

# Maurice Plaisted “Algie” Alger Jr.

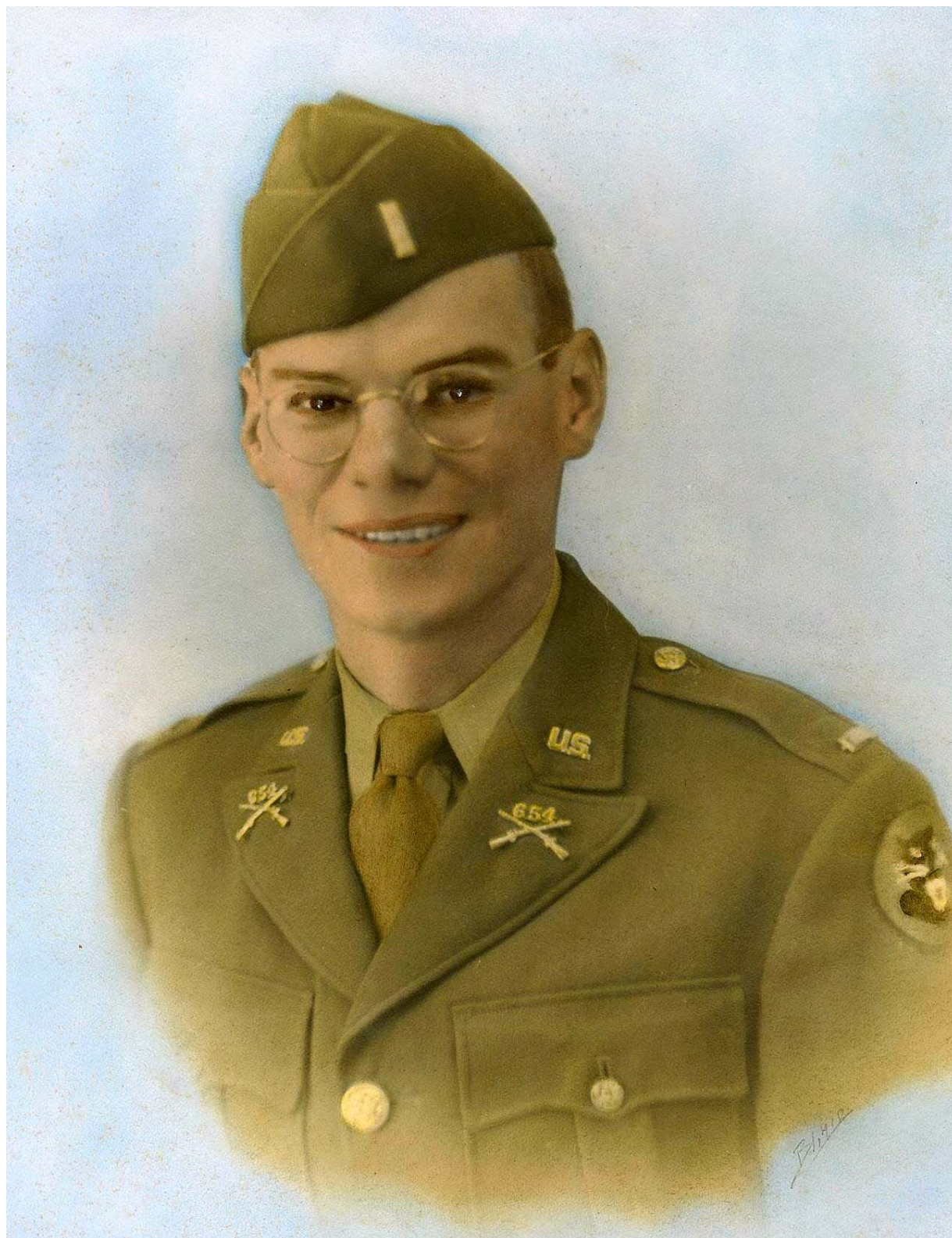
---

## A Biography

**By Ann Gaule**

**7/1/2012**

A detailed account of the early life and military service time of the author's uncle who was killed on July 21, 1944 near Saint Lo, France. At the time of his death, he was the Executive Officer for B Company of the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion.



