

Take the High Ground

Richards Daniel Van Allen reported for active duty with the United States Army in March 1942. He attended basic training at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and then was ordered to officer candidate school at Fort Benning, Georgia where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant on October 16, 1942. The newly minted lieutenant was assigned to the newly activated 100th Infantry Division then organizing at Fort Jackson. This wasn't the first occasion for Van Allen to wear a uniform in the Palmetto State.

Van Allen, from Savannah, Georgia, had attended Clemson College during the 1933-34 school year. A textile chemistry major, he was assigned to the 2nd Platoon of Company M, 3rd Battalion of the Cadet Regiment. After leaving Clemson, Van Allen returned to Savannah and took a job with Turpentine and Rosin Factors, Inc. He married the former Dorothy Austin and they established their home in Savannah.



As American military mobilization accelerated in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, Van Allen became the executive officer of K Company, 3rd Battalion, 399th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division. The division trained stateside for its planned deployment overseas, participating in maneuvers in the Tennessee mountains before traveling to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for further training.

The 100th sailed for Europe on October 6, 1944, completing its two week voyage at the southern France port of Marseille. Attached to Seventh Army, the 100th moved into the front line on November 2 with Van Allen's 399th Infantry Regiment relieving elements of the 45th Infantry Division. 3rd Battalion occupied positions about two miles southeast of St. Remy, France.

German troops on high ground overlooking St. Remy fired heavy machine guns and mortars at American forces impeding their forward movement. A spell of rainy weather further hindered the American advance. Any American troop movements were inevitably answered by German mortar fire. The regiment was pulled off the line on November 9, but the rest period lasted only a couple of days. On November 12, the 399th was back on the offensive, seeking to seize high ground from the Germans to allow for greater freedom of movement.

On November 19, the weather cleared and a warm sun shone down on the soldiers of the 399th. The following day, Van Allen's K Company attacked Hill 467 supported by a platoon of tanks. While advancing against fierce resistance to destroy enemy heavy machine gun emplacements, the tank platoon leader was killed and the tanks began to withdraw. Lieutenant Van Allen reorganized the tankers and sent them back into action to support his company's infantrymen. With the foot soldiers and tanks working together, Hill 467 was secured, but Van Allen was mortally wounded by enemy mortar fire. He died the following day in an Army hospital at Neuf Maisons, France.

First Lieutenant Richards Daniel Van Allen was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his mother, his wife Dorothy, and a daughter, Richards Dorothy Van Allen who was born after his untimely death. Van Allen is buried at Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah.

