own.

Folger and his company from the 36<sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Regiment went into the line on June 29, 1944 and quickly found themselves confronted by tenacious German defenders and the unfriendly hedgerows of Normandy. The hedgerows, or *Bocage*, were terrain features of mixed woodland and pasture, with fields and winding country lanes sunken between narrow low ridges and banks surmounted by tall thick hedgerows that break the wind but also limit visibility. The hedgerows favored the defenders, creating natural obstacles and defensive cover and concealment at the edge of every field and pasture. The difficult terrain added to the challenge of displacing the Germans and punching a hole in their lines.

On July 15, Folger was leading his company in fierce fighting north of the Periers-St. Lo road. Folger was moving along his defensive line inspiring and encouraging his men despite heavy shelling by the enemy. According to the citation for his Silver Star decoration, *"This fearless action, exceptional initiative and unselfish devotion to duty resulted in the loss of his life..."*

Chaplain Arthur Weber described Folger as *"... an excellent leader, whose men thought the world of him. He was respected and admired by officers, as well as by enlisted men. I can remember his battalion commander telling me that he could have commanded a battalion as easily and as well as he did a company."* In a letter to Jean, Folger's widow, Weber wrote *"Your husband did not give his life in*



*vain, but to make possible and to perpetuate those freedoms which are the inherent right of mankind. The world is debtor to him. [He] ...had a deep, personal faith in The Lord...he was most faithful in attendance at chapel services...urged his officers and men to worship.”*

Al Folger was awarded both the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. In addition to his widow, Jean, he was survived by his young children Margaret and Allen.