

Heavy Cost

Walter Lawson Jenkins, Jr. of Rock Hill was a mechanical engineering major and a member of Clemson's Class of 1945. At the conclusion of his sophomore year in the spring of 1943, Jenkins and most of the underclassmen on campus were ordered to basic training in the armed forces. Military planners were engaged in the cold calculus of predicting casualties and determining the numbers and types of organizations it was going to take to defeat the Germans and the Japanese. All these units would require men and 1943 would see the war's peak in terms of inductions into the service with more than 3.3 million men called to the colors.



Jenkins reported for duty on June 30 and trained at Fort McClellan, Alabama. He was assigned to the 309th Infantry Regiment of the 78th Infantry Division which moved into the Carolina Maneuver Area in November to evaluate its training. After Christmas leave, the division deployed to Tennessee to participate in maneuvers there beginning in January 1944. After additional training, the division traveled to Camp Pickett, Virginia, drawing new equipment in preparation for its movement overseas. The 78th sailed for England in October 1944. Final combat preparations took place in England and the division crossed the Channel to France on November 22.

By the time of the 78th's arrival in France, the Germans had been shoved back close to their own borders in most places along the front lines. The 78th moved to Belgium on November 27 and entered Germany at Roetgen on December 7. In early December, Jenkins's 309th Infantry Regiment relieved elements of the veteran 1st Infantry Division on the front lines in the vicinity of Entenpfuhl.



Shoulder patch of the 78th Infantry Division

Pushing the Germans out of France was a good thing, of course, but it resulted in over extended supply lines and shortages of fuel and ammunition along the Allied front lines. These shortages, and the approaching winter weather, limited offensive action. Still, patrols and skirmishes continued to take place as the opposing armies probed to maintain contact with the enemy.

The cost of war falls most heavily on the front-line soldier. In less than six months of combat, the 78th Infantry Division would suffer more than 8,000 casualties, including 1,427 killed in action. On Wednesday, December 13, Private First Class Jenkins was mortally wounded.

Walter Lawson Jenkins, Jr. was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents and sister. After the war, his remains were returned to Rock Hill and buried in Laurelwood Cemetery.

