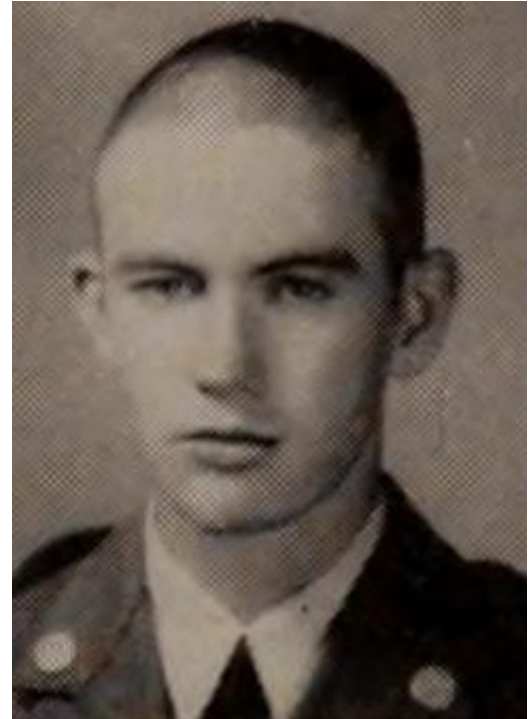


## Combat Engineer

By the time he arrived on campus in the fall of 1942, the United States had been at war for nine months. Alvin Cecil Johnson and his comrades in Clemson's Class of 1946 probably figured that the odds of completing their college degrees without interruption were pretty slim. If so, they were right.

Johnson was a chemical engineering major from Spartanburg. Assigned as a private to Company K, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, Johnson and most of his classmates were able to complete only their freshman year before being called to active duty.

After completing basic training, Johnson was selected for the combat engineers. He was assigned to the 278<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion which was activated at Camp Robinson, Arkansas in October 1943.



In March 1944, the 278<sup>th</sup> participated in its first major field training exercise in the Sulphur Springs training area. According to the battalion's history, it "practiced living in the mud and rain for days on end, throwing pontoon bridges, and infantry foot bridges across the river, how to conduct ferry and assault boat crossings, how to get things done under blackout conditions, building roads and culverts, classifying bridges and making long hikes and reconnaissance, eating 'C' rations for the first time." In April, the battalion headed to the Louisiana maneuver area to repair 85 miles of roads rendered impassable by the heavy military exercises previously conducted there.

In June, the battalion, then stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, received orders alerting it for overseas movement. The 278<sup>th</sup> completed its preparations at Camp Shanks, New Jersey and embarked from a westside pier in Manhattan on September 28.

Arriving in England, the battalion moved into billets in the resort town of Swanage on the southern coast just west of the Isle of Wight. In early December, the 278<sup>th</sup> crossed the English Channel to France. On December 10, it arrived in Belgium, assigned to the US Ninth Army. While quartered in the vicinity of Hermalle, several German V-1 buzz bombs struck nearby. When the Battle of the Bulge broke out to the south, the 278<sup>th</sup> carried out critical operations to sand roads and keep them passable despite heavy snowfall. It also took over operations of area sawmills.



On February 11, the battalion moved its headquarters to Valkenburg, Holland, a rest center for the XIX Corps. The 278<sup>th</sup> continued its work to improve the main highway between Maastricht

and Aachen, which carried heavy traffic in preparation for the Allies' offensive to cross the Roer River. German prisoners-of-war were put to work as road gangs under the supervision of the engineers.

In early March, the battalion moved about six miles northwest of Roermond, along the Netherlands' border with Germany. During a convoy halt on this move, a soldier from Company B stepped on a German mine which detonated wounding six men and killing five, including Private First Class Johnson.

Alvin Cecil Johnson was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his mother, a brother, and a sister. He is buried in the American Cemetery, Margraten, Netherlands.

