

Uncertainty on Campus

We know little about Bryan Gibson Hunt and even less about his year at Clemson College. Hunt was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Dana Broadman Hunt of Greenville. He attended Forestville Baptist Church and enrolled at Clemson in 1942 with the first group of post-Pearl Harbor freshmen. The war then raging would not only change their lives, it would also change their college.

Hunt was an engineering major and as an underclassman was required to participate in basic ROTC. In addition, with the country shifting to a wartime posture, Hunt would have been both a Clemson cadet and a member of the Enlisted Reserve Corps. The ERC was a mechanism to keep young men in colleges and universities until the exigencies of wartime manpower demanded their call to active duty.

In the years between 1930 and 1940 inclusive, Clemson President Robert Franklin Poole reported that the college had graduated nearly two thousand Army officers through its Reserve Officer Training Corps. Numerous other young men had received sufficient training to qualify as productive officers and non-commissioned officers in the armed forces. Poole used that record to resist calls from some cadets to shorten the curriculum and allow early graduations so that they might get into the fight sooner. Instead, college officials attempted to secure draft deferments for the cadets.

While there was uncertainty over the military's manpower policies and needs, official guidance from college administrators and the Departments of War and Navy was to stay in school.

Despite this uncertainty and the anxiety it must have caused the cadets, life on campus continued to include formations, classes, drills and examinations. Speakers, concerts and sporting events were hallmarks of campus life at a time when entertainments were less available. The campus YMCA offered feature motion pictures like *Pride of the Yankees* with Gary Cooper and *Mrs. Miniver* starring Greer Carson during November 1942. Perhaps the most popular diversions were the occasional dances featuring young ladies from Winthrop College.

By the start of Hunt's second semester in January 1943, the campus newspaper, *The Tiger*, was able to report that seniors who were currently in the advanced ROTC course would be allowed to finish the semester before being ordered to Officer Candidate Schools following their June commencement. Juniors enrolled in the advance course would also finish the semester on campus before reporting to infantry replacement centers for three months of training. Those who successfully completed this regimen would have the opportunity to attend OCS. As for the sophomores and freshmen, *The Tiger* columnist Kenneth Cribb wrote, "We still don't know what's going to happen to us...Neither does Dr. Poole, Colonel Pool, the Secretary of the War, the Secretary of the Navy, nor anybody else...sit tight and listen to rumors."

By mid-February, the war's manpower needs were beginning to come into sharper focus. Cribb reported, "The freshmen are already being called up." The Corps of Cadets, which had number twenty-two hundred at the start of the fall semester, including a record nine hundred thirty-one freshmen, began to dwindle. By May, only sixteen hundred cadets remained. As these cadets were ordered to service, two new groups of young men arrived on campus and moved into the barracks. Army aviation cadets and engineering students in the Specialized Training Program filled part of the void created by the early departure of students. These Army cadets were the result of Clemson's selection by the War Department



as one of two hundred eighty-one colleges and universities across the country to provide academic training in critical subjects like engineering, physics and chemistry.

In the May 12, 1943 edition of *The Tiger*, Cribb wrote "...this is the last year Clemson will really be Clemson for a long time...About all that will remain of the Clemson we know and love will be the traditions of service to this state and this nation, and the traditions of honor and loyalty and friendship that characterize the Clemson man the world over."

With most of its students gone to war, Clemson focused on providing training to soldiers on active duty for the next two years.

Bryan Gibson Hunt left Clemson after less than a year on campus. He ended up in the Army as a private first class and by May 1944 was fighting within the Anzio beachhead in Italy as part of VI Corps. The Corps had achieved a complete surprise, landing from the sea at Anzio on the west coast of Italy on January 22, 1944 in an attempt to outflank the German defensive lines then battling General Mark Clark's Fifth Army. Instead of exploiting its surprise, VI Corps' commander ordered his forces to dig in and defend the beachhead against an expected German counterattack. When it finally came, the counterattack was so ferocious as to bottle-up the invaders and prevent them from regaining the initiative. It was not until May 24 that the Americans were able to capture the key town of Cisterna, affect a link up with II Corps and finally form the left flank of Clark's army. It was on that date, generally considered the final day of the Anzio campaign, that Hunt was killed in action. Eleven days later, Fifth Army liberated Rome, the first of the Axis capitals to fall.

After the war, Hunt's remains were returned and reburied in his family's plot at the Berea Baptist Church Cemetery.

"Clemson will emerge from the war stronger and greater than she has ever been," Kenneth Cribb had written in May 1943. "Her traditions will continue and new ones will be formed. Because Clemson is CLEMSON. She will live."

Cribb was right of course. The Clemson University of today has reached heights that even he would not have imagined. The World War II sacrifices of Bryan Gibson Hunt and three hundred seventy other Clemson men helped make those achievements possible.