

“Feared Nothing”

It was cold and the snow was deep as the six-man patrol stepped out into the darkness. The green 75th Infantry Division had been thrown into the Battle of Bulge without any combat experience, its soldiers and officers learning the skills needed to meet and defeat the enemy in the war’s biggest and bloodiest battle involving American troops. Now, after more than a month of bitter fighting in wretched weather, the 75th, including F Company of its 291st Infantry Regiment, was on the offensive and pushing the Germans back toward the Rhine River. Among the men on patrol was Private First Class James Scott Winebrenner, Clemson College Class of 1944.



Jimmy Winebrenner was a scholarship student from the Mountville community in Laurens County. He was an agricultural engineering major and a member of the campus chapter of the American Society of Agricultural Engineering. Soft spoken and slightly built, he was noted for his impeccable manners, traits which served him well as he conducted tours of the Calhoun Mansion. At the end of his junior year, Winebrenner was ordered to active duty.

His basic training as an infantry soldier took place at Camp Croft in Spartanburg. Following the completion of additional training at Fort Benning, Georgia, he was assigned to the 1st platoon of Company F, 291st Infantry Regiment, 75th Infantry Division at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky.



Arriving in the company at the same time as Jim was his Clemson classmate Second Lieutenant Paul Bowman. Once the division completed its pre-deployment training, Jimmy made a last trip home in October 1944. The following month, the 75th shipped overseas, arriving in England on November 22. After a brief pre-combat training program, the division landed at Le Havre and Rouen in France on December 13. Three days later, the Germans launched the winter offensive, catching American forces of the 12th Army Group by surprise. The 75th, despite its inexperience, was rushed to the front to help stabilize the salient—or bulge—in the Allied lines created by the German attack.

In fierce fighting and miserable weather, the Americans slowed and then stopped the German advance. By Christmas Day, American forces were counterattacking the German flanks from both south and north. As the Germans ran out of fuel and supplies, they began to gradually withdraw, but did so grudgingly. On January 5, the 75th moved into Grandmenil, one of the heavily contested Belgian villages the Germans vacated. On January 8, the division relieved the exhausted 82nd Airborne

Division along the Salm River and strengthened its defensive positions. On the 17th, the division attacked, taking the town of Vielsalm.

On January 25th, 1st Platoon of F Company was ordered to send out a patrol to check for German troops in a neighboring town. George Thomas, the platoon sergeant, asked for volunteers to accompany him. “Jim was the first one to step forward,” Thomas wrote in a subsequent letter to Jim’s mother. Thomas briefed his patrol on its mission and the group set out at about 10 p.m. Walking single file at intervals of ten yards, Thomas recalled that the patrol would stop often and “get down on the ground to see if we could hear anything.” When they reached the first houses in the village, they went through them to ensure that none of the enemy were hiding within. Starting out toward another house, the patrol was fired on by German machine guns. Three of his men were hit, but Thomas “didn’t know exactly which three they were.” After taking cover and assessing the situation, Thomas and his two remaining soldiers crept into the snowy darkness to assist the wounded. He found that all three, including Jimmy Winebrenner, were dead. The rest of F Company heard the firing and came to the rescue of its patrol. The Germans manning the machine guns were killed and the village secured.

Jim “feared nothing and did his job wonderfully,” Thomas recalled. “All of the fellows liked him very much.” Jim’s comrade William Fenning agreed. “He was a real soldier. He was a smart boy without any doubt.” Jimmy endured the Army’s most rugged training and emerged “well-liked by everybody in the company.”

James Scott Winebrenner was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents and three sisters. He was buried in the American Military Cemetery in Henri-Chapelle, Belgium and memorialized at the Motes Family Cemetery.

