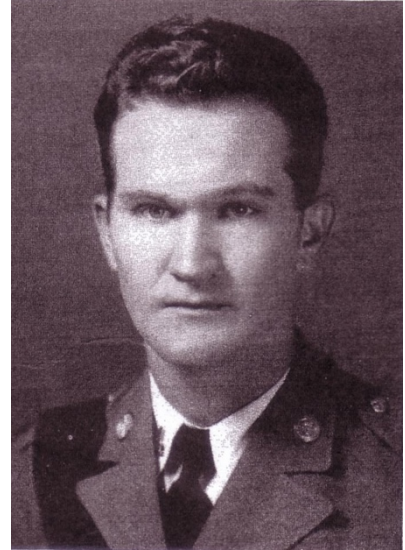


Tank Company Commander

Sometimes the enemy was nowhere to be found. At other moments, the men of Company A, 31st Tank Battalion found themselves in the crosshairs of German anti-tank guns. Captain Alvin Davis of Greer was the company commander as Company A battled its way across France in the summer of 1944.

Alvin Frank Davis was a textile engineering major and a member of Clemson's Class of 1938. As a cadet, Davis was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment. At ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, Davis qualified as a marksman on the rifle range. As a senior, he was designated a cadet second lieutenant.



Davis married the former Marie Powell and they soon welcomed a son, Alvin Frank Davis, Jr. Davis was called to active duty and assigned to the 31st Tank Battalion of the 7th Armored Division.

The 7th Armored Division was trained at Camp Coxcomb, California before shipping to England in June 1944. After a period of combat preparation and training, the 7th crossed the English Channel and landed on Omaha and Utah Beaches on August 13-14 and was assigned to General George Patton's Third Army. By this time, the Americans had broken out of the Normandy region, wheeled to the east, and were sweeping the Germans out of France.



Davis's Company A helped liberate the city of Chartres and then advanced to Dreux, just fifty miles west of Paris. On August 22, the battalion received orders to move south and east of Paris and prepare to seize the fortress of Melun on the Seine River. The following day, the 31st moved to Mennecy, traveling ten miles without interference from the enemy. By mid-afternoon, the force was

settled into a bivouac area reorganizing, conducting maintenance, and preparing for the attack on Melun.

On August 24, the battalion reached the Seine River at 1530 hours. The Germans had demolished the bridges over the river, but Army engineers had erected a pontoon span that now attracted the full attention of the enemy. The battalion's after action report described the

pontoon bridge, under German artillery fire, as “a hot spot.” Nonetheless, the 31st crossed the river and moved into an assembly area about an eighth of a mile to the east.

At 0030 hours on August 25, Davis’s Company A moved north of Melun to Verte-Saint Denis to support Company B’s attack on the fortress. The attack commenced at 0200 hours, with the lead tanks in both companies hitting mines and jamming the roads. It was daylight before the damaged vehicles could be cleared away and the attack resumed. With the help of supporting infantry, Melun was liberated. The cost to Davis’s company was five medium tanks damaged and three men wounded.

The next day, Davis’s Company A suffered its first combat deaths when German anti-tank guns ambushed the column near La Chapelle Gauthier. Even with the resistance, the battalion covered 23 miles during the day. Company A, as part of a task force, continued to race to the northeast, covering sixty miles over the next two days.

On August 28, Company A attacked German forces in the vicinity of Épernay. The city was liberated, but at a high cost. Company A lost three more tanks, incurred a score of casualties, and lost its commanding officer when Captain Davis was killed in action. For his “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy,” Davis was posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal.

Alvin Frank Davis was survived by his wife and son, his parents, a sister, and a brother. He is buried in the Lorraine American Military Cemetery, Saint-Avold, France.

