

Private Henry F. Hatcher

L Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division

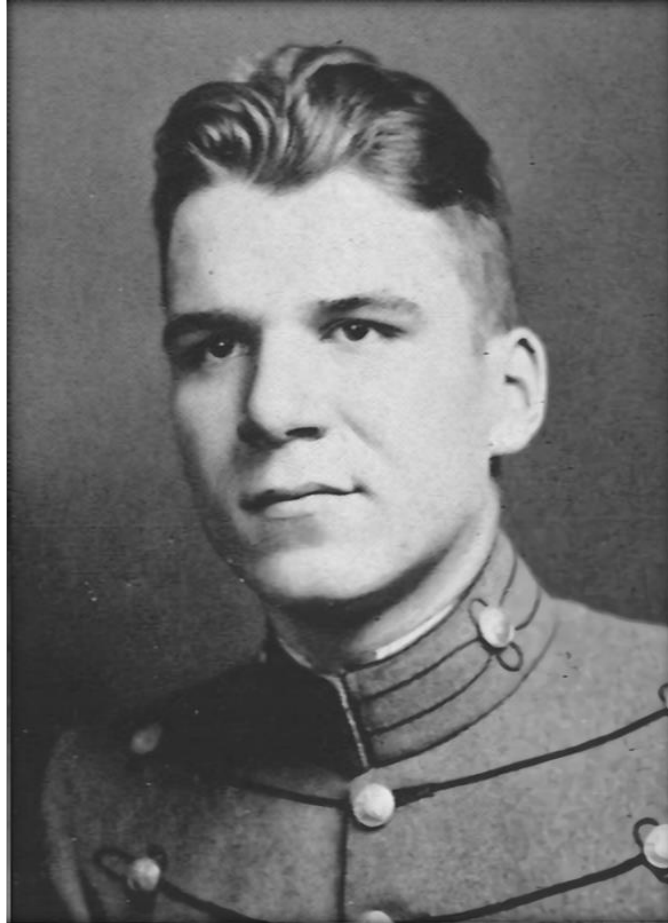


Figure 1: Henry F. Hatcher, Fishburne Military School, Waynesboro, Virginia, 1942.

HIST 3044W – The Price of Freedom: Normandy 1944

Professor Tom Long

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A package rests upon the front porch of 1427 Longfellow Street in Washington, D.C., in the early summer of 1945. A lonely woman picks it up and brings it inside, her heart sinking as she sees the address. Carefully, she opens it, hands shaking as she retrieves its contents. She lifts a wristwatch up from within, carefully setting it down upon a table. It is all that she now has of her only son, Henry.

Private Henry Frederick Hatcher (Figure 1) had great dreams and aspirations. He put them aside to serve his country, and never returned. He had spent his teenaged years preparing for military service. “Hatch” attended two military high schools; attended a university, serving in its Corps of Cadets; he withdrew specifically to volunteer for the U.S. Army.¹ His career in the workforce consists of a summer job in construction between high school and college.² He spent only one semester in college.³ The time between induction into the U.S. Army and his death was exactly one year and one week. He had been on the frontline in Normandy for five days. His life story is short, his military service even shorter, yet there is a gravity to his story, and a commonality between him and thousands of other soldiers.

Private Hatcher was a replacement, a person the other troops often looked down upon because – by necessity – he had taken the place of a man that a band of brothers had loved and lost. He did not likely make a lasting impression on anyone in his unit. Yet all the same, he volunteered for service, went across the seas, and was killed in the service of the United States.

¹ Record for Henry F. Hatcher [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at www.archives.gov, 2 November, 2019]. <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&tf=F&q=33744346&bc=&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=4207521>

² "U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," digital image s.v. "Henry Frederick Hatcher," [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/2238/44004_04_00010-00037?pid=6570385&backurl=https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid%3D2238%26h%3D6570385%26indiv%3Dtry%26o_vc%3DRecord:OtherRecord%26rhSource%3D8939&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&_ga=2.187967019.2001600542.1582564532-1723020774.1576092667

³ Sandra M. Worley, Virginia Tech Alumni Relations, email messages to author, 31 January –3 February, 2020.

His time on Earth was short, but his actions were noble. Today his name is inscribed upon memorials at two military boarding schools and a university, and his name is also called in one annual ceremony wherein a young student responds, “died on the field of honor, sir.” Of course, his name is memorialized on his grave marker in Normandy as well. If a single sentence can be said about Hatcher, it is this: Henry Hatcher intended to live a life of selfless service, and gave his life doing exactly that.