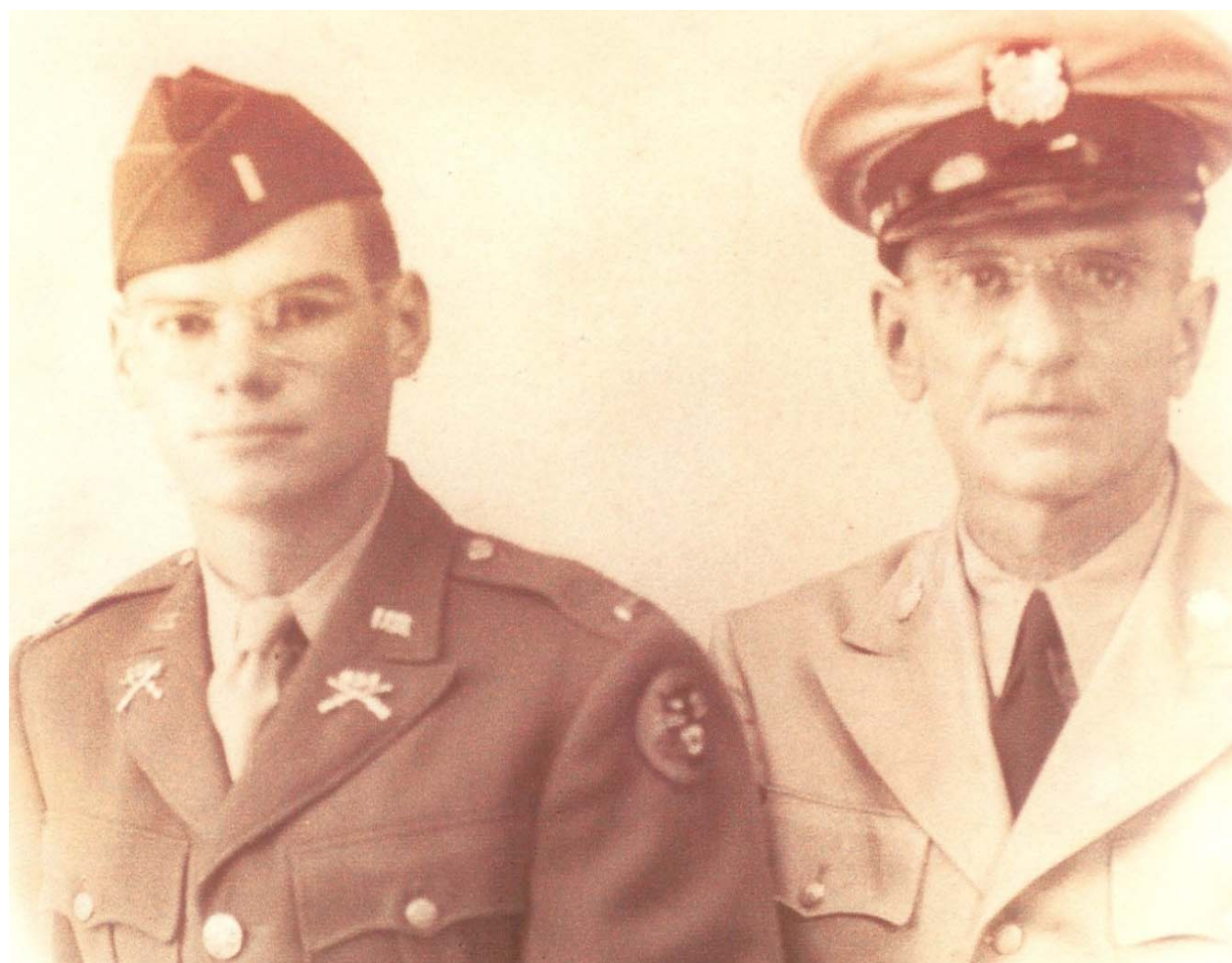
**“A Very Proud”  
2<sup>nd</sup> LIEUTENANT MAURICE PLAISTED “Algie” ALGER, JR.  
Cocoa, Florida, “last furlough home” Circa September 1943**



**Biography: Maurice P. "Algie" Alger, Jr.** was born to parents Captain Maurice P. Alger, Sr. and Anne Enesly Alger on September 29, 1920 in Cebu City, Cebu Island, Philippines. He was their second child my Aunt Barbara (Barbara Julia) was the oldest she was born in 1918.

My grandfather, Captain Maurice P. Alger, Sr. for whom my uncle is named was serving in the U. S. Army in the Philippine Constabulary under General John J. "*Black Jack*" Pershing. My Grandfather rose to the rank of Captain and served continuously from 1908-1918. His job was to train Christian Filipino natives to protect themselves from the warring Moro Moslem tribes.

