

Death at the Moment of Victory

August 14, 1945 is best remembered as the day the Japanese heard the voice of Emperor Hirohito explaining that Japan had “decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure. We have ordered our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that our empire accepts the provisions of their joint declaration.” It is also the day that Hugh David McPherson, Jr. died.

Hugh McPherson entered Clemson College in 1941 as the cataclysm of war was expanding inexorably toward the United States. As Hugh’s Rat semester came to a close, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—on his 18th birthday. While changes began immediately, they weren’t all quick. Hugh continued in his textile engineering studies and was selected for the Pershing Rifles and Sigma Epsilon. It wasn’t until early-1943 that his accelerated training resulted in his commissioning as a second lieutenant in the Army.



McPherson, who attended grammar school in Meggetts before enrolling in Charleston’s Porter Military Academy, was initially assigned to Camp Croft in Spartanburg and then journeyed to Fort Benning for additional officer training. From there, McPherson shipped out to the South Pacific enroute to Calcutta, India. In mid-January 1944, McPherson flew “over the hump,” the treacherous air route over the Himalaya Mountains, and into China where he joined Y-Force.

Y-Force was the designation given Chinese forces which invaded Burma from the Chinese province of Yunnan in 1944. McPherson was assigned as an advisor to a Chinese regiment on the Salween River Front. Y-Force Americans accompanied each attacking Chinese unit to render medical and other technical assistance and to advise the Chinese commanders.

By the end of May the Yunnan offensive, though hampered by the monsoon rains and lack of air support, succeeded in annihilating the Japanese garrison at Tengchung and eventually reached as far as Lungling. Although their advance was interrupted by the monsoons, the Chinese and American forces continued to press the Japanese well into 1945. McPherson was out in front for much of the fighting over the rugged mountain terrain in which the campaign took place. For weeks, owing to the difficulties of supply imposed by the trackless mountains and the heavy monsoon rains, he lived on a steady diet of rice alone. McPherson fought with the Chinese through the Burma campaign and helped the Chinese open the Ledo Road from India to China. At that time he was a liaison officer with a Chinese division and after opening the Ledo Road the division was sent to Toucnow to open the port of that city. At that time, according to a report in the *Dillon Herald*, Captain McPherson was a division advisor attached to the Chinese 2nd Army. For the campaign, McPherson was awarded the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantry Badge.

In early August, as the first atomic bomb was falling on Japan, McPherson became ill and was confined to bed by a doctor. Eight days later, as the Emperor was making his unprecedented speech, Hugh McPherson, age 21, succumbed to a liver ailment.

Captain McPherson was survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. H. D. McPherson of Dillon, South Carolina and his brother Arthur, then a US Navy aviation cadet. In December 1948, Captain McPherson's remains were recommitted at Dillon's Riverside Cemetery.