Family Prior to Henry’s Life

So what do we know about Henry Frederick Hatcher? His father was Rodney Frederick Hatcher, and his mother was Blanche Furr Hatcher. Rodney, born in 1870, was much older than Blanche (born 1887); he went by R. Frederick. In fact, this was his second marriage, having had a wife named Edith who died in 1915. Before Edith Hatcher’s death, R. Frederick had a son by the name of Rodney Hatcher on 11 December, 1908. A second child was a daughter named Gertrude Adeline Hatcher (later Parker) on 6 February 1914. Edith died sometime in 1915. It was just five years later that on 1 January, 1920, R. Frederick remarried to a woman named Ida Blanche Furr in Collin, Texas, who changed her name to Blanche Furr Hatcher. Three years later, Henry Frederick Hatcher was born on 23 September, 1923, in Washington, D.C. The Hatcher family lived at 1427 Longfellow Street NW for his entire life. They were Protestants, more specifically, Methodists, and they usually attended at Francis Asbury Methodist Church.⁴ This religious affiliation likely influenced the family’s choice of a high school for young Henry.

⁴ 1930 United States Census, Washington, District of Columbia, digital image s.v. "Henry F Hatcher" Ancestry.com; R. Frederick Hatcher, grave marker, Goose Creek Burying Ground, Lincoln, Loudoun County, Virginia, digital image s.v. "Rodney Frederick Hatcher," Ancestry.com.; Edith G Hatcher, grave marker, Goose Creek Burying Ground, Lincoln, Loudoun County, Virginia, digital image s.v. "Edith G Hatcher," Ancestry.com; "Social Security Death Index," s.v. "Rodney Hatcher" (1908-1978),

High Schools

Information on Henry Hatcher's life is scant. There is almost nothing about him before the first day he put on a uniform, at the age of thirteen. For reasons unknown, in 1936, he left the District of Columbia, and headed for Front Royal, Virginia (Figure 2). Here lies a school by the name of Randolph-Macon Academy (R-MA).



Figure 2: Photograph of Randolph-Macon Academy's Sonner-Payne Hall in 2020. Henry Hatcher lived in the same building during the 1936-1939 school years. Image courtesy of Randolph-Macon Academy.

Founded in 1892 by Methodists, today, R-MA is, while still a Methodist school, also a military boarding school affiliated with the Air Force.⁵ In 1936, when he began to attend, it was affiliated with the National Defense Cadet Corps, having become a military school in 1917. Every day he spent at R-MA, he wore a military uniform and carried a rifle in the school's Company C. Hatcher lived within Sonner-Payne Hall, a building with "striking colonial style

Ancestry.com; "Social Security Death Index," s.v. "Gertrude Adeline Hatcher" (1914-1998), *Ancestry.com*; "Texas, Select County Marriage Records, 1837-2015," s.v. "Ida Blanche Furr" (1 Jan 1920), *Ancestry.com*.

⁵ "Randolph-Macon Academy." Randolph-Macon Academy. Accessed 24 February, 2020. <https://www.rma.edu/about-rma>

structure [and] an elegant dome,” that still towers over the town of Front Royal. Built in 1927, it replaced Randolph-Macon Academy’s original building, which had burned down at the start of the year. The building was six years old when Hatcher attended. It is still in use by R-MA today, particularly for male dormitories and the swimming pool. The year he matriculated, 214 students were enrolled, a number near exact to the school’s population today.⁶



Figure 3: Henry F. Hatcher’s name is on Randolph-Macon Academy’s memorial wall in Front Royal, Virginia. There are fifty other names, and a wreath is laid in front of it every year. Image courtesy of TSgt. Tina Laing, Randolph-Macon Academy Aerospace Instructor.

Hatcher spent three years at Randolph-Macon Academy before, again, for reasons unknown, he transferred. He is counted among the alumni of Randolph-Macon Academy’s Class

⁶ The author of this paper attended Randolph-Macon Academy from 2017 to 2019. Modern population is known due to author’s former position at R-MA within VA-091 AFJROTC, as the Deputy Logistics Commander. The population of the school in December, 2018, was 195 students; it increased by 15 in the following semester.

of 1939. During the Second World War, 850 R-MA alumni served the country. Thirty-two – among them Henry Hatcher – made the ultimate sacrifice.⁷

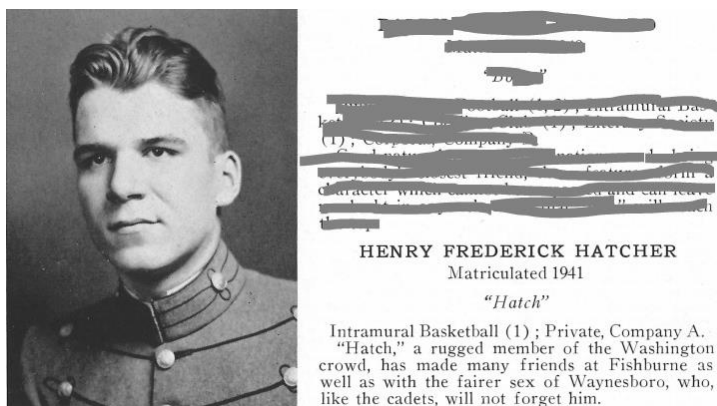


Figure 4: Henry Frederick “Hatch” Hatcher in Fishburne Military School’s 1942 yearbook TAPS. Image courtesy of Bev Pelaccio, Fishburne Military School Alumni Development Coordinator.



