

## Unlikely Hero; Exceptional Leader

Augustus Massenburg Trotter '15 won the Distinguished Service Cross during World War I.

Victory on the battlefield depends on any number of factors: terrain, weather, communications, available forces, weaponry, tactics and luck. Yet at its most basic level, combat still revolves around the actions of small units composed of individual soldiers daring to risk all for the sake of their comrades and their cause.

Augustus Massenburg Trotter '15 of Camden, SC was an unlikely hero. Massenburg, as he was tagged in the 1915 edition of TAPS, enrolled in Clemson Agricultural College in 1912. Never rising above the rank of private in the College's Corps of Cadets, Trotter was nonetheless active on campus, participating in the Agriculture Society, Calhoun Literary Society and the Student Press Association. Trotter was best known, however, for his skills as an entrepreneur! His mercantile efforts extended to the barracks, where he ran a thriving market for his fellow cadets. His business prowess did not go unnoticed: Trotter landed on the Delinquency Report for this extracurricular activity!

Although his military record at Clemson was unremarkable, Trotter subsequently earned an Army commission at Fort Oglethorpe Training School and was then assigned to Camp Greene in Charlotte, NC before shipping out to France with the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

In June 1918, Trotter and his comrades in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division found themselves on the front lines of one of the fiercest American battles of the First World War, Belleau Wood. German forces were attempting to exploit a gap in French lines when General 'Black Jack' Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, committed the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions to stop the enemy advance. Over the next three weeks, the Americans and Germans launched one deadly counter attack after another and the Wood changed hands numerous times. Fighting was tenacious, often hand-to-hand, and losses on both sides were heavy.

On June 21, First Lieutenant Trotter was leading his platoon through heavy machine-gun fire in an attack on a strongly fortified enemy position. The platoon suffered heavy casualties, but Trotter pushed forward until shot down near the enemy position. For his selfless leadership and courage, Trotter was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Augustus Massenburg Trotter was one of 1,811 Americans killed in the nearly month-long Battle of Belleau Wood. His sacrifice, like those of his comrades, helped to halt and finally finish off the Germans' last major offensive of World War I. Trotter was an unlikely hero and an exceptional leader who risked all for the lives of his comrades and the cause for which they fought.

