



FINDING AID

GENERAL MILTON DAVIS COLLECTION

1890s-1938

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National Park Service
NPS History Collection
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HISTORY

Milton F. Davis was born in Manterville, Minnesota on November 15, 1864, son of Evan Richard and Julie Ryder Davis. The family moved to a ranch in Polk County, Oregon in 1878. Milton Davis attended the University of Oregon for two years and in 1886 was appointed to West Point after attaining the highest marks in the competitive examination. He graduated with honors in 1890.

After graduation from West Point, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 4th Cavalry, stationed for seven years at Fort Walla Walla, in Washington, and in the Presidio of San Francisco. During this period, he explored, surveyed, and mapped Yosemite National Park, Sequoia National Park, and the Sierra Forest Reserve. In 1895, he made one of the earliest explorations of the Grand Canyon, getting lost in the canyon for a week without food before making his way out safely.

In 1892, he made what was believed to be his first ascent of a 12,000-foot mountain in the Sierra Nevadas and in 1894 that mountain was officially named Mount Davis, on recommendation of the late John Muir. Davis was a keen mountain climber and hunter, exploring the West from Mexico to Alaska.

In 1897, Davis was promoted to first lieutenant, serving in Cuba with the 1st Cavalry during the Spanish-American War. He fought in the battles of Las Guasimas, San Juan, and Santiago. During the yellow fever outbreak in 1898, he served for several weeks as the military governor of El Caney, a town near Santiago. He received the Silver Star citation "for gallantry in action against the Spanish forces at Santiago, Cuba, July 1, 1898."

Davis was sent to the Philippines in 1900 and was soon made captain, in command of Troop C of the 1st Cavalry in the southern Luzon campaign. He later served as adjutant general and chief of staff to Brigadier Generals S.S. Sumners and J. Franklin Bell.

Returning to the U.S. in 1903, Captain Davis served as an executive officer of the Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth. In 1907, he went to Washington as military secretary and aid to Chief of Staff General Bell. In this capacity, he occasionally traveled with President Theodore Roosevelt and then Secretary of War William Howard Taft.

A heart ailment forced him to retire from active duty in 1909. His rank upon retirement was that of major. Three days after retirement, he became professor of military science and tactics and commandant at the New York Military Academy. In February 1918, he was recalled to active duty for World War I, serving successively as colonel and executive officer of the Signal Corps, chief of training in the Air Service, and chief of staff of the Air Corps.

In July 1919, Davis led a group of men making a cross-country automobile trip from Detroit, Michigan to San Francisco and Los Angeles, California. Referred to as the "Davis Trail" by the participants, the tour passed through areas Davis was familiar with given his previous mapping experience in the West. Davis left the party in Los Angeles, CA on July 23, 1919 and the remaining individuals returned to Dayton, Ohio. The thirty-three day journey covered 5,846 miles, at an average of 177 miles per day. The vehicles used were a Packard, referred to as "Arapahoe" and a Cadillac, called "Apache." Among the party was Orville Wright, E.A. Deeds, Charles W. Deeds, G.S. Rentschler, Sidney D. Waldon, Dana H. M. Maya,

and Colonel George. The collection includes a letter to Mrs. Davis, signed by these men, thanking her for his company on the journey.

Retired as a colonel in May 1921, Davis was commissioned a brigadier general in the Air Corps Reserve in December 1921. Two years later he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his work as chief of the schools section, Division of Military Aeronautics. General Davis served as head of the New York Military Academy from 1921 until he became its president in 1938, shortly before his death.

Davis also served as vice-president and president of the Cornwall National Park and as president of several chambers of commerce groups. He was a member of the National Council, Boy Scouts of America; a fellow of the National Geographic Society; and a member of the Army and Navy Clubs, of New York and Washington, among other organizations.

Davis was married to Elizabeth Aitken Hall and together they had two daughters and a son. General Davis died on May 31, 1938 at Cornwall on Hudson, NY. He is buried at West Point.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

GENERAL MILTON DAVIS COLLECTION

1890s-1938 (bulk dates:)

<i>CATALOG NUMBER</i>	HFCA 1981
<i>VOLUME</i>	0.8 LF
<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	Original maps of Yosemite, General Grant, and Sequioia National Parks created by Davis in the 1890s during his tenure with the 4th U.S. Calvary. Correspondence includes letters from Yosemite National Park Superintendent Lawrence C. Merriam and members of the July 1919 trip to Mrs. Davis, including original signature from Orville Wright. Davis' personal copies of publications of "The Yosemite" by John Muir and "Exploration of the Sierra Nevada" by Francis P. Farquahar are present, as is his copy of "Sagebrush and Sequioia" which features his 1919 autor tour. General Davis' obituararies are included.
<i>ORGANIZATION</i>	Unarranged.
<i>PROVENANCE</i>	This collection was donated to the National Park Service in 1969.
<i>RESTRICTIONS</i>	No
<i>ASSOCIATED MATERIALS</i>	General Davis' map cases, Silver Star medal, and other objects in NPS History Collection, NPS Harpers Ferry Center;

HIERARCHY

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

CONTAINER LIST

BOX 01

Folder 01: Davis' Obituary, June 1, 1938

Folder 02: "Exploration of the Sierra Nevada" by Francis P. Farquahar, 1925

Folder 03: Letter from Lawrence C. Merriam, December 27, 1937

Folder 04: Letter to Mrs. Davis, July 23, 1919 [Orville Wright Signature]

Folder 05: Maps of Yosemite, General Grant, and Sequoia National Parks, c. 1890s

Folder 06: Prospectus, July 1919 Auto Tour

Folder 07: "The Yosemite" by John Muir, 1912

BOX 02

Folder 01: "Sagebrush and Sequoia"