

## Army Ranger

America was already at war when Lee Hugh Welborn arrived on the Clemson College campus as a freshman in the late summer of 1942. After a disastrous start, American and Allied fortunes had stabilized. The Battle of Midway had stopped Japanese expansion in the Pacific. The American Eighth Air Force had begun flying missions over occupied Europe in August.

Welborn, a general science major from Liberty, completed his first semester but in February 1943 left school to enter the Army. He was eventually assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion.

The concept of unconventional soldiers gained credibility over the varied combat landscapes and scenarios of World War II. Rangers underwent rigorous training and prepared for special missions. The elite Ranger units were also frequently pressed into frontline service as riflemen.

With the success of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ranger Battalion during the North Africa campaign, Army leadership decided to form three additional Ranger battalions using the 1<sup>st</sup> as a cadre. The 4<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalion was activated in Tunisia in May 1943.

The Rangers participated in the landings at Salerno, Italy in September 9, 1943. Seizing high ground on the Sorrentino peninsula, the Rangers occupied a series of mutually supported strongpoints and, with support from naval gunfire, held off a series of determined German counterattacks until finally joined by elements of General Mark Clark's Fifth Army on the last day of the month.

By November, Clark's offensive had bogged down against the Germans' entrenched fortifications known as the "Winter Line." To renew his advance, Clark committed the Rangers once again, this time attaching the battalions to existing infantry divisions in order to achieve a breakthrough. In bitter fighting, the Rangers suffered heavy casualties. Tech 5 Welborn died of wounds on November 24, 1943 the day before Thanksgiving, but the long-sought breakthrough wouldn't come until the following spring.

It took nearly five years, but Welborn's body was finally returned home in July 1948—six months after the passing of his father. The younger Welborn was survived by his mother and sister and was buried in the family's plot at the Westview Cemetery in Liberty.

