

Gallant Defense

Clemson College was a decidedly different place in the fall of 1943. Most of the uniformed men on campus were participants in the Army's Specialized Training Program. There were relatively few cadets as most young men above the age of 18 were already in military service. John Joseph Graham was one of the few exceptions.

"Yank" Graham had graduated from Walhalla High School in the spring and enrolled at Clemson in September. An English major, Graham was one of just 293 new freshmen, most of whom had not yet reached their eighteenth birthdays or had been categorized as physically unfit by their local draft boards. In all, just over 700 students were on campus as the college opened its fifty-first year.



Graham remained at Clemson only one semester before taking a typesetting position with the *Keowee Courier* newspaper back in his hometown. In February 1944, Graham followed the example of his father, who had served in the Army during the First World War. Graham enlisted at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and trained as a paratrooper. He shipped overseas in October. He was assigned to Company B, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles. The 101st had participated in the D-Day invasion and the unsuccessful Operation Market-Garden in the Netherlands. Graham joined the division at Mourmelon, France, where it was refitting and retraining.

When the Germans launched their winter Ardennes offensive, the 101st was deployed by truck convoy to the Belgian town of Bastogne, a key road junction. The division, in miserable weather, set up a circular defense around the town and was soon surrounded. On December 22, when offered the opportunity to surrender, the division's acting commander, Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe replied, "Nuts!" and the 101st continued to deny the Germans access to the roads they needed to advance. On Christmas Day, the snowy, frigid weather began to clear and Allied airpower was brought to bear against the German attackers. On the 26th, elements from the 4th Armored Division broke through the German encirclement to reach and resupply the 101st. The gallant defense of Bastogne had slowed the German advance and caused the attackers to expend time and resources they could ill afford to lose. With the outcome of the battle no longer in doubt, the 101st remained in the area to clear out remaining German forces and reduce the bulge in the Allied lines.



On January 18, the 101st moved south into the Alsace region of France along its border with Germany. Attached to Seventh Army, the 101st held defensive positions along the front and engaged in patrolling. On February 1, Private Graham was killed in action.

John Joseph Graham was survived by his mother and sister. He was awarded the Purple Heart and the Combat Infantryman Badge. He was buried at the Lorraine American Military Cemetery in Saint-Avold, France.

The heroic stand of the 101st at Bastogne helped doom the German offensive. It was the last act of a desperate regime and when it failed, the Germans were left without the necessary forces to seriously contest the Allied advance from the west.

