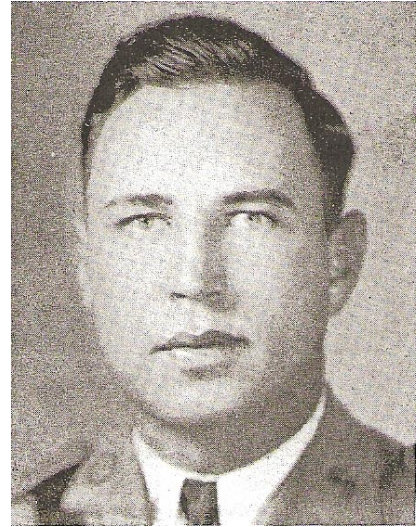


Taking Command

When word came that his commander had been wounded and evacuated, executive officer Captain Nick Carpenter took command of 1st Battalion, 32nd Armored Regiment of the 3rd Armored Division. The battalion, part of the vast and growing Allied invasion force, was attempting to exploit the breakout from the Normandy lodgment area and encircle German forces in northwestern France. On that Sunday evening, August 13, 1944, Carpenter's battalion was fighting near the village of Ranès.



Nicholas Drewry Carpenter enrolled at Clemson College after completing two years of study at North Georgia College. A native of Elberton, Georgia, Nick was a chemistry major and a member of Athanor, the campus chemistry club. He was one of the best drilled cadets in his class for two years running, marching with both the Junior and Senior Platoons. A cadet first lieutenant, he served as executive officer and social officer of Company F, 2nd Battalion of the Cadet Regiment. A member of the Class of 1935, Carpenter attended ROTC training camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama in the summer of 1934.

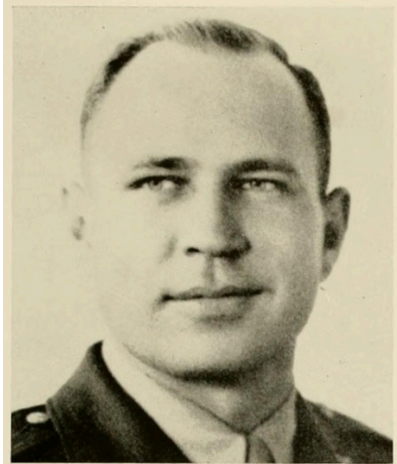
Carpenter was already on active duty in the Army at the outbreak of World War II. He was eventually assigned to the 32nd Armored Regiment of the 3rd Armored Division. The division was committed to battle in late June, just weeks after the D-Day landings. Fighting in the notorious bocage region of Normandy, 3rd Armored tankers were credited with welding steel I-beams, used by the Germans as beach obstacles, onto the fronts of their Sherman tanks and using them to ram through the hedgerows.

On August 13, Carpenter's battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Elwyn Blanchard, was driving toward the village of Ranès along roads littered with destroyed German vehicles. The battalion's objective was to seize the town and join up with English forces to encircle the now retreating Germans. Supported by infantrymen from the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment, Carpenter was leading the battalion's column of tanks towards its objective while keeping in radio contact with Blanchard who was behind him in the middle of the battalion formation.



As the Americans encountered German strongpoints, the 1st Battalion's column split to advance along multiple routes. At 1730, Blanchard, now leading a different column, was wounded, leaving Carpenter in command of the battalion. At 1830, Carpenter's force was ambushed by Germans defending a roadblock near Ranès. With darkness falling and his men in need of rest, Carpenter halted the advance and planned with the regimental commander to resume the attack on Ranès the following morning at 0800.

As 1st Battalion's advance resumed on Monday morning, aerial reconnaissance reported enemy activity in front of Carpenter's troops. Instead of committing his forces blindly, Carpenter and First Lieutenant Heiss from G Company moved ahead to reconnoiter for themselves. Carpenter and Heiss captured ten German soldiers and took them back to friendly lines for questioning. The two officers then resumed their reconnaissance, returning to the vicinity at which they had taken their prisoners. Almost immediately, Carpenter and Heiss were struck by enemy fire. A German doctor and an officer came forward to evaluate the Americans' wounds. They judged Carpenter beyond help but took the less severely wounded Heiss as their prisoner. Heiss was put—alone—into the back of a camouflaged truck. As the vehicle began to move, Heiss bailed out of the back and escaped to the American lines. Carpenter was reported as missing in action.



MAJ. NICHOLAS DREWRY CARPENTER
Third Armored Division
Elberton, Georgia

After the war ended, Carpenter's cousin, a Lieutenant Hardin, serving with the Army Air Force in Germany, borrowed a jeep and with the help of a French-speaking comrade traveled to the area in which Carpenter had been lost. Hardin asked around the village of Ranès and discovered a man who was aware of a grave south of the town that was reputed to be that of an American captain. Hardin ventured into the woods where he found a grave

marked with a wooden cross near several wrecked tanks bearing the unit markings of Carpenter's regiment. Hardin reported his finding to the Graves Registration section at SHAPE headquarters in Versailles. A few weeks later, the identity of the dead soldier was confirmed as Nicholas Carpenter. Carpenter's remains were removed to the temporary American cemetery at St. André-de-l'Eure.

Nick Carpenter's promotion to major had not yet been communicated to him at the time of his death. He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and the Purple Heart. His body was later reinterred in the Normandy American Cemetery at St. Laurent Sur Mer.

Major Nicholas Drewry Carpenter was survived by his wife Betty and their two daughters.

Alexis Boban, a French Citizen, who has a special interest in the American forces that liberated his grandparents' hometown of Ranès, Normandy in August 1944, provided much of this information. See his website at:

<http://mayenne-ww2.forumactif.org/t650-nicholas-d-carpenter-hq-co-1st-bn-32nd-ar-mia-14-08-1944>

