

Combat in the Rear

The 12th Army Group situation map for April 19, 1945, shows the deep penetrations of Allied forces into Germany. American divisions had reached the Elbe River and some were within just 80 miles of Berlin. But a careful review of the map indicates that not all American troops were in action at the front. Some, like Martin Marion Lotz, Jr., were in action in the rear.

Martin Lotz was an agricultural engineering major from Summerville and a member of Clemson's Class of 1944. He compiled a distinguished record as an underclassman and as a junior was appointed cadet first sergeant of Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment. He was a member of the First Sergeants Club and the American Society of Agricultural Engineers.



At the end of the spring semester of 1943, Lotz, by then a rising senior, reported for active duty with the Army. He completed basic training and Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry.

Lotz was assigned to the 262nd Infantry Regiment of the 66th Infantry Division training at Camp Blanding, Florida. Known as the "Black Panther" division, the 66th later moved to Arkansas and then to Camp Rucker, Alabama before shipping overseas to England in late 1944. The 66th reached France in late December and was committed to combat on January 1, 1945—but the 66th wasn't sent to the front.



The Allies' great breakout from the Normandy beachhead the previous summer had swept the German army out of France, but no broom sweeps completely clean. Rather than expend the time and resources to completely reduce German strongpoints, many enemy formations were simply bypassed and cut off from reinforcement and resupply.

The 66th Infantry was sent to western France to contain and eventually destroy the approximately 100,000 German soldiers left on the Brittany Peninsula. These forces, many of which had supported the German U-boat campaigns against Allied shipping, were now isolated, but they were not harmless. If ignored, they could threaten to disrupt Allied rear areas including the vital lines of communication over which Allied supplies moved ceaselessly from the English Channel to the frontlines in Germany.

Throughout that winter of 1945, the 66th harassed remaining German installations and conducted limited objective attacks. On April 16, the Germans went on the offensive, launching a heavy attack near La Croix, which was repulsed. The 66th in turn attacked several heavily fortified enemy positions in mid-April. In one of these attacks, on April 19, Second Lieutenant Lotz was killed in action.

Martin Marion Lotz, Jr. was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents, eight sisters, and one brother. In 1948, his remains were returned to Summerville and buried in the Boone Hill United Methodist Church Cemetery.