In 1916 he suffered a serious motorcycle accident while in the line of duty with the Constabulary this would wreck his career as an Army officer. The Army had just selected him to be an aide to Lieutenant General James Guthrie Harbord. General Harbord was Chief of Staff under General Pershing during the War in France in the Great World War. At the outbreak of World War II Captain Alger joined the Coast Guard to help defend our Country at the age of 57 years old. The photograph taken of Father and Son below was made on "Algie's" last furlough home in 1943.



Father & Son Serving in World War Two  
Cocoa, Florida  
Circa September 1943

Eight years after "Algie's" birth his mother Anne Enesly went home to be with the Lord. In 1929 my grandfather remarried my mother's mother a nurse Jennie Crockett in the Philippines. In 1930 Maurice Sr. and Jennie had one child together that little girl became my mother Ann Elizabeth. She was born on September 21, 1930.

“Algie” was raised in the Philippines with his two sisters my Aunt Barbara and my mother Ann Elizabeth. “Algie” and Barbara attended Brent Episcopal School in Baguio, in the Philippines from 1931 through 1935. Ann Elizabeth was home schooled. Maurice like his father was quite a gentleman – very loving and thoughtful to all.

He was very active in sports and outdoor activities. He often invited his little sister Ann to join him on fishing excursions and hikes. It did not bother him to have her tag along even though she was much younger. Maurice greatly admired his father and had a keen interest in his dad’s military service. He excelled in the Boy Scouts during this time. He often liked to draw maps and take hikes with the family. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and golfing with his father. His formative years prepared him for his future military calling.

In 1936 Maurice and Barbara Julia returned to the United States for further education. In 1940, the war was drawing near so Ann and her parents returned to the United States. Barbara Julia attended and graduated from the University of Rochester with a degree in Sociology, and “Algie” like his father attended The Manlius Military School in New York twenty-eight years later and would graduate from Manlius in 1940 with a “Scientific” degree.



Cadet Sergeant Maurice P. Alger, Jr.  
“The Manlius Military School”  
Manlius, New York  
Circa 1939

“Algie” especially enjoyed the ROTC program and military science while at Manlius. He had a special talent for math and science. Maurice also enjoyed his French class and he became quite fluent in writing and translating French. During his time off, he also enjoyed building model airplanes. In 1939 “Algie” attended Officer’s Basic Training at Camp Plattsburg, New York. Activities at Camp Plattsburgh included weapons training. Most of the weapons were from the WWI era. Maurice qualified as Sharp Shooter with the rifle and Marksman with the pistol. During 1939, Maurice was, also awarded the Expert badge the highest award for proficiency with a weapon.

During his tenure at Manlius “Algie” played Football, Golf, and was a member of the Ski Club, and the coveted Ski Platoon Unit. He achieved the rank of Sergeant in 1939 and helped to lead members of “Charlie Company”. He won the “Scholarship Medal” in 1937, the “Military Merit Medal” in 1937, and 1940. Maurice and his team won the Company Football Medal in 1939. He and his Father enjoyed playing golf together, and Maurice was a member of the golf team in 1939 and 1940. Maurice served on the Wildcats Football Staff, from 1937-1938. “Algie” was also an avid member of the Ski Club and served on the Windmill Newspaper Staff in 1938-1939. Cadet Alger had a great love and talent for mathematics. On his summer breaks from Manlius, he worked as a

math tutor teaching calculus and trigonometry. He won the O brig Mathematics Trophy for being the most proficient Cadet in mathematics. Maurice was very active in sports and his Company won the Intramural Shield Award for the highest standings in Inter-Company Sports.

Cadet Alger had the great honor to be the Guidon Bearer for his graduating class. As such, he carried the unit flag – a great source of pride and long tradition for the unit. The Guidon Bearer stands in front of the unit, along side the Commander to provide a visual signal accompanying his verbal commands. There were sixty-one students in Sergeant Alger's graduating class. Many of them went on to attend Ivy League Colleges and other prominent universities. Four of his classmates also died in service during WWII. Following graduation at The Manlius School, Maurice received his commission as a Second Lieutenant, US Army Infantry Reserve - the commission to be effective when he reached the age of 21.

