

Across the Mediterranean

Fred Lamoreux Williams and his colleagues in Clemson's Class of 1946 probably reckoned that their time on campus would be brief. They had enrolled during the first summer of American involvement in World War II and already rumors about when and how they would be called to service were zipping across campus.

Williams was an engineering major from Spartanburg. He was assigned as a cadet private to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment. Early in the spring semester, Clemson's cadets learned that the end of the school year would mark the beginning of active duty for most.



After completing basic training, Williams joined the cavalry reconnaissance squadron of the 45th Infantry Division. The 45th was a National Guard outfit that had been federalized in September 1940 as the United States belatedly began a military build-up in anticipation of involvement in the war in Europe. It shipped overseas to North Africa arriving in June 1943. The following month, the 45th sailed into the Mediterranean Sea to land on Sicily as part of the Allied offensive there. After conquering that island, the 45th in September took part in the invasion of Italy, landing at Salerno. It later participated in the amphibious assault at Anzio and continued to battle the Germans in Italy through the bitter winter. On June 4, 1944, soldiers of the division entered Rome and were the first Americans to reach the Vatican. Two weeks later, the division was withdrawn from combat for rest and reorganization in preparation for yet another Mediterranean amphibious operation, the invasion of southern France.

The Western Allies had for months debated the value of a landing on France's Mediterranean coast. The British preferred to continue engaging the Germans in Italy and the Balkans. The American position was to defeat the Germans in western Europe. Invading in the south of France held the promise of capturing Mediterranean ports that would help supply Allied forces in the drive on Berlin.



On August 15, 1944, the 45th Infantry was one of the leading US divisions landing as part of Operation Dragoon. For four weeks, the 45th raced north, covering nearly 400 miles in an attempt to trap the retreating German Nineteenth Army and prevent it from reaching Germany. By mid-November, the division, part of General Lucian Truscott's VI Corps, was bogged down on the western slopes of the Vosges Mountains. It would be a second straight winter campaign over rugged, enemy-held terrain for the 45th which had spent the previous winter battling the Germans in central Italy's Apennine Mountains—and it would be the last for Sergeant Williams. On

December 4, while the division was positioned near Bouxwiller, France, northwest of Strasbourg, Williams was killed in action.

Sergeant Fred Lamoreux Williams was survived by his mother and brother. After the war, his body was returned to the United States and laid to rest in the Melrose Cemetery in Abbeville.