Figure 5: Photograph of Fishburne Military School’s barracks, built in 1916. This is where Hatch lived during the school years of 1939-1942. Photograph taken in 1984. Image courtesy of Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

⁷ Jenny Walton, Randolph-Macon Academy Alumni Engagement Coordinator, interview by Joshua Cline, 29 January, 2020.; Bourdon, Cooper. “The Rebuilding Years.” Randolph-Macon Academy, October 25, 2017. <https://www.rma.edu/blog/rebuilding-years>.

His second high school, starting in Fall semester, 1939, was another military boarding academy called the Fishburne Military School in Waynesboro, Virginia (Figures 4-6). Soon after, his father died at the age of 69 in December, but Henry remained at the boarding school instead of returning to D.C..⁸

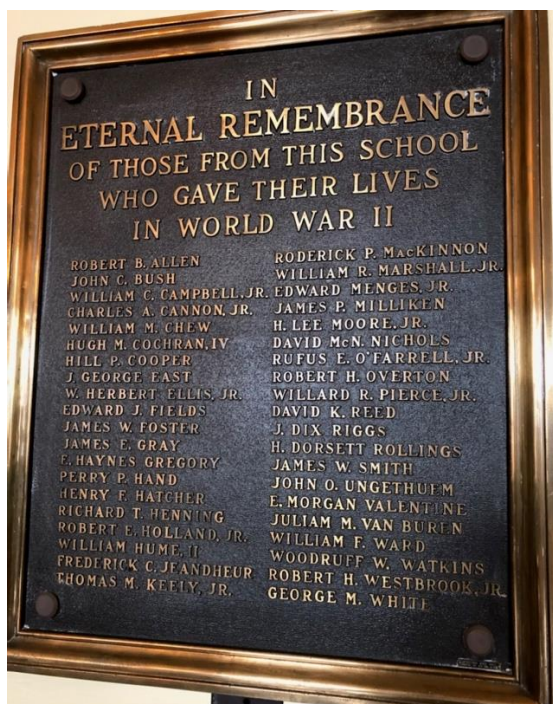


Figure 6: Henry F. Hatcher's name is upon this plaque at Fishburne Military School. Image courtesy of Bev Pelaccio.

Founded in 1879 as a military school, it was here where Hatcher finished out his high school career, graduating in Spring, 1942.⁹ He was a part of the school's Company A, again wearing the army's uniform and again with a rifle on his shoulder in most days. He was known

⁸ *Evening Star*. (Washington, D.C.), 06 Dec. 1939. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1939-12-06/ed-1/seq-2/>. Hatcher's father dead of heart attack at age 69; services were held that Friday at Francis Asbury Methodist Church.

⁹ "Fishburne Military School - About." Fishburne Military School. Accessed 24 February, 2020. <https://www.fishburne.org/admissions-about>.

by the nickname “Hatch.” It was likely as common back then as it is now among military schools to refer to people solely by their last name.¹⁰ For his intramural, he played basketball, and was popular with “the fairer sex of Waynesboro, who, like the cadets, will never forget him,” as his senior yearbook photograph was captioned.¹¹



Figure 7: Henry Hatcher in Virginia Tech's 1943 The Bugle, page 126.

It was in 1941 that Hatch was accepted to Virginia Tech as a member of their Corps of Cadets. He started in September, 1942.¹² But just prior to that, he registered for the draft, on 30 June, 1942. On that date, Hatch was 5'11" and weighed 180 lbs, according to his draft card. His hair was brown, his eyes were brown, his complexion light-brown. At the time he was working for Victor R. Beauchamp, Inc.¹³ This entity is now known as Beauchamp Construction Company, with its primary claim to fame being the Iwo Jima Memorial, which they built in

¹⁰ Personal experience at R-MA, but likely applies to FMS too. It was always a peculiar moment to hear a first name instead of a surname.

¹¹ See Figure 4.

¹² Sandra M. Worley, email messages to author, 31 January –3 February, 2020.

¹³ "U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," digital image s.v. "Henry Frederick Hatcher," *ancestry.com*.