After his graduation from The Manlius, the prestigious Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, (RPI), accepted him into their Mechanical Engineering program in the fall of 1939. The college was located in Troy, New York, and had the reputation for being one of the top schools in the country. Maurice became a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. In college, Maurice continued to demonstrate his strong leadership traits and became President of the Alpha Kappa Pi Fraternity during his first year at RPI.

**Service Time:** Lt. Alger entered Infantry Reserve status on 20 February 1942. He received his second physical exam at West Point on 6 March 1942. 2LT Alger after his physical exam was to serve duty at West Point but instead was ordered to report to Camp Gordon, Augusta, Georgia on 1 April 1942. His duties there were to serve with the 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion.

He was the youngest officer in his battalion. His initial assignment was Platoon Leader in Company "B". He served from April of 1942 through March of 1943 in three different positions receiving superior and excellent performance ratings. He served as Platoon Leader in both Company "A" and Company "B", and as Battalion Adjutant. He was also briefly assigned to "C" Company. Battalion officers often rotated to broaden their experience and prepare them for war, while not allowing them to get too close to their men.

Maurice performed temporary duty with the Second Army Umpire School at Camp Rucker, Alabama in 1943. Lt. Alger served duty as an umpire for the 806th Tank Destroyer Battalion's Combat Firing Tests. The importance of umpiring is a testimony to Maurice's leadership and tactical skills as such a junior officer. Lieutenant Alger was among fourteen officers from the 654<sup>th</sup> TB Bn. who participated as umpires in the field maneuvers at Camp Rucker. The photograph below was taken:

*"While at the Second Army Umpire School at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, from April through June of 1943. He served as an Umpire for the 608<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion's combat firing test and was this time rated during this exercise. He received an "S" for "Superior Rating" for his contributions in the successful exercises".*



**2LT. Maurice Plaisted "Algie" Alger, Jr. by Half-Track with mounted 76mm Gun  
CAMP FORREST, TENNESSEE Circa 1943**

---

After the Tennessee Maneuvers, Lieutenant Alger returned to Camp Gordon. He was reassigned to lead another unit- this unit was the Reconnaissance Company. Algie would serve as a Platoon Leader for the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon from 1 July 1943 through the time of their departure overseas to Northern Ireland. He continued in the same assignment until 1 February 1944.

Maurice was able to visit his family one last time in September 1943, just prior to deploying overseas. My mother was just twelve years old then. The U. S. Army had allotted two weeks of leave to him to travel to Cocoa, Florida to celebrate Ann and his birthdays. Tragically, his leave was cut short a week there would be no party. Lt. Alger embarked on a journey into a faraway land, serving his Country along with so many other brave young men of his generation. He would never return!

On 1 February 1944, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant "Algie" Alger was reassigned to help lead Bravo Company in combat in Europe first in France. He became the company "*Executive Officer*".

He served in this position for only ten days before he was killed in action at the young age of 23 years. His Company Commander CPT. George A. Stevens still clearly remembered my uncle as an "*Extremely smart, an excellent and very brave leader- who took good care of his men*".

On 18 July 1944, during combat in Normandy, France: 2LT. Maurice P. "Algie" Alger, Jr. see below is sitting upon his company vehicle watching his men in their tank destroyers roll single file past him on the important strategic hill of - "Hill 122" just after its capture. Hill 122's capture opened the door to his unit and others to help capture the town of SAINT Lô, FRANCE on 18 JULY 1944.



All photographs below were taken on 18 July 1944 by a 165<sup>th</sup> U. S. Army Signal Corps Photographer, Courtesy of Combat Reels.



*“The photograph below was taken during the initial capture of the town of Saint Lô, France.”*

**2<sup>nd</sup> LT. Maurice P. “Algie” Alger, Jr.**  
**SAINT LÔ, NORMANDY FRANCE - JULY 18, 1944**



**Credit U.S. Army 165<sup>th</sup> Signal Corps, Courtesy of Combat Reels**

*“The young blonde “Grenadier” carrying the sign was captured by the first U.S. Soldiers “Algie” and Company to enter Saint Lô, France from the North on 18 July 1944”. In the same footage below you see the same proud but smiling lieutenant .... “Algie had made it to Saint Lô,” Sadly, three days later he was KIA near the Notre Dame Cathedral.*



I met his Company Commander CPT. George A. Stevens back in 2007 and I showed him the above photographs without naming any names to him. Upon seeing the photograph he replied-  
*OH, that’s “Alger” – Isn’t it! - I haven’t seen him for over 63 years!*





