Valiant Stand

St. Clair Webb came to Clemson College from nearby Anderson. Assigned to Company M, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Regiment, Webb was a civil engineering major. He progressed through the cadet ranks and was a second lieutenant as a senior. He was also a member of the campus chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Webb's Class of 1943 was the last to complete its four-year journey through Clemson before the War Department mandated that college men report for military service. We don't know about Webb's service during World War II, but in a cruel twist of fate, Webb, like so many other veterans, was recalled to service upon the outbreak of the Korean War.

The June 1950 surprise invasion of South Korea caught the United States unprepared. Allied forces in the country were quickly forced to retreat all the way to the southeastern corner of the Korean peninsula where a defensive perimeter was established around the port city of Pusan. US military units on occupation duty in Japan were rushed to Pusan to help stabilize the pocket of resistance and buy time for the mobilization and transport of additional American and United Nations forces.

The 2nd Infantry Division, including its 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, was quickly dispatched from Fort Lewis, Washington to South Korea. Captain St. Clair Webb was assigned to the battalion's headquarters and service company.

Soon after arriving at Pusan, the 2nd Infantry Division was committed to battle, spearheading a drive to break out of the defensive perimeter. Captain Webb was wounded on September 3. He returned to duty a month later. The division, with support from its combat engineers, battled all the way to the Yalu River, the border separating North Korea from China.

In late November, massed Chinese forces flooded across the border and attacked UN troops. The Chinese overwhelmed the 2nd Infantry Division and 8th Army, shoving the Americans southward. In the face of this new enemy, Webb's 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion was ordered to hold the town of Kunu-Ri to protect the rear and right flank of the 8th Army's retreat.

By November 26, after three days of relentless attacks by three Chinese divisions, friendly lines began to collapse. On November 29, Webb's battalion received orders to withdraw south to Sunchon, but Chinese forces had already cut the road, leaving a mountain pass as the only open path. The following day, the 2nd Infantry Division began its trek through the six-mile pass, braving a gauntlet of Chinese sniper and mortar fire. Chinese troops soon swarmed down upon the retreating column. Bringing up the rear,

the engineers fought valiantly to hold off the enemy long enough for the rest of the division to reach safety.

At 1930 hours on November 30, engineer battalion commander Colonel Alarich Zacherle ordered all equipment destroyed. Magnesium grenades were dropped on heavy equipment tracks and engines. Tires were filled with gasoline, thrown inside vehicles, and set ablaze.

Zacherle then ordered the battalion colors and the 25 combat streamers that adorned it soaked in gasoline and set on fire. He wanted to prevent the Chinese from capturing it as a war trophy.

About 30 minutes after Zacherle gave that order, the Chinese forces overran the engineers. By the time the battalion regrouped after the battle, just 266 of the original 977 soldiers remained. One officer was present; all others had been killed or captured, including Captain Webb. He died while a prisoner-of-war on February 28, 1951. His remains were never recovered. The 2nd Engineers' valiant stand purchased at grave cost the escape of the rest of division.

Captain St. Clair Webb was awarded the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Prisoner of War Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal.

He is memorialized at the Courts of the Missing, American Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii and at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Norfolk, Virginia.