1954.¹⁴ In all likelihood, this was just a summer job, the date he started and the date he stopped are lost except for the note of the fact of employment on his draft card. In September, 1942, he joined the Corps of Cadets at Virginia Tech, showing up in their 1943 yearbook, *The Bugle* (Figure 7).¹⁵

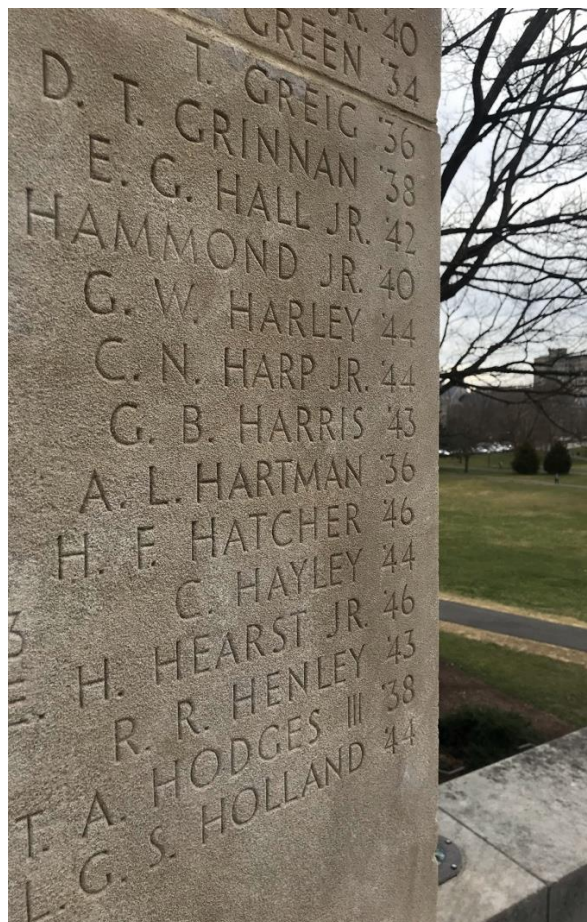


Figure 8: Close-up image of Henry Hatcher's name on Virginia Tech's 'SACRIFICE' pylon. He is considered part of Virginia Tech's Class of 1946, as that would have been his graduation year. Photograph courtesy of Michele Messner, Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Alumni Director Assistant.

¹⁴ "Beauchamp Construction: Our History." Beauchamp Construction | Our History. Accessed 24 February, 2020. <http://www.beauchampco.com/sections/aboutus/aboutus.cfm>.

¹⁵ Virginia Tech, *The Bugle* (Lynchburg, VA: 1943), Page 126, https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/11350/1943_BUGLE.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y&fbclid=IwAR2nJgCM_zDA1bqCZ1uPAkl-nIJTvxBelX_1o2ZteKWDP3DyLkAp2cic4, accessed on 22 January, 2020.

Hatch was not at Virginia Tech for long. He studied engineering from September to December and withdrew from the school on 5 January, 1943.¹⁶ The nation had been at war for more than a year; what he thought of this is unknown, but it undoubtedly was on his mind. By this point, he had gone to two military high schools and had gone to a college with deep military ties. He withdrew from the university with the intention to volunteer, which he did the following summer, 5 July, 1943.¹⁷ Hatcher was a man who evidently intended to join the military, holding an interest in serving his country. He seems to have decided that he could not stay in college while people he knew went off to war. Instead of staying and finishing his college education in three and a half years, he chose to enlist, alongside many other Virginia Tech students.

Military

Hatch was inducted into the U.S. Army at Ft. Myer, Virginia. Where he went to train was a mystery. He was single with no dependents. His serial number was #33744346. He did not choose a branch assignment, but was assigned MOS 604, meaning he was a light machine gunner.¹⁸ He had 373 days left to live. What the journey was like between enlistment until arrival in Normandy is also unknown. What is known is that he was sent to the 86th Replacement Battalion by July, 1944. The 86th, along with the 41st and 92nd Replacement Battalions, were the three battalions responsible for the distribution of men to replace those killed, wounded, or missing from frontline units dedicated to the Normandy Campaign. The 86th, in particular,

¹⁶ Sandra M. Worley, email messages to author, 31 January – 3 February, 2020.

¹⁷ Record for Henry F. Hatcher [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at www.archives.gov, 2 November, 2019]. <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&tf=F&q=33744346&bc=&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=4207521>

¹⁸ Record for Henry F. Hatcher [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at www.archives.gov, 2 November, 2019]. <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&tf=F&q=33744346&bc=&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=4207521>

served the units of XIX Corps, then part of VII Corps.¹⁹ By D+33, 8 July, 1944, Hatcher was transferring from the 86th Replacement Battalion to the 83rd Infantry Division – L Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment.²⁰ There were five days left in his life.



Figure 9: A satirical comic disparaging inexperienced replacements by famed illustrator Bill Mauldin, from his book, *Bill Mauldin's Army*.

