

A Hero From Sardis

The fog of war and the mists of time often mingle to shroud events, to hide them from those who would look backwards. Much of the story of Loraine Orben Matthews of Sardis, South Carolina is lost to us through this conspiracy of years and chaos.

Matthews was born and lived most of his life in Sardis, the tiny crossroads just south of Timmonsville. In September 1940, he joined the other members of Clemson's Class of 1944 as they arrived on campus. Their college careers would be most unusual as their time at Clemson—and their lives—would be interrupted by a call to arms.

A textile engineering major, Matthews was a sophomore when the war broke. He responded by enlisting in the Army in 1942, but he remained in school until summer of the following year. In June 1943, with the Allies beginning—finally—to advance on all fronts, Matthews was ordered to basic training at Camp Wheeler near Macon, Georgia. Wheeler, rather than being used to train cohesive units, was a replacement training center where new soldiers received basic and advanced individual training. They would then be sent to overseas units as replacements for combat casualties. In Matthews' case, however, the Army sent him back to school, back to Clemson, where he continued to train while he resumed academic work. With the invasion of Europe planned for the spring of 1944, the Army called Matthews to Fort Benning, Georgia in March. From there, we went to Fort Jackson near Columbia and was assigned to the 345th Infantry Regiment.



Following the Normandy invasion, Army casualties increased dramatically, as did the need for fresh units to commit to the battle. The Army staged the arrival of new divisions into France to keep the pressure on the now retreating Germans. On October 17, Matthews and the rest of the 345th Infantry Regiment, now assigned to the 87th Infantry Division, set sail aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* bound for England. By December, the regiment had crossed the ocean, traversed England by train and shipped across the Channel to France.

On December 13, the regiment moved up to the front, and by the 17th had crossed into Germany. Capturing the town of Medelsheim, its objective, the regiment set up in defensive positions. On December 23, the regiment was ordered to prepare for movement to a new area of operations where a German offensive was forcing a bulge in Allied lines. In frigid 15-degree weather with intermittent snow, the regiment began to move west and then north. Buns and homes provided the only warmth and cheer on Christmas Eve, but mail was delivered through the night and Christmas morning dawned bright and clear.

With the German offensive that became known as the “Battle of the Bulge” spent, the regiment helped the Allies regain the offensive. By February, the 345th Infantry had crossed not only the Rhine, but also the Neckar River and was advancing to the north of Stuttgart. At 1730 hours on the 26th, 1st Battalion, including Matthews' B Company attacked to the east near the village of Neuenstein. Eight hundred yards from its objective, B Company was halted by heavy German machine gun fire and small arms fire. In addition, the soldiers found themselves in the midst of anti-personnel mines and booby traps. The regiment reported 125 casualties in the first 28 hours of the attack. One of these was Matthews.

We have no details on his wounds, but given the proximity of anti-personnel mines and the fact that Matthews was later transported to the sprawling Lawson Army Hospital in Atlanta, it is possible that he suffered wounds resulting in amputation. Lawson was well-known across

the United States for fitting soldiers with prosthetic devices and helping rehabilitate them.

A full nine months elapsed between the time Matthews was wounded and his death on November 29. By that time, the war in Europe, which he had helped to win, had been over for more than six months.

Private First Class Loraine O. Matthews was buried at St. Paul's Cemetery in Coward, South Carolina on Saturday, December 1, 1945.

Much of the story of Loraine Orben Matthews has been lost to us, but not the fact of his selfless sacrifice and his contribution to the victory of freedom over tyranny.

