

Shared History

They were born two months apart in late 1918, studied agriculture, marched across campus in the same parades, graduated as members of the Class of 1941, and on a dark night in April 1945, ended up sharing a foxhole.

Walter Bennett graduated from Orangeburg High School in 1936, completed a business course the following year and then enrolled at Clemson College. A member of the cadet band, Bennett was a vocational education major and a member of the campus chapter of Future Farmers of America. He participated in the Calhoun Forensic Society, the Tri-County Club and the Orangeburg County Club. In the summer of 1940, Bennett and many of his classmates attended ROTC Camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama. As a senior, Bennett served as a cadet second lieutenant.



Marion Innis Jenkins of Yorges Island attended public schools in Meggett before enrolling in Greenwood's Bailey Military

Bennett

Institute. As a Clemson cadet, he

majored in animal husbandry and served as president of the Animal Husbandry Club. He was a member of the rifle team and served as president of the Episcopal Students Association and the Block and Bridle Club. Like Bennett, he attended ROTC training at Fort McClellan. Jenkins was an editor for Agrarian, the campus agriculture publication and was a cadet first lieutenant as a senior.

Both newly commissioned alumni reported for active duty with

after graduation. Both were eventually assigned to the 307th Infantry Regiment of the 77th Infantry Division, an old New York National Guard unit reactivated in March 1942 at Fort Jackson.

After months of organization and also known as the Liberty Division, on March 31, 1944. Here the division practiced amphibious operations and jungle warfare. Elements of the division took part in the assault on Guam. By early August, Guam was secured, but the 77th was afforded little time to rest.



the Army shortly assigned to the Infantry Division, reactivated in

training, the 77th, landed in Hawaii practiced warfare. In July, assault landing on secured, but the The division landed

on the east coast of Leyte, the Philippines on November 23 and was attached to the XXIV Corps. In action against the Japanese on Leyte, Bennett, now a captain, was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism. The 77th remained in the Philippines until February 1945 when it was pulled out to prepare for the next major US invasion—Okinawa.

When US Army and Marine divisions landed on Okinawa on April 1, 1945—Easter Sunday—they kicked off what would become the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. The 77th did not participate in the initial landings, but remained at sea, suffering from intensified Japanese kamikaze attacks. On April 16, the 77th landed on the island of Ie Shima, northeast of Okinawa's Motobu Peninsula, to seize a Japanese airfield and key terrain. The ensuing fighting was bitter as the Japanese defenders were committed to fighting to the death.

On Wednesday, April 18, a Japanese sniper killed famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle who was covering the 77th's campaign. Then came the night of April 19. It was the "worst night of my life," remembered A. J. Tiffany, a mortar man in Captain Bennett's H Company. "We were so close to the front lines we had our mortars pointing almost straight up." Tiffany recalls that Bennett and Jenkins were huddled together in the same foxhole. A Japanese shell scored a direct hit. "I was only a few yards from them when they were killed... both officers were very well liked..."

Both were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.

Captain Walter Bennett was survived by mother and brother. He is buried in Orangeburg's Sunnyside Cemetery.

First Lieutenant Marion Innis Jenkins was survived by his parents, a sister, and brother who was then serving in the Army in India. He is buried at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Cemetery in Yonges Island.