This photograph captures a similar “*Proud But Relaxed Smiling Lieutenant*”



**2LT. Maurice P. "Algie" Alger, Jr. at Camp Gordon, Georgia Officer's Club**

**21 YEARS OLD**

**Circa 1942**

My mother Ann Elizabeth was 13 years old when her brother died along side his best friend – killed in combat by a single German “88” artillery shell. The brave hero’s had sought cover as trained under their parked tank destroyer during a heavy artillery and mortar barrage while in the vital forward position in the town of Saint Lô. My uncle had come to move a platoon of destroyers “*his friends*” to a much safer locality at the time of their deaths.

They were true and valued leaders, and to the horror of their Company Commander who had sent them on their mission, they became the first casualties in the unit. The German shelling was so severe that any attempt to recover their bodies was repulsed countless times.

On the evening of the second day the Battalion Commander - Lieutenant Colonel William Vincent Martz personally lead a volunteer recovery team into Saint Lô to recover them. The team consisted of (9) nine Reconnaissance men and one (1) Headquarters soldier all from the battalion. This heroic recovery team on foot did so under a hail of accurate German steel. The team pulled through it fine and were awarded the Bronze Star Medal for their efforts.

After the lieutenant's deaths the (4) four destroyers movement never came!

*"For many days the men of "Bravo Company" were forced to live inside their destroyers as the close heavy accurate German shelling intensified upon them".*

The distinguished unit citation; or -*Presidential Unit Citation*- below addressed to Bravo Company discloses the remarkable conditions that each of these men faced daily.

## **UNIT CITATION COMPANY "B"**

The unit citation below is for: **"Extraordinary Heroism"** From 20 July through 26 July 1944, while positioned in a forward position "In" St-Lô, France.

I the author have done some minor editing to help the reader. The items edited are genuine and are noted in brackets.

### **HEADQUARTERS 654<sup>th</sup> TANK DESTROYER BATTALION Office of the Commanding Officer APO #403, U.S. Army, 28 July 1944**

Subject: Request for Unit Citation, Company "B", 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion.

To: Commanding General-(Paul W. Baade), 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, APO #35, U.S. Army.  
Thur: Commanding General  
(Theodore L. Futch), 35<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery

It is requested that Company B, 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion be awarded a unit citation in compliance with Section IV, War Department Circular # 333, 22December, 1943.

*It is believed that Company "B" distinguished itself in battle by extraordinary heroism, exhibited such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in overcoming an unusually difficult condition as to set it apart and above other units participating in the same engagement.*

The narrative concerning this engagement is as follows: On 20 July 1944, at 1400 hours (2:00 PM) Company "B" permanently put one platoon of tank destroyers in position covering a completely ungaurded road (Rue de Neurbourg) entering the town of St-Lô, France. The remainder of the company was placed in anti-tank positions close behind St. Lo in the (Carrefour de la Bascule) The Company stayed in anti-tank defense of St-Lô until about 1800 hours (6:00PM) on 26 July, 1944. The guns in St-Lô were so located that they were not able to

