A few good men around South Carolina have done everything. Only a few, however, have done more than T. Moffatt Burriss of Columbia, who once taught school in Orangeburg.

Burriss finished Clemson, was a hero in World War II, built a strong construction business, married a charming school teacher, and that's not all. He raised a daughter and three sons, served in the S.C. House of Representatives a decade and a half and - there's more but that's enough.

The big shocker is that Burriss is still around, still energetic enough to drive to Orangeburg from Columbia and deliver exciting remarks about WWII at the Rotary Club. By himself.

Of course, the "true high point" of his life came when he finished Clemson in 1940 and became a science teacher at Orangeburg High School! That's where he met Louisa Hay of Morristown, Tenn., the future Mrs. Burriss.

Premier Tojo's dirty deal

Moffatt Burriss' stay in Orangeburg lasted only a year and a half. With Hitler and Mussolini gloating over France and other conquests, Americans realized they could not let them swallow the world. Japan's Premier Tojo provided motivation by ordering hundreds of bombers to destroy Pearl Harbor and many more Pacific sites in 1941-1942. Suddenly, we faced our biggest conflict since the Civil War's death and destruction. Moffatt enlisted in the Third Battalion of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division and served, he says, "for two and a half of the roughest years of my life."

He fought in the invasion of Sicily, the liberation of Holland and several other battles, but his eyes widen when he describes the infamous "Battle of the Bulge," which began Dec. 17, 1944. Burriss calls it "the most deadly, destructive and damnable military encounter" he ever took part in.

"My 82 Airborne Parachute Division came late to the site after the Germans launched a last ditch, major attack at a weak point in our line along the Ardennes region of Belgium and tiny country of Luxembourg. They had massed all their forces - some 500,000 men at that particular point. Facing them, new to the conflict, were the 106 Infantry and 9th Armored Divisions," Burriss said. "The Nazis blasted and hurt them with everything they had, including big artillery and Panther and Tiger Tanks."

‘Nuts!'

Moffatt said this inspired the famous note the Germans sent General McAuliffe demanding his surrender, to which he gave his now world-famous reply, "Nuts!"

"As soon as our 82nd had moved into the line, we sent out patrols to learn the Kraut positions, then linked with our troops on the left and right. Next day, having learned they were not directly to our front, orders came to move forward until we made contact," he said. "As we did, there came an ominous sound - German tanks rumbling forward. I immediately realized that because we only carried rifles, machine guns and hand grenades, we might be pinned down. Sitting ducks, ripe to be blown to bits."

Burriss said he dispatched a squad to ambush their flak wagon, "then we rushed in, and captured it, killing the crew. We hurried to turn the wagon's 20 millimeter gun, along with our small machine guns and mortars, at them and repel the attack."

After a week of heavy fog, and being outgunned, the fog broke, he said.

"At dawn on Christmas Eve, we awoke to the thrilling sound of motors high above," Burriss said. "Our fighter-bombers had come. In minutes, we saw and heard violent explosions along the German line.

"Before long, we received a radio message that the Krauts had converged on a section in the middle of our line. Bunched together, they were trying to find a place to cross the nearby Meuse River. Suddenly, they were stranded and vulnerable. We moved immediately into winning battle.‘'

Waist-deep snow

As the German offensive continued to lose its punch, "we began inching our way toward a town called Yerresburg, often through waist-deep snow," Burriss said. "Even without opposition, our progress totaled 100 yards an hour. Men on the point, breaking a trail, had to be relieved every 30 minutes."

On Dec. 28, his company suffered a major attack by a large German 95 Panzer Division.

"For several hours, the heavy artillery fire wounded and killed our men. Then, suddenly, the enemy withdrew, leaving many of their casualties for us to take care of," Burriss said.

"We later learned that the Army's casualty report for the entire European Theater during December had exceeded 78,000."

Continuing to advance, Burriss' company hit its last formidable barrier the first week in February: the Siegfried Line. The ground before the huge bunkers held concrete ‘'teeth'\* four feet high, he said.

"The jeeps and even big trucks could not flatten and cross them. Both sides fired countless artillery; both suffered heavy casualties," he said. "Fortunately, our greater fire power overcame them.

"When we reached the Siegfried's huge bunkers, which held most of their troops, we had to blast through heavy steel doors below ground. But once inside, the occupants surrendered."

Burriss continued, "Hitler's last gasp effort to regain momentum and prevent the Allies from entering his Fatherland has failed; he had to face trespassers on the hallowed soil of the Third Reich."

"There are no words in my vocabulary to describe the bravery and determination of the men in my company," he said. "They gave everything, sometimes their lives. The great strength of the Nazis had been demolished. The few minor engagements proved only the last weary gasps of the exhausted German empire."

Note: Moffatt Burriss' book, "Strike and Hold", published in 2000, can be found at most libraries in the state. A copy of that book and this personal interview proved invaluable and were a huge enticement for me to read the entire, amazing experience. My thanks to Richard Fowler of Orangeburg for all of his help in setting up this story.