

Change

Clemson was changing, there was no doubt about it. That summer, the Alumni Association elected a new president, an Edgefield judge named Strom Thurmond from the Class of 1923. There was a new football coach too, Frank Howard. *The Tiger* newspaper proclaimed that Howard had “his work cut out for him,” taking over the program after its most successful season ever. Long-time president Enoch Sikes had retired over the summer. His successor, Dr. Robert Franklin Poole, was the first Clemson alumnus to reach the presidency of his alma mater. Poole was on hand that August of 1940 to welcome cadets back to campus. With enrollment of 2,300, every spot in the barracks was filled and some of the boys were staying in rooms at the YMCA. Among the new arrivals getting their heads shaved and their uniforms issued was Francis Marion Jones from Lake City.



Jones was a chemistry major. He was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment. Starting his college career was no doubt a life-changing event for Jones and the rest of the new arrivals in the Class of 1944—but even more dramatic changes were in the offing.

As Jones reported to campus to begin his sophomore year in the late summer of 1941, football was again one of the headlines in *The Tiger*. Bonds for the construction of a new 20,000 seat stadium had been sold and the facility was projected to be ready for the start of the 1942 season. In a sign of the growing concerns over the war in Europe and the continuing expansion of the US Army, ROTC training camp in the summer of 1941 could not be held at Fort McClellan, Alabama as it had been throughout the previous decade. Instead, Clemson commandant of cadets Colonel Herbert Pool commanded 1,300 cadets from across the Fourth Corps Area for training on the Clemson campus. Pool termed the training camp, which culminated with a simulated “blitzkrieg” on nearby Anderson, as the “best ever.” It wasn’t just the rising seniors affected by America’s growing military. Of the cadets who had been seniors during Jones’s freshman year, 75% were already on active duty with the largest portion of them in the Infantry.

Jones and his fellow chemistry majors were no doubt shocked in early December when one of their professors was found dead of an apparent heart attack in his room at the Clemson Hotel. Despite the tragedy, most of the news on campus was about pre-holiday events like the pending concert to be presented by the Limestone Girls Choir.

The most significant change of Jones’s tenure at Clemson occurred on Sunday, December 7. With the Japanese attack on Hawaii, Jones and his fellow cadets realized that forces beyond their control would now determine the arc of their lives. In a *Tiger* article the following Wednesday, famous journalist Ben Robertson of the Class of 1923, advised the cadets:

This is the time for all of us at Clemson to do a difficult thing—we must be patient and quiet. We must remember, without doubting, that the war we are now in will certainly last for a very long

time and that before it is finished the time will come for all of us to fight. If for the present, we must stand by then we must stand by.

Waiting—and the accompanying uncertainty—was more difficult for some than for others. Many cadets left campus to enlist. Others, like Jones, signed up for the Enlisted Reserve Corps [ERC], which conferred military status on cadets in school, and deferred their draft—at least for the moment. Over the following months the front pages of *The Tiger* frequently included updates on alumni serving in the military. Promotions, assignments, commendations, wounds, and deaths were reported.

As Jones started his junior—as it would turn out his final—year at Clemson in the fall of 1942, rumors were flying as to the cadets' future. Congress was debating an amendment to the Selective Service Act that would make eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds eligible for the draft. New enlistments in the ERC were suspended in December as War Department officials wrestled with plans to meet the Army's manpower needs.

In early January, *The Tiger* reported that the War Department's Adjutant General's office had determined that all juniors and seniors in advanced ROTC would be allowed to complete the school year. Once Army Specialized Training Programs [ASTP] began functioning at the institutions attended by the cadets, they would be subject to call up. Clemson soon announced that it would begin hosting ASTP training after 1943's June commencement.

Jones reported for active duty after completing his junior year in the spring of 1943. After training in the States, he was transferred overseas in October 1944. On February 9, 1945, Staff Sergeant Jones was killed in action in Germany.

Francis Marion Jones witnessed great changes at Clemson and in American society brought on by the world war. His sacrifice contributed to the most significant change of the 20th Century: the defeat of fascism and the emergence of the United States as a global superpower.

Jones was survived by his parents, a sister, and a brother, then fighting in Italy. He was awarded the Purple Heart. After the war, his remains were returned to South Carolina and buried at the Lake City Cemetery.

