

## Inside the Reich

By the spring of 1945, the Germans, pinched from both the east and the west, were facing certain defeat. Even with their homeland invaded, Hitler and his Nazi cronies were unwilling to face the reality of their dire circumstances. They refused to give up and so the fighting and the dying continued. Thomas Edward Davis, Jr. was one of the junior officers leading the Allied offensive inside Germany.



Davis was a member of Clemson's Class of 1944. At the conclusion of his junior year, the architecture major from Newberry saw his collegiate career suspended when he, like most of the other cadets on campus, was ordered to active duty. The War Department's need for manpower to fight a global war trumped the benefit of retaining able-bodied men in the relative safety of college campuses.

Davis trained at Fort Knox, Kentucky and earned his commission as a second lieutenant in August 1944. He was assigned to the 80<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, the "Thundering Herd." The 80<sup>th</sup> departed its training base, Camp Polk, Louisiana, in October 1944 and headed to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey for embarkation. The battalion sailed from New York on November 7, its overseas destination unknown. Arriving in England on November 19, the battalion proceeded to Tidworth to draw its equipment and then moved into a staging area to await its transportation to France.

On January 6, 1945, the battalion sailed from Portland and arrived at LeHavre, France the following day. A long road march in cold, windy, snowy conditions eventually ended with the battalion's arrival in Vilt, Holland. On February 19, the battalion relieved British tank units near Hingen and saw its first combat action. The battalion, still a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, was now under the command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army and was acting as a holding force pending a planned offensive into the Roer Valley.



*An M-4 Sherman Tank of the 80<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion.*

The 80<sup>th</sup> entered Germany on February 28 as the big offensive got underway. Throughout March, the 80<sup>th</sup> battled its way deeper into Germany, crossing the Rhine River on March 26. Against "very stiff" German resistance, the 80<sup>th</sup> reached Bork, Germany on April 1 and was then relieved by elements of the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. But the 80<sup>th</sup>'s rest was short lived.

On April 3, intelligence reports located two German Armies and at least one Panzer Division in the Ruhr pocket. The 8<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was ordered to attack from Lippstadt toward Hirschberg, about twenty miles to the south, to isolate and destroy the German forces.

Second Lieutenant Davis, commanding a platoon of five M-4 Sherman tanks, was attached to Task Force Walker for the attack. While approaching the town of Norddorf at 0750 hours, the task force encountered enemy tank fire. As it advanced, German tank fire was augmented by artillery, small arms, and anti-tank weapons. During this attack, Davis was killed.

Thomas Edward Davis, Jr. was survived by his parents and sister. He was awarded the Purple Heart and buried at the American Military Cemetery, Margraten, Netherlands.

