

## *Nordwind*

Daniel Preston McLaurin of Cheraw came to Clemson's campus as a freshman in 1940. McLaurin was a mechanical engineering major and was assigned to Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. At the time, Clemson boasted one of the larger ROTC contingents in the country, and McLaurin was a standout. As a junior, he was appointed a cadet sergeant, indicating an aptitude for military science. At the end of that spring semester, McLaurin reported for basic training at Camp Croft near Spartanburg.

As a soldier, McLaurin again demonstrated proficiency. His basic training performance earned him a slot at Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. In June 1944, McLaurin was commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry.

McLaurin was assigned to the 222<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the famous Rainbow Division, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. The 42<sup>nd</sup> had gotten its nickname in the First World War because it included men from each of the forty-eight states and therefore spanned the country like a rainbow. Unlike many World War II divisions based on National Guard units drawn from specific sections of the country, the 42<sup>nd</sup> continued to field soldiers from all the states—and continued to be known as the Rainbow Division.

After intense combat training at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, the 222<sup>nd</sup> and the rest of the Rainbow Division shipped out to Marseille, in southern France, arriving there in November 1944. After a brief period of training and consolidation, the regiment moved north in early December. On Christmas Eve 1944, the 222<sup>nd</sup> moved into the line, relieving elements of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the Alsace region of eastern France, bordered by the Rhine River.

To the northwest, the Germans were losing their last major gamble, the Battle of the Bulge. To help blunt the attack, General Alexander Patch's Seventh Army, which included VI Corps and the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, had extended its lines in the Alsace to free up American divisions to counterattack into the German bulge. The thinner American lines were an invitation that the Germans' First Army could not resist. Supported by the XXXIX Panzer Corps, the Germans attacked Seventh Army on December 31.

The main effort of the German attack, Operation *Nordwind*, fell on the VI Corps area—including the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division—along France's Maginot Line of fortifications north of Haguenau. On January 11, Second Lieutenant McLaurin was leading a patrol back toward friendly lines



near Ingolsheim when enemy artillery fire blocked his route and the patrol got caught in the crossfire of two German machine guns. After one of McLaurin's men was killed attempting to silence one of the guns, "Lieutenant McLaurin stood up in full view of the enemy and charged the other gun. Although mortally wounded, he succeeded in throwing two grenades which silenced the gun and killed or wounded its crew. His heroic sacrifice permitted the remainder of his patrol to withdraw without further casualty." For his extraordinary action, Lieutenant McLaurin was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, America's second highest decoration for heroism in combat. Within two weeks, Operation *Nordwind* would be spent. McLaurin's 222<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment made one of the key defensive stands that turned back the offensive, which failed to reach any of its objectives.

Daniel Preston McLaurin was also awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his mother, three sisters, and a brother then serving in the Army. He is buried at Old Saint David's Episcopal Church Cemetery in Cheraw.