be moved without disclosing their position to the enemy less than 500 yards distant. This position was under accurate machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire continuously for the entire six day period. Platoons were rotated daily on this forward position. Changes were made at night. This change necessitated a dismounted advance of approximately one mile over a route that was continually under enemy mortar and artillery fire. Entire vehicle crews remained continuously and constantly on the alert during their 24 hour period on duty on the forward positions. When they were relieved it was still necessary for at least half of each gun crew to remain constantly on the alert at the anti-tank positions North of St-Lô. On 21 July, 1944, (after Lt.'s Alger and Thelen were killed) the Division Commander-(General Baade), of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division authorized the withdrawal of the guns in St-Lô to a safer locality. (Lt. Alger was in the process of moving the tanks to a safer locality when he and Lt. Thelen were tragically killed). However, the Company Commander, Company "B" Captain George A. Stevens, 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion, elected to remain in position in St-Lô after a consultation with the Battalion Commander-(Lt. Colonel Alfred Thomsen), 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Colonel Thomsen who informed him (CPT. Stevens) that the guns were of inestimable value to him since they were in a position, covering a sector of his front that it was impossible for any of his infantry units to cover without severe casualties. On 25 July, 1944, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry took over the Infantry positions in St-Lô, Lieut-Colonel Denver W. Wilson, commanding requested that the guns remain in position and gave the same reasons as the Commanding Officer, 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Company "B" remained in this hazardous and dangerous position until it was possible to relieve them by Company "C", 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion who occupied these positions for only two days. During the time that Company "B" occupied this important position in St-Lô they were never more than 500 yards away from enemy installations. There was no infantry close enough to give them necessary security in case of a German-Counter attack. They had the enemy under constant observation and gave the infantry much valuable information of his movements. They were responsible for the location of an enemy observation post ("*A Church*") *according to Veteran Don Hocking it seemed that the heavy enemy fire was coming from a church steeple (A general drawn U.S. Army map I came across made from aerial photos places a church at the right distance and position just south of this position),* which was later destroyed by Company "C" by direct fire with "HE" shell on 27 July, 1944, when the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division attack to the south commenced. It was impossible to fire at this command post prior to the attack for reasons of premature disclosure of the position. Infantry mortar fire, though accurate, failed to destroy the command post. During the occupancy of these forward gun positions in St-Lô the enemy fired mortar and artillery accurately, since it was the most prominent road junction in St-Lô, at an almost continuous rate. Buildings in the vicinity of the guns positions were demolished, and offered no protection to the crews. The position was strafed by enemy air on two occasions. One shell burst destroyed the tube of one gun. The gun was replaced under fire. Another shell burst threw fragments inside the crew compartment exploding two hand grenades on impact. One crew member was wounded as a result of this explosion. Additionally casualties during the six days of operation included two officers killed (Lt.'s Alger and Thelen), and one sergeant wounded. (Sgt. Bruce L. Foster, *these 3 soldiers are only mentioned because they perished in this vital position. In addition Colonel Martz had participated in their recovery.*) It is firmly believed that the entire company performed a hazardous mission, beyond the call of duty, exhibiting such gallantry and esprit de corps in its performance as to distinguish its self by conspicuous battle action of a character that merit the award to an individual of the Distinguished Service Cross.

I suggest citation to state:



*“For contributing to the defense of St-Lô from July 20 to July 26, 1944 with anti-tank and personnel security (Security Platoon assigned to Company), covering a portion of the city that infantry was unable to secure, and from a position in front of friendly infantry, and not more than 500 yards distant from enemy installations. Under conditions mortar and artillery fire the company manned these hazardous positions constantly, showing extraordinary Heroism, and exhibiting such Gallantry and Esprit de corps as to set them apart and above other units participating in the same operation”.*

The recommending officer daily visited this position and certifies to the authenticity of the continuous enemy fire, and to the Morale, Gallantry, and Esprit de Corps of the entire unit.

Signed W. V. MARTZ  
(William Vincent Martz)  
Typed by W. V. MARTZ  
Lieut-Colonel, 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion,  
COMMANDING

*“After all this Heroism “B” Company was never awarded the above citation, nor did the men receive any recognition from any other higher echelons.”*

I, the author believe that the above citation was never followed through because Lt. Colonel William V. Martz was captured by the German Forces at the Battle of Mortain, France on 8 August 1944. I am certain that had he remained with his unit he would have followed through on behalf of Bravo Companies Citation.

-----

#### **“ALGIE’S” DEATH NOTICE**

Weeks later a telegram arrived and my grandparents learned that they had lost their only son. They grieved deeply, just like thousands of other parents. My mother “Ann Elizabeth” was heartbroken - she had lost her only brother. The brother she had come to know, love, admire, respect and even thought of as a second father.

*The family learned that he gave his life for his Country with his best friend David Thelen while in combat together in the town of St-Lô, France, on 21 July 1944.*

#### **2nd Lt. M.P. ALGER, JR., DIES IN ACTION**

A letter from Mr. M. P. Alger, Sr., Oak Forge, New York, and Georgiana, Florida., this week gives the sad intelligence of the death of his son, 2nd Lt. M.P. Alger, Jr. on the battlefield of France on July 21st. Lt. Alger was connected with the 654th Tank Drs Bn. Lt. Alger and his mother and father considered Cocoa and Merritt Island their home since his family came from the Philippine Islands, where his father, Capt. M.P. Alger served with the Philippine Constabulary. His name appears on the Cocoa Honor Roll. Lt. Alger was born at Cebu, Philippine Island, in 1920, but graduated from Manlius School, Manlius, N.Y. He held a commission in the Reserve Corps of the Army, and entered the service in March 1942, with the 654th T.D. Bn. at Camp Gordon, Ga., until he went overseas in September 1943. Lt. Alger spent his last leave with his parents in Cocoa last September, but did not have the opportunity to complete the visit as he was called back to duty to leave for overseas duty.

