



MONTGOMERY CUNNINGHAM MEIGS

1937

Montgomery Meigs, being the son of a naval officer, had been to half a dozen different schools, in the Philippines and in the United States, before he entered the First Form in 1931. During his one year at St. Paul's he led his Form and won several Dickey Prizes. After he left, a back injury kept him in a plaster cast for six months and in an iron brace for over a year, but, completing his preparation at the Severn School near Annapolis, he entered West Point when barely seventeen.

Graduated in 1940, 44th in his class of 449, Meigs chose the Cavalry as his branch of the Army. He was first assigned to the 8th Cavalry at Fort Bliss, later successively to three different Armored Divisions, the 2nd, the 7th and the 12th. In 1941, and again in 1942, he was very seriously and painfully injured in accidents while on volunteer motorcycle detachment duty.

On his second discharge from the hospital, Meigs, at the age of twenty-five, was promoted Lieutenant Colonel, A.U.S., and given command of the 23rd Tank Battalion, 2nd Armored Division. Ordered overseas in the early autumn of 1944, he went into combat for the first time on December 9 in Alsace.

Throughout the whole of December 9, the 23rd Tank Battalion was engaged on a direct-fire mission from the flank against the village of Binning in support of a reinforced Infantry Battalion assaulting frontally. The village was occupied late that afternoon.

The next day the 12th Armored Division assaulted a section of the Maginot Line north of Rohrbach and the 23rd Tank Battalion was in action from 0845 until 1800, "continually under heavy fire

during this time." By nightfall outlying pillboxes had been reduced and the main defense positions had been reached.

On the morning of the eleventh "without sleep for two days and nights," Meigs again led his battalion in an attack. He and his lead tanks reached the top of a ridge which the enemy proved to have 'zeroed in' with 88 mm. guns from well-concealed positions. Three tanks were hit as the first assault wave reached the top. Meigs sent back orders to his company commanders to stop and try to locate the enemy guns. He himself with his lead tanks began to reconnoitre toward the village of Bettwiller, 1,000 yards to the right flank. Seeing a gun flash there, he ordered the company commanders to fire smoke on the edge of the village and the lead tanks to withdraw to cover. At that moment his own tank was hit in the turret by an 88 and he was instantly killed. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star: "Lieutenant Colonel Meigs' actions during the three days' operations under artillery, mortar and small-arms fire set an example for all the officers and men of his battalion, inspiring them to continue the attack on the Division objective, which was taken on December 12, 1944."

Before going overseas, Meigs had been married to Elizabeth Griggs, daughter of Captain John B. Griggs, U.S.N. Montgomery Cunningham Meigs, Jr., was born January 11, 1945, one month after his father's death.

Note (Excerpt from a letter): "The history of the 12th Armored Division can never be adequately written. . . . My only hope is that we will not have to take the same ground again, for I have learned what must be paid to take it. Most of my friends, as well as Mont's, were killed. Of the three original Tank Battalion Commanders, two were killed and the other crippled for life. Of the original twelve Company Commanders, six were killed and the others were wounded, or captured after being wounded. The 43rd Tank Battalion¹ was entirely annihilated at Herlesheim in Alsace on January 17, 1945, with a 100% loss in Tanks in 24 hours. I spent the last five months of the war in Europe in German hospitals and prison camps. . . . I don't want you to feel that it was a strange quirk of fate that caused Mont's death. To the contrary: it was a strange quirk if a man got back."

¹The 43rd and 23rd Tank Battalions were both in the 12th Armored Division.