

## The Rest of the Story

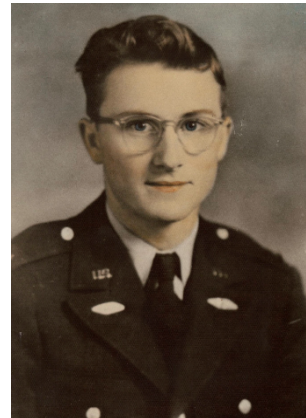
Oscar Fred Danner, Jr., was a certified war hero. He was awarded a medal for heroism in combat. Sadly, Danner's story doesn't end with the Silver Star.

"Os" Danner, from Jonesville, was a member of Clemson's Class of 1949. Although World War II was four years over by the time he graduated, Danner, like the rest of his non-veteran classmates, had endured the strenuous life of a cadet. He was, for the record, a member of the Best Drilled Squad. He was active in the Baptist Student Union, had run track and, like thousands of boys before him, had participated in ROTC. He had completed his summer training at Fort Meade, Maryland and was designated a Distinguished Military Student.



Danner would continue to distinguish himself militarily—and in the most crucial of tests.

A year after graduating from Clemson, Danner was a platoon leader assigned to the 70<sup>th</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The battalion provided training equipment and support to the officers and enlisted students at the Army's Armor School. But, within two weeks of the outbreak of the Korean War in late June 1950, the 70<sup>th</sup> was alerted for movement to San Francisco and began preparations for deployment to South Korea. The battalion was severely understrength, both in terms of men and equipment. In order to get up to strength for combat, soldiers from other units were transferred into the 70<sup>th</sup>. The battalion's M4 Sherman and M26 Pershing tanks underwent extensive maintenance, receiving new tracks and replacement parts. Tactical training was conducted at the platoon level, but totaled only about thirty days by the time the battalion deployed.



The 70<sup>th</sup> embarked by rail on July 17 from Fort Knox, arriving in California on July 20. Battalion personnel boarded the USNS *General A. W. Brewster* on July 23, with their vehicles and equipment loaded on separate cargo transport.

They may not have known it at the time, but the soldiers of the battalion were sailing right into the most desperate of battles. North Korean forces had rolled down the Korean peninsula against ill-prepared defenders and had encircled United Nations forces in what would become known as the Pusan Perimeter, a relatively small pocket of territory on the southeast coast of South Korea. The 70<sup>th</sup>'s personnel arrived at Pusan on August 7. Their equipment transport arrived two days later.

The battalion was attached to the 1st Cavalry Division and first went into action near Waegwan, on August 15. Their appearance, along with the 6th and 72nd Tank Battalions, on the front was

welcomed by the American units which had had no tanks with which to fight the North Koreans' T-34's.

Even with the addition of the tanks, the 1st Cavalry Division was hard pressed by the North Koreans and had to withdraw from key terrain near Taegu. Stabilizing the front over the next few days, the division and other units went on the offensive on September 15 in support of the Inchon Landings west of Seoul.

As the American units began to break out of the Pusan Perimeter, they suffered numerous casualties to mines that the North Koreans had laid across their path of advance. Company A served as the lead element of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, advancing northwest along the Taegu-Waegwan road. The company lost nearly seventy-five percent of its tanks to mines in order to clear the road for the follow-on infantry.

On September 22, Danner's platoon from Company C was serving as the lead element of Task Force Lynch as it drove north to link up with units that had broken out from the daring amphibious landings at Inchon. The task force's mission was to seize and hold a key river crossing near Naktong-ni. Lieutenant Danner, in the lead tank, observed a column of enemy soldiers marching along the road and in the same direction as the task force. Danner, realizing that surprise was a great advantage, instructed his platoon to hold its fire. Danner guided his tank through the panic-stricken enemy and fired his first round into an enemy ammunition truck, causing it to explode. The citation for the Silver Star medal awarded Danner for this action states:

*[H]e completely exposed himself in order to give accurate fire directions to his platoon, causing 500 enemy casualties. During the bitter conflict with the enemy infantry, it became apparent that his tank was in danger of catching fire from the burning and exploding ammunition truck. With great risk of his own life, Lieutenant Danner voluntarily dismounted from his tank and, while under direct fire of the enemy and withstanding the blistering heat from the burning truck, directed his vehicle to a safer position. By his calm, forceful leadership and undying devotion to duty, his platoon captured and destroyed much enemy equipment. Lieutenant Danner's gallant actions reflect great credit on himself and the military service.*

This skirmish helped enable Task Force Lynch to drive more than one hundred miles and link up on September 26 with elements of the 31st Infantry Regiment, one of the units which had landed at Inchon.

If only that was the end of the story. United Nations forces continued to drive north, reaching the North Korean capital Pyongyang on October 20. By the end of the month, the 70<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion was thirty miles north of Pyongyang. Then all hell broke loose.

On October 31, Chinese forces counterattacked. The weight of the Chinese attack was so heavy that it compelled UN forces to retreat. 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and 70<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion units were frequently cut off, isolated and forced to fight through heavy Chinese forces, suffering severe

casualties in the process. By mid-December, after a long, costly withdrawal, the 70<sup>th</sup> helped establish a new defensive line just north of Seoul, the South Korean capital.

January and February of 1951 found the battalion supporting limited offensive operations. At some point, Lieutenant Danner was transferred from his tank platoon and given a new assignment as an aerial spotter for artillery.



On April 1, 1951, Danner was flying as an artillery forward observer in an Army L-4 Grasshopper. The L-4 was the military version of the Piper Cub and was used for liaison missions. It was slow, flew low and was unarmed. During the mission, the aircraft was struck by ground fire. Danner was killed, but the aircraft managed to return to its base.

Danner was survived by his wife Mildred; mother Mrs. O. F. Danner, Sr.; sisters Jonets

and Regina; and brother Bobby, a member of Clemson's Class of 1952. He is buried in the Gilead Baptist Church Cemetery in Jonesville.