

Pugilist, Tanker, Hero

James Ray Geraty from Yorges Island, South Carolina didn't excel in the military arts while a cadet at Clemson. He was a four-year private in the cadet brigade, his interests more aligned to athletics and academics than the rote and routine of the military system.

Geraty's family operated a cabbage nursery, but his focus was on engineering, not agriculture. Pursuing a double major in electrical and mechanical engineering, Geraty, a member of the Class of 1933, also found time to letter as a member of the boxing team and was a member of the Block C Club. He was a member of both the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. And though he seems not to have been greatly motivated by military matters, he nonetheless completed ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama during the summer before his senior year.



That summer training and the second lieutenant's commission that resulted from it would eventually lead Geraty into the Army and into the Second World War.

The 1st Armored Division, as its name suggests, was something new in the American Army, a self-supporting, permanent fighting unit with tanks as its nucleus. The 13th Cavalry Regiment, renamed the 13th Armored Regiment, was activated as one of the division's maneuver units in July 1940 at Fort Knox, Kentucky. With the passage of the Selective Service Act that September, the United States began an unprecedented peace-time military build-up. Many of those called into service for twelve months of training were assigned to existing divisions like the 1st Armored.

Although new equipment was arriving almost daily, the division was still under-equipped. Officers and men made do with what they could scrounge, often using wooden rifles and maneuvering in jeeps instead of tanks. In September 1941, the division traveled to Louisiana for large scale war games and then to the Carolinas for First Army maneuvers. For three months, the 1st Armored Division demonstrated the battlefield ascendancy of armor that the German *Blitzkrieg* had revealed in France the previous year. The division arrived back at Fort Knox the first Saturday in December, with many of the men looking forward to the end of their twelve-month enlistments. That all changed the next day.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the division's training took on a more serious, urgent tone. Overseas deployment was now a given, the question was when and where. In April, that question was answered as the division began its overseas movement, passing through New Jersey and boarding the RMS *Queen Mary* at the Brooklyn Army Terminal for its voyage to Northern Ireland. The division trained on Northern Ireland's moors. It's hard to imagine a landscape more different than its eventual destination.

As part of Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa, the 13th Armored Regiment landed at Oran in Algeria. For months, the regiment participated in the see-saw battles across the mountainous terrain, battling both German and Italian defenders. The Allied plan was to squeeze the enemy between Montgomery's 8th Army advancing from the east and Anderson's 1st Army approaching from the west.

By April, the two armies had trapped the remnants of Rommel's *Afrika Korps* and its Italian allies in Tunisia, steadily pushing the defenders back toward the Mediterranean Sea. In bitter fighting against the desperate Germans, the Allied forces prevailed, but with heavy losses. Captain Ray Geraty fell in action on April 22, 1943 as the Allies punched through defensive lines forcing the Germans to commit their armor reserves.

James Ray Geraty was awarded the Purple Heart and was buried at the North Africa American Cemetery in Carthage, Tunisia.

