



**Benjamin Oliver Davis, Sr.: A Biography
(Courtesy of the US Army Heritage and Education Center)**

Benjamin Oliver Davis, Sr. was born in Washington, D.C. on 1 July 1877 to Louis P. H. and Henrietta Davis. He attended M Street High School in Washington where he participated in the school's cadet program. During the Spanish-American War, Davis briefly served in Company D, 1st Separate Battalion of the Washington D.C. National Guard. On 10 July 1898, Davis joined the 8th U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiment as a first lieutenant of Company G. The 8th United States Volunteer Infantry was stationed at Chickamauga Park, Georgia, from October 1898 until the unit was disbanded in March 1899.

On 14 June 1899, Davis enlisted in the Regular Army. He was assigned to Troop I, 3rd Squadron, 9th Cavalry at Ft. Duchesne, Utah, first as the troop's clerk and then as squadron sergeant major. In the spring of 1901, Troop I was assigned to the Philippine Islands. In August 1901, he was assigned to Troop F, 10th Cavalry, where Davis assumed the duties of a second lieutenant after passing an officers' qualification test. Troop F returned to the United States in August 1902. Davis was then stationed at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, where he also served for several months with Troop M. In September 1905, he was assigned to Wilberforce University in Ohio as Professor of Military Science and Tactics, a post that he filled for four years.

In November 1909, shortly after being ordered to Regimental Headquarters, 9th Cavalry, Davis was reassigned for duty to Liberia. He left the United States for Liberia in April 1910 and served as a military attaché reporting on Liberia's military forces until October 1911. He returned to the United States in November 1911. In January 1912, Davis was assigned to Troop I, 9th Cavalry, stationed at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming. In 1913, the 9th Cavalry was assigned to patrol the Mexican-United States border.

In February 1915, Davis was again assigned to Wilberforce University as Professor of Military Science and Tactics. From 1917 to 1920, Davis was assigned to the 9th Cavalry at Camp Stotsenburg, Philippine Islands, as supply officer, commander of 3rd Squadron, and then of 1st Squadron. He reached the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel but returned to the United States in March 1920 with the rank of captain.

Davis was assigned to the Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, as the Professor of Military Science and Tactics from 1920 to 1924. He then served for five years as an instructor with 2nd Battalion, 372nd Regiment, Ohio National Guard, in Cleveland, Ohio. In September 1929, Davis returned to

Wilberforce University as Professor of Military Science and Tactics. He was assigned to the Tuskegee Institute in the early part of 1931 and remained there for six years as Professor of Military Science and Tactics. During the summer months of 1930 to 1933, Davis escorted pilgrimages of World War I Gold Star Mothers and Widows to the burial places of their loved ones in Europe.

In August 1937, Davis returned to Wilberforce University as Professor of Military Science and Tactics. Davis was assigned to the 369th Regiment, New York National Guard, during the summer of 1938 and took command of the regiment a short time later. Davis was promoted to Brigadier General on 25 October 1940, becoming the first African-American general in the United States Army.

Davis became Commanding General of 4th Brigade, 2nd Cavalry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, in January 1941. About six months later, he was assigned to Washington, D.C. as an assistant in the Office of the Inspector General. While serving in the Office of the Inspector General, Davis also served on the Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Problems. From 1941 to 1944, Davis conducted inspection tours of African-American Soldiers in the United States Army. From September to November 1942 and again from July to November 1944, Davis made inspection tours of African-American Soldiers stationed in Europe.

On 10 November 1944, Davis was reassigned to work under Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee as Special Assistant to the Commanding General, Communications Zone, European Theater of Operations. He served with the General Inspectorate Section, European Theater of Operation (later the Office of the Inspector General on Europe) from January through May 1945. While serving in the European Theater of Operations, Davis was influential in the proposed policy of integration using replacement units.

After serving in the European Theater of Operations for more than a year, Davis returned to Washington, D.C. as Assistant to the Inspector General. In 1947 he was assigned as a Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Army. In this capacity, he was sent to Liberia in July 1947 as a representative of the United States for the African country's centennial celebration. On 20 July 1948, after fifty years of military service, Davis retired in a public ceremony with President Harry S. Truman presiding.

From July 1953 through June 1961, he served as a member of the American Battle Monuments Commission. Davis died on 26 November 1970 at Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Awards and Decorations

Brigadier General Davis was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and the Bronze Star Medal. His Foreign Decorations include the French Croix de Guerre with Palms, and the Grade of Commander of the Order of the Star of Africa, Liberian Government.

Brigadier General Davis' honorary degrees include an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia, an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, and an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Morgan State College, Maryland.

Promotions

Benjamin O. Davis Sr. was promoted to first lieutenant 30 March 1905; to captain 24 December 1915; to major, temporary- 5 August 1917; to lieutenant colonel, temporary-1 May 1918, permanent-1 July 1920; to colonel 18 February 1930; to brigadier general, temporary-25 October 1940, permanent-1 August 1941.

The collection of Benjamin Oliver Davis Sr. is housed at the [US Army Heritage and Education Center](#) and is available to researchers and historians. The collection spans the years 1893-1974. The bulk of the material pertains to the period from 1941 to 1945. The collection documents Davis' fifty years of military service from 1898 to 1948 and consists of seven series: Correspondence (Sub-series: Official, Personal, Retirement), Official Papers, Personal Papers, Speeches, Printed Materials, Photographs, and Oversize.

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