¹⁹ Lerwill, Leonard. *The Personnel Replacement System in the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1954), 442

²⁰ Morning Report Company L, 11 July reports his arrival on 8 July. Accessed 17 February, 2020. https://83rdinfdivdocs.org/documents/331st/MR/MR_331_Co_L_JUL1944.pdf

Hatch was a replacement for another man in the 83rd. He was among many who were not with a unit from the beginning, joining it far after a bond had been created by the men within the unit. Replacements were disparaged and looked on unfavorably for a myriad of reasons, among which being perceived as green, with inferior quality of training, unfamiliarity with the terrain, and inexperience in combat. Generally looked on as if they were children, replacements faced higher casualty rates, until they could integrate into their new unit (Figure 9). It is unlikely Hatch made many friends in the five days within his unit.

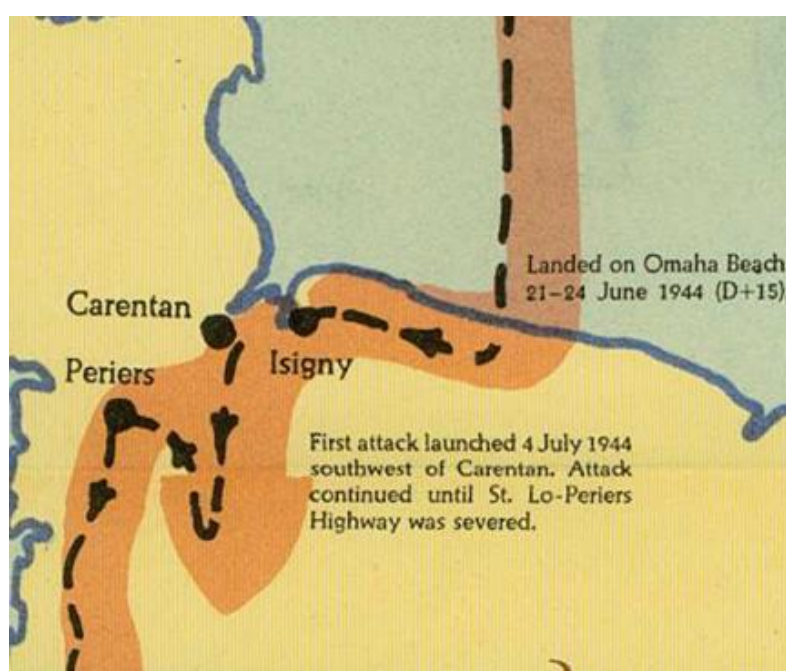


Figure 10: Simple map, clipped from Ernie Hayhow's The Thunderbolt Across Europe: A History of the 83rd Infantry Division, 1942-1945. The section between Carentan and Periers is the offensive in which Hatcher fought.

The division intended to land in Normandy on 18 June. However, the storm that would destroy the Mulberry Harbor at Omaha Beach the following day was developing. They landed after it passed, with the the 331st going ashore on 23 June, D+17.²¹ The 331st Regiment's

²¹ Jean Paul Pitou, email message to author, 24 April, 2020

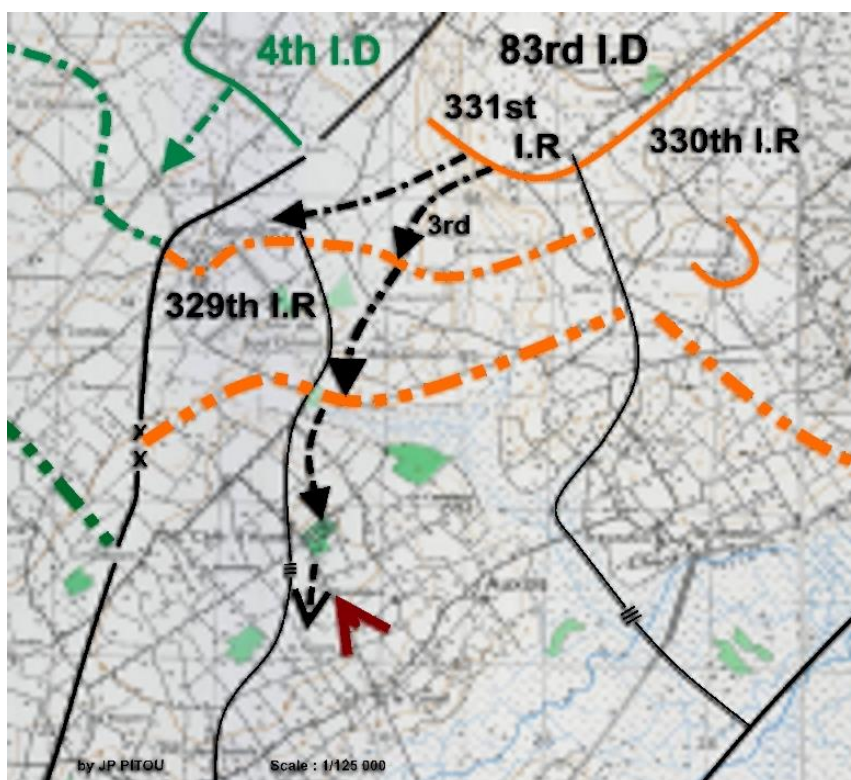
first small taste of combat came three days later, when they relieved the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan.²² The real baptism of fire came on 4 July, four days prior to Hatch's arrival. Going on the offensive, the division attacked south, trying to cut the St. Lo-Periers highway, vital for German logistics and later allied use.²³ First up was the town of Sainteny. This is the offensive upon which Hatch would arrive, be committed to, and die trying to achieve. This was the drive to secure a starting point for Operation Cobra, the breakout from Normandy and into the rest of France.

