

Tragedy by Train

A heavy weight of responsibility fell on Clemson College's Class of 1941. These young men embarked on their cadet journey when the distant rumblings in Europe and the Pacific could still be eclipsed by the rigor of the classroom, the comradery of the barracks and the excitement of fall football games. As their academic careers progressed, so too did those distant rumblings evolve into menacing claps of thunder. By the time Dan Smith and his classmates graduated in the spring of 1941, the world, if not the United States, was already at war. Japan had invaded China, the first of a long line of Pacific conquests. Germany had occupied the Rhineland, annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, then invaded Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France. Before that hot summer was over, Hitler's forces would be rolling toward Moscow. Soon, Smith and his classmates would be called to their country's colors.



D. W. SMITH

Daniel Willard Smith was born in January 1920 to Mr. and Mrs. Michael A. Smith of Williston. Dan graduated from Williston High School and chose electrical engineering as his course of study at Clemson. Dan was an honors student and was selected for membership in Phi Kappa Phi, a national honor society promoting scholarship. He was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and Tau Beta Phi, the national honorary engineering fraternity. Dan's achievements extended beyond the classroom. Respected by his peers, he was tapped for membership in Tiger Brotherhood and served as president of the ABC Club composed of cadets from Allendale and Barnwell Counties. Dan was also a member of the state champion track team. During the summer of 1940, like so many of his classmates, Dan attended ROTC training at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Following graduation, Dan took a job with Westinghouse, but his career there barely had time to begin before he was called to active duty in November. He was assigned to the Signal Corps and sent to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey where the Army's Signal School was located. As an electrical engineer, one who had excelled in the classroom, Army officials quickly recognized Dan's ability. Following the completion of his course, Dan was assigned as an instructor.

The rapid collapse of the French Army in 1940 had been due in part to poor communications. The French had relied on telephone lines and motorcycle messengers to communicate between headquarters and subordinate commands. Their German opponents had used radios—and with stunning effect. The lesson was not lost on the US Army. Over the course of the war, the signal school at Fort Monmouth would train many of the more than 350,000 men and women who would serve in the Signal Corps. The post was ideally located near Army ports of embarkation from which soldiers would soon be departing for the European Theater.

Another attractive feature of the area was the robust network of railroad lines serving the area. The movement of great numbers of men and vast amounts of equipment from training camps and factories all over the country to eastern ports was accomplished by railroad. It was on one of these tracks that Dan Smith's life ended.

On Friday, April 10, 1942, Dan was struck by a fast train at Little Silver, New Jersey. He had excelled in all he undertook, from athletics and academics to his military service.

Second Lieutenant Daniel Willard Smith was survived by his parents and his brother Lybrand, then on active duty in Mississippi, and his brother Herbert. He was interred in the Williston Cemetery.

