

1st Lt. Cloudy Gray Conner Jr.

December 16, 1915 – February 12, 1944



Cloudy Gray Conner was born in Lamar, South Carolina, on December 16, 1915. He was the eldest of Cloudy Gray Sr. and Lilly Conner. Other children included Kathleen born November 1919 and brother, Warren Lee born November 23, 1923. He attended grade school, junior high and high school all in Lamar, South Carolina. Upon graduation from high school, Cloudy Gray enrolled in Clemson College, South Carolina. While at Clemson he enrolled in the ROTC but when he graduated from college in 1937, he was denied a commission due to lack of required height.

Cloudy Gray Conner Jr was married to Anza Willeford from nearby Florence, South Carolina. They had no children. He was teaching school as well as being a

railroad telegraph operator.

He was called to active duty in 1941. Disregarding his lack of height, Cloudy Gray did receive his commission. Subsequently, 1st Lt. Conner would be assigned to Company D of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) and in combat would be attached to the 34th Infantry Division. The 133rd, 135th and the 168th regiments would make up the 34th Division.

As reported by his 1st Sergeant, Lt Conner died of a sniper bullet wound to the head while pinned down behind Castle Rock on the road to Cassino Abby.

To illustrate the type of action that surrounded Lt Conner's death, the following description of the fighting that took place was extracted from Thomas Murphy's book *AMBASSADOR IN ARMS, The Story of Hawaii's 100th Battalion*.

In three days of fighting, **8-10 February**, the 168th Infantry failed to take Monastery Hill, and suffered tremendous losses. On the northern slopes of Hill 593 the 135th was forced to fight furiously just to hold on.

On **11 February**, the Allied II Corps mounted another attack. This time the 36th Division would try to break the German defenses along the line from Hills 593 to 374, and the 34th Division would make another try against Monastery Hill and Cassino. The 36th failed to dent the enemy defenses, and suffered heavy casualties. The 168th Infantry, so depleted in manpower that headquarters and supply personnel had to be used as reserve units, failed to gain ground on Monastery Hill, and the 135th and 133rd regiments held their ground with

difficulty. From now on all units held defensively while the New Zealand Corps prepared to take over from the exhausted II Corps units.

On 12 February, the 100th withdrew from its exposed position on Hill 165 and went into regimental reserve north of Hill 193 and behind the 1st Battalion. From this point Company B was sent into Cassino to aid the 3rd Battalion. For four days and nights one of its squads held an ancient church which was gradually being ripped apart by enemy shells. The gray sky could be seen through a dozen holes in the roof.

On **15 February**, as thousands of soldiers watched with fascination and awe, **255** Allied planes dropped tons of bombs on the venerable Abbey atop Monastery Hill, and heavy guns hurled shells into its slowly disintegrating walls. During the next three days, English, Indian, and New Zealand troops tried to capture Monastery Hill and Hill 593, but failed. On **22 February**, when elements of the 6th New Zealand Brigade relieved the 133rd Infantry, the Germans still held Cassino and the mountain defenses above it.*

In the fighting at the Rapido River and around Cassino, the 100th had lost Lt Conner and three other officers and forty-four enlisted men killed; twelve officers and 122 men wounded, and three officers and eight men injured. An additional seventy-five men had been hospitalized for trench foot or other ailments. When the battalion had entered Italy at Salerno it had numbered 1,300 men. On **1 January**, before its casualties in the fight through the Majo Hill mass and down to the Rapido Plain, it had had an effective strength of 832 officers and men. Before Major Lovell had led the battalion back into the fight for Cassino, the 133rd's commander had told him, "I hate to have to do this, Major; they've been hit hard already, but I've got to use your fire eaters in this attack." The 100th's effectives now totaled **521**.