According to Martin Blumenson in *Breakout and Pursuit*, the 83rd Division sustained 5,000 casualties in between 4 July and 15 July. The 331st Infantry Regiment, of which Hatch was going to be a part of, had five commanders in one week. "Indeed, had it not been for progressive integration of replacements as the fighting developed [Private Henry Hatcher being one such replacement], the division would have been little more than a skeleton."²⁴

²² Straus, Jack M. *We Saw It Through: History of the Three Thirty Two Combat Team*. (Munich: F. Bruckman K-G, 1953), 17

²³ *Ibid.*, 17

²⁴ Blumenson, Martin. *Breakout and Pursuit: Special Commemorative Edition*. (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1993), 132



The Boisgrimot Battle by the 3rd/331st I.R. July 8th- July 13th 1944

Caption :

- : American advances and frontlines of the July 8th, 1944
- - - - : American advances and frontlines of the July 9th, 1944
- . - . : American advances and frontlines of the July 12th, 1944
- - - -> : Advance of the 3/331st I.R. the July 13th
- > : German counter-attack, the July 13th.

*Figure 11: The five days Hatch was with 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division.
Image courtesy of Jean Paul Pitou.*

Hatch was assigned to L Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division. On the day he arrived, the unit was in relative safety, the battalion in the 331st reserve. The following morning, the Third Battalion was upon the left flank as the unit attacked towards Highway No. 4, the wooded Boisgrimot area, and the town of Sainteny. The 3rd Battalion was forcefully stopped at the highway, but they successfully took Sainteny.²⁵ Colonel James Bender took command of the regiment, just two days after Lt. Col. Bowen had done so, presumably

²⁵ Ibid., 130

having become a casualty. The unit took prisoners of the 37th and 38th Panzergrenadier regiments of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division; their adversaries were tough enemies, prepared to fight in the Normandy hedgerows.²⁶

According to the book *We Saw It Through*, Hatch's battalion led a charge into the Boisgrimot area and was stopped by heavy defenses.²⁷ However, both the battalion and regimental histories note it as a day of consolidating their own defenses, with a German attack at near midnight. Heavy hedgerow fighting and hand grenade action ended with the 3rd Battalion pushed back, reforming the defensive line 300 yards behind their original position.²⁸

Preparing for a few days, on 11 July, the 331st attacked again. The 3rd was on the right flank; at 0930, Colonel Bender's jeep was hit by a German tank's shell, killing the regimental commander. The Germans were dug in well and supported by tanks. After reaching Highway No. 4 again, the attack bogged down, and the battalion settled in for the night.²⁹ Colonel Robert York took command of the 331st.³⁰ Once midnight passed, it was 12 July. There was only one full day left in Private Hatcher's life.

The Third Battalion attacked across Highway No. 4 following a preparatory artillery barrage. They came to a stop at the hedgerows on the opposite side, German tanks taking advantage of terrain that rendered tank destroyers and anti-tank guns useless. Heavy casualties led to the commitment of battalion reserve Company K, but they too were stopped in their tracks. Lt. Col. Cheal took command of the battalion, attempting to break through the hedgerows.³¹ No

²⁶ United States, Army. Third Battalion, 331st Infantry. *Battalion History: June-Aug 1944*, 7

²⁷ Straus, *We Saw It Through*, 19

²⁸ United States, Army. Infantry Regiment, 331st. *After Action Report: 331st Infantry Regiment, July 1944*, 3

²⁹ US Army, Third Battalion, 331st Infantry. *Battalion History*, 5

³⁰ Straus, *We Saw It Through*, 19

³¹ Straus, 5

matter what the battalion did, “[attacking] was more like hitting your head on a stone wall and each attack brought heavy casualties to the Battalion.”³² Eventually, the attack stopped, the GIs waiting for morning.

On the morning of 13 July, all three battalions resumed the attack. 2nd and 3rd Battalions crossed the open swamp ground to the south of the wooded Boisgrimot area. While 2nd Battalion was directly south of Auxais, Hatch’s 3rd Battalion reached a point one thousand yards south before German tanks and infantry attacked, breaking the battalion in half. The Germans “struck at the center of the battalion front and split the battalion. Approximately 100 men and six officers including the artillery liaison officer remained in the woods on the right flank of [Chateau d’Auxais].”³³ Approximately 120 troops were cut off until 15 July.³⁴ In all likelihood, Hatcher did not live to see it.