**(Published in the COCOA TRIBUNE August 10, 1944, page 4)**

1LT. Maurice Plaisted Alger, Jr.  
Hometown: Troy, New York  
Brevard County, Florida Connection  
U. S. Army  
Serial: # O-438962  
Service: 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion  
Died Friday, July 21, 1944  
Buried at Normandy American Cemetery,  
Colleville-Sur-Mer, France, Plot J, Row 16, Grave 4  
“Awarded Purple Heart”

“Algie’s” Gravesite below courtesy: Andy Graves the nephew of Sergeant Frederick G. Easley  
of Alpha Company, 654<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion.



“Before my uncle entered combat in Normandy he wrote a letter home from England announcing to my grandfather that he was being promoted to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant within about three weeks from the date of the letter. Had he survived he would have pinned on his rank sometime in early August 1944. In honor of his Selfless Sacrifice my grandfather saw to it that his only son received this promotion. Below are various U.S. War Department letters to my grandfather with regard’s to “Algie’s” Sacrifice, Posthumous Purple Heart and Promotion.”

October 21, 1944.

My dear Mr. Alger:

At the request of the President, I write to inform you that the Purple Heart has been awarded posthumously to your son, Second Lieutenant Maurice P. Alger, Jr., Infantry, who sacrificed his life in defense of his country.

Little that we can do or say will console you for the death of your loved one. We profoundly appreciate the greatness of your loss, for in a very real sense the loss suffered by any of us in this battle for our country, is a loss shared by all of us. When the medal, which you will shortly receive, reaches you, I want you to know that with it goes my sincerest sympathy, and the hope that time and the victory of our cause will finally lighten the burden of your grief.

Sincerely yours,



Mr. Maurice P. Alger,  
Rural Free Delivery 1, Box 27-a,  
Cocoa, Florida.

WAR DEPARTMENT  
The Adjutant General's Office  
Washington

OFFICIAL STATEMENT of the MILITARY SERVICE and DEATH  
of

MAURICE P. ALGER JR.  
First Lieutenant, Infantry

The records show that Maurice P. Alger Jr. serial number O 438 962, was appointed second lieutenant, Infantry Reserve, 20 February 1942 and accepted the same day. He reported for extended active duty 1 April 1942 at which time he gave his home address as 195 Hoosick Street, Troy, New York. He left the United States for service overseas 8 October 1943. Second Lieutenant Alger was killed in action 21 July 1944 in Normandy, France while serving with Company B, 654th. Tank Destroyer Battalion.

He was promoted posthumously to the grade of First Lieutenant, Army of the United States effective 20 July 1944 under the provisions of Public Law 680, 77th. Congress.

This official statement furnished 24 February 1948 to Mr. Maurice P. Alger Sr., father, Cocoa, Florida

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

Edward F. Witsell  
Major General  
The Adjutant General

Countersigned

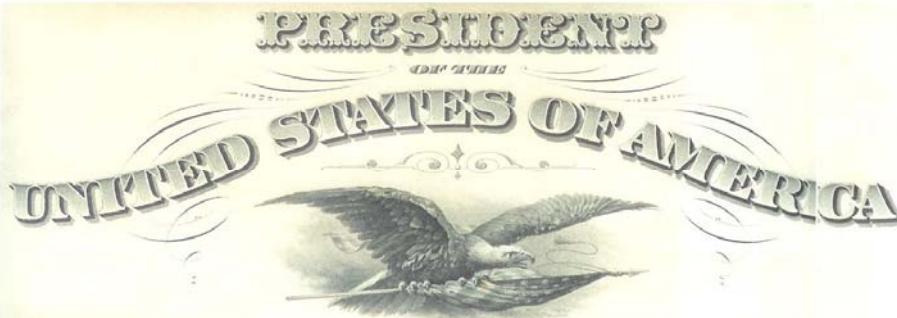
Alfred E. Bromwell

Adjutant General

A true copy of the original- made 12 March 1948

  
Maurice P. Alger Sr.





To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

Know Ye, That under the provisions of Public Law No. 680, 77th Congress, approved 28 July 1942

Second Lieutenant Maurice Plaisted Alger, Junior  
who died on 21 July 1944, was promoted posthumously to the grade of  
First Lieutenant, Army of the United States  
effective 20 July 1944.

