

**The second brother to die in WWII, SSgt Tourie R. Rickenbaker '43 lost his life on the German front...**



Growing up on a farm in Summerton, SC, Tourie Rickenbaker could never have envisioned the sacrifice his country would ask of him. Like many farm boys of that era, Tourie attended Clemson College and studied Animal Husbandry. He was active on campus, a member of the Animal Husbandry Club, Dairy Club, Block and Bridal Club, and the winner of the Swift Essay Contest. Tourie's brother, Dibble, followed Tourie to Clemson and was in the class of '44. Dibble was killed in an aircraft training accident in July 1943.

After joining the Army, SSgt Tourie Rickenbaker was assigned to the 335<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In November 1944, the 84<sup>th</sup> Railsplitters were sent to Germany. During their first month of fighting the Germans, the 84<sup>th</sup> Railsplitters took 1549 prisoners and knocked out 112 pillboxes as they captured German city after German city.

The 84<sup>th</sup> spent the month of December marching through Belgium. They were so effective that the Germans referred to them as the "Terror Division". In January 1945, the 84<sup>th</sup> was sent to the upper Ardennes on a new mission. The onslaught from the 84<sup>th</sup> across the Ardennes made the Germans regret their earlier December hopes of Christmas in Paris. The 84<sup>th</sup> was pushing them farther back during the entire month of January.

In February, the 84<sup>th</sup> was assigned the mission of crossing the Roer River in Holland. According to the Lone Sentry's WWII unit history booklet...

*Before they could meet the bulk of the German armies, these doughs had to cross the small but treacherous Roer River. Allied commanders planned carefully. The 84th, resting after the Ardennes battles, was picked to play a prominent role. Early in February, Railsplitters moved to positions along the river under cover of darkness. Feb. 23 was D-Day; 0330 was H-Hour.*

*A thunderous, 45-minute artillery barrage opened the attack. Amid bursting shells, 1st Bn., 334th, pushed off in assault boats. First waves received little opposition as Nazis were caught off guard.*

*Soon after the attack began, engineers had thrown bridges across the river and infantry streamed to the opposite shore. Anti-aircraft batteries drove off German planes sent over the bridges in bombing and strafing attacks.*

*Once across the Roer, the division experienced particularly heavy artillery and mortar fire. The advance roared ahead, Korrenzig fell, then Baal, Matzerath, Hoven, Golkrath, many others.*

*Battle-wise now, Railsplitters still kept their sense of humor. When his 3rd Bn., 334th, took Baal, Lt. Col. William J. Sutton, Fort Worth, posted an "Annexed to Texas" sign on a tree just inside the city limits.*

*Under sledge-hammer blows from division forces, German opposition weakened. Gen. Bolling sent a a motorized column battering into German lines Feb. 27.*

*Riding this time, 334th troopers lashed machine guns to the sides of trucks. First Bn., aboard tanks, was the point. Task Force Church moved out with all guns blazing. Behind, on foot, followed the 333rd and 335th.*

*The task force advanced 12 miles the first day, plunging along roads in a breakthrough reminiscent of earlier victories in France.*

*Doughs waved prisoners to the rear, kept going ahead. One complete FA battalion was captured intact. An officer replacement pool was overrun and the entire police force of one town taken prisoner.*

*Boisheim, important communications center, was attacked by the task force that night when most of the garrison was asleep. One officer, roused from his sleep, asked: "American, British or Russian?" Told his captors were American, he said, "Good," and surrendered his weapons.*

*Smoke still was spewing from Dulken factories when the 333rd delivered an ultimatum that the town surrender or be destroyed. When the terms were ignored, the division's big guns plastered the town and the infantry walked in to mop up.*

*Railsplitters were in high gear now. The 335th headed for Krefeld, large manufacturing city. Down the road raced a German staff car. Doughs opened fire. Out jumped a colonel, arms raised.*

*After cleaning up Krefeld, the 335th took Moers and swept on to the Rhine Co. E was the first division unit to reach the river bank.*

*From the Roer to the Rhine in ten days -- an advance of nearly 50 miles. Railsplitters had accounted for more than 9000 Germans killed, wounded or captured. This was the pay-off to four months of fighting in the mud of Germany and the snow and ice of Belgium -- bitter fighting that tore chunks out of the German army. The trouble-shooters had built an enviable reputation in record time.*

*Railsplitters now looked back on Geilenkirchen and Lindern where they had crushed the enemy in their first taste of combat. They looked back at Marche, where they had stood alone before the might of the once-powerful Wehrmacht and where they held fast in the face of a potential Allied disaster.*

*And they looked ahead -- ahead to Victory and to Peace.*

SSgt Rickenbaker died on February 25, 1945 during this heroic battle. Both Tourie and his brother, Dibble, started their lives on a small farm in South Carolina, attended Clemson College then gave their lives that we might be free. Our nation and the entire Clemson family honor their service and sacrifice.

Awards / Citations: Silver Star - Tourie B. Rickenbaker, United States Army, was awarded the Silver Star under the below-listed General Orders for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving with the 84th Infantry Division during World War II.

SSgt Tourie Rickenbaker is buried in Netherlands American Cemetery, Margraten, Netherlands.