³² US Army, Third Battalion, 331st Infantry, *Battalion History*, 6

³³ US Army, Third Battalion, 331st Infantry, *Battalion History*, 6

³⁴ US Army, Infantry Regiment, 331st, *After Action Report*, 4

Tragic Circumstances

Hatcher saw the events between 8 and 12 July. What time he died on 13 July is unknown. Even the way he died is somewhat nebulous. Private Hatcher's Official Military Personnel File lists that he died a non-combat death; he drowned. Considering all references to the area consistently refer to it as swampy, that may make some sense.³⁵ Most notably, his unit was even approaching a castle moat.³⁶ However, what muddles this is within his Individual Deceased Personnel File, wherein his burial report is listed. This burial report is made on the same day that he died, likely meaning his body was recoverable immediately, so he was not among this 'lost battalion' of 120 or so men. Upon this report, his cause of death is listed as a gunshot wound to the right side of his head.³⁷

Hatcher was temporarily buried in St. Mere Eglise Cemetery #2, plot P, row 4, grave 66, the same day he died. But what muddles his possible death even further is a report made 28 April, 1948, when he was disinterred and reburied in the St. Laurent Cemetery (now the Normandy American Cemetery). Besides advanced decomposition and a crushed skull (possibly the gunshot wound), it was noted that both legs were fractured.³⁸

Jean Paul Pitou, the 83rd Infantry Division's expert in France, is convinced that it was not a non-combat drowning. "The US military has always investigated acts of self-harm and suicide," he wrote via email, "if drowning had been the real cause of his death, it [would not have been] KIA. So drowning is the consequence of another event, provided that there was

³⁵ Office of the Surgeon General, 6 February 2020, 33744346, St. Louis, St Louis Military Personnel Records Center, in Official Military Personnel File

³⁶ Jean Paul Pitou, email message to author, 17 February, 2020

³⁷ Report of Burial, 13 July 1944, written by Harvey D. Shoal, Individual Deceased Personnel File at St. Louis Military Personnel Records Center

³⁸ Disinterment Directive, 15 June 1948, signed by 2nd Lt. Robert B. Howard, Individual Deceased Personnel File at St. Louis Military Personnel Records Center

drowning."³⁹ Mr. Pitou proposed the scenario that Private Hatcher "was hit in the head by a bullet [or shrapnel]. . . He immediately fell to the ground in the [nearby Bucaille River], in a ditch, in the castle moat or in a puddle. . . The shock must have been violent because it fractured both legs, unless it was a burst of machine gun fire. Death must have been almost immediate, even if he swallowed water."⁴⁰ No matter what series of events led to his death, all that Henry left behind for his mother was his wristwatch.⁴¹

A Mother's False Hopes

His tale does not entirely end with his death, for as is classic with the military, somebody, somewhere, had erred. Despite the fact he was buried the day after he died, Hatcher was declared Missing In Action on 19 July.⁴² This was revised a month later, on 22 August, to Killed In Action 13 July.⁴³ But the damage was done – a devastated mother likely received a ‘Missing in Action’ long before a ‘Killed in Action’ message, and she remained hopeful. The 14 November issue of the Washington D.C. *Evening Star* reported that Blanche Hatcher did not believe Henry was dead. “The War Department told Mrs. Hatcher to ‘go on hoping.’”⁴⁴ She did not give up; as late as 20 April, 1945, when she sought to finally get his wristwatch, she had still been entertaining the hope that Henry Hatcher was still alive (Figure 11).⁴⁵ Sadly, her worst fears were

³⁹ Jean Paul Pitou, email message to author, 17 February, 2020

⁴⁰ Jean Paul Pitou, email message to author, 17 February, 2020

⁴¹ Report of Burial, 13 July 1944, written by Harvey D. Shoal, Individual Deceased Personnel File at St. Louis Military Personnel Records Center

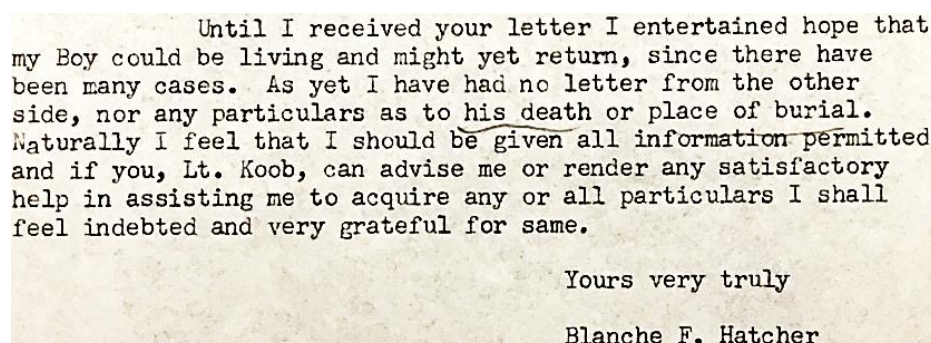
⁴² United States, Army. L Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry. *Morning Reports: July 1944*, 38