Done at the City of Washington this twenty-second day of August  
in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and forty-six and of the Independence  
of the United States of America the one hundred and seventy-first

The Adjutant-General's Office. By the President:

Recorded 30 AUG 1946

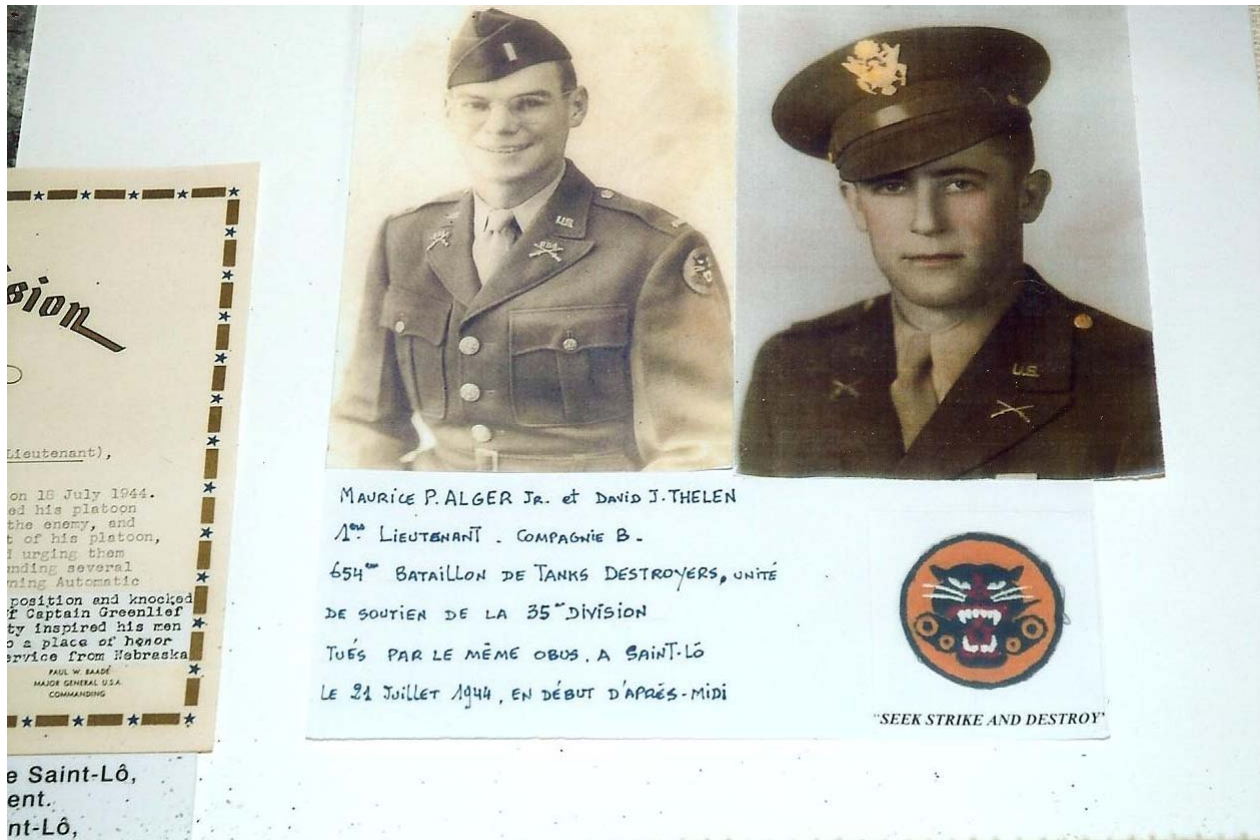
*Edward A. Hines*  
Major General  
The Adjutant General

*Reuben P. Patton*  
Secretary of War

The photograph below of the fallen lieutenants “Alger & Thelen” as currently displayed at the “Chappelle de la Madeleine” Museum at Saint Lô, France.

The photographic arrangement below of the fallen lieutenants “Alger & Thelen” was provided by Monsieur Jean Mignon the curator of the museum “Chappelle de la Madeleine” near Saint Lô, France. Photographs provided by Lieutenant Thelen and my families.

# “OUR FALLEN HEROS”



“SAINT LÔ REMEMBERS THEIR FALLEN LIBERATORS”