⁴³ United States, Army. L Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry. *Morning Reports: August 1944*, 30

⁴⁴ *Evening Star*. (Washington, D.C.), 14 Nov. 1944. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1944-11-14/ed-1/seq-2/>

⁴⁵ Letter from Mrs. Blanche Hatcher to 2nd Lt. P. L. Koob dated 20 April 1945, in Individual Deceased Personnel File at St. Louis Military Personnel Records Center

realized. A response of 11 June, 1945, confirmed it.⁴⁶ One year and one week after joining the U.S. Army, Henry Frederick Hatcher had been killed in action.



Until I received your letter I entertained hope that my Boy could be living and might yet return, since there have been many cases. As yet I have had no letter from the other side, nor any particulars as to his death or place of burial. Naturally I feel that I should be given all information permitted and if you, Lt. Koob, can advise me or render any satisfactory help in assisting me to acquire any or all particulars I shall feel indebted and very grateful for same.

Yours very truly

Blanche F. Hatcher

Figure 12: A portion of a letter dated 20 April, 1945. It was not until 11 June that Mrs. Hatcher got confirmation that her son had died. Image courtesy of Myra Miller, Ph.D.

On 28 July, 1945, the Washington *Evening Star* stated the following Sunday (29 July), a memorial service would be held for Henry Hatcher at Francis Asbury Methodist Church, the same church where his father's service was held.⁴⁷ He would never return to American shores. In 1948, his remains were moved to the Normandy American Cemetery, where he lies at rest today. He is buried in Grave 22, Row 17, Plot F (Figure 12).⁴⁸

Hatch was a replacement. He did not leave the States among brothers in arms, with whom he had trained with for years. He did not benefit from comradery born from training when he arrived at his unit. If he made any friends while he was there, that is unknown. But there are a great many other men who faced similar circumstances as replacements, and many had fates like Hatcher, dead within the week. They, like Hatch, served the country during the Second World War. They, like Hatch, deserved to be remembered.

⁴⁶ Letter from Lt. Col. Mayo Darling to Mrs. Blanche Hatcher, dated 11 June 1945, in Individual Deceased Personnel File at St. Louis Military Personnel Records Center

⁴⁷ *Evening Star*. (Washington, D.C.), 28 July 1945. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1945-07-28/ed-1/seq-10/>.

⁴⁸ "Private Henry F. Hatcher." 83rd Infantry Division Documents - Private Henry F Hatcher ASN 33744346. 83rdinfdivdocs.org



*Figure 13: Private Henry Frederick Hatcher's grave, Plot F, Row 17, Grave 22.
Photograph courtesy of Jean Paul Pitou.*

Henry Frederick Hatcher volunteered. He pledged his service to his country, pledged an oath to do his duty. Hatcher spent only one year and one week in the U.S. Army, but during his life, he spent eight years in uniform. He made the greatest sacrifice of all, and lies eternally at rest, surrounded by his countrymen in a cemetery far from home.

It is a terribly hot day in Virginia for two hundred young high school cadets standing on a football field, currently being used as a parade ground. Each of the young men and women stand at parade rest, their knees slightly bent to keep the blood flowing. They have been reminded that it is important not to pass out. There are more than fifty names called during this solemn ceremony. "Henry Hatcher, Class of 1939," a retired lieutenant colonel says over a loud speaker. One of those young cadets, heart beating in her chest as her moment arrives, snaps to attention. At the top of her lungs, the cadet shouts, "died on the field of honour, sir!" Once a year, every

year, Randolph-Macon Academy's homecoming weekend is celebrated, the main event being the memorial parade.

Once a year, every year, Henry Frederick Hatcher's name is uttered once more.

Special Thanks

My thanks for their help in research go out particularly to Myra Miller, Ph.D, and Jean Paul Pitou. Obtaining Hatcher's records from St. Louis would have been extremely difficult without Dr. Miller. The maps that Mr. Pitou gave have been worth their weight in gold, as well as information on the area where Hatch died.

Thanks also go out to Sandra M. Worley at Virginia Tech for confirming Hatcher attended Virginia Tech, informing me that he was studying engineering, and that he specifically withdrew to volunteer for the U.S. Army. So too do I thank Bev Pelaccio at Fishburne Military School, for finding the yearbook Hatcher's picture is within, confirming his attendance there. Last but certainly not least, TSgt Laing for volunteering to send photographs of Randolph-Macon Academy's memorial wall.

Without the help of the above, this project would not look anything close to this.

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