

Taking the Fight to the Germans

When he arrived on campus in the late summer of 1937, Robert Moffat Anderson took his place in the ranks of the only ROTC Cadet Brigade in the country. Owing to the increasing enrollment at Clemson College, the ROTC staff had expanded the structure of the Cadet Corps, now composed of two regiments under the overall command of a cadet colonel. A key idea behind the expansion was to create more leadership positions for the cadets, giving them more experience in the exercise of responsibility. That so many members of Anderson's Class of 1941 went on to lead soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen in World War II attests to the effectiveness of the plan.



R. M. ANDERSON

“Chick” Anderson was a mechanical engineering major from Chester. He was a member of the Catawba Club and the Pershing Rifles. Following his junior year, Chick attended ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, where he qualified as a marksman on the rifle range. During his senior year at Clemson, he served as a cadet platoon leader in Company H, Second Battalion, Second Regiment.

Efforts to strengthen the United States' military were beginning to gain traction by the time Anderson and his classmates crossed the amphitheater stage to collect their diplomas in June. On the fifteenth of the following month, Anderson enlisted in the Army Air Corps' aviation cadet program. By the time he completed his flight training and was commissioned a second lieutenant, America was at war. Organizational and combat training followed and then Anderson shipped overseas in October 1942. He was assigned to the 365th Bomb Squadron, part of the 305th Bomb Group at Chelveston, England. At that point in the war, the airmen of the Eighth Air Force were the only Americans taking the fight to the Germans on a regular basis--and losses were heavy.



On Wednesday, January 13, 1943, the 305th departed Chelveston on its tenth combat mission. The group's targets were the steel and locomotive works and the marshaling yard at Lille, just across the English Channel in occupied France. Anderson was flying as copilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress, "Buckeye Blitz," piloted by First Lieutenant Conrad Hilbinger.

The formation of more than seventy bombers dropped one hundred twenty-five tons of bombs on the targets at approximately 1430 hours. About ten minutes later, as Anderson's aircraft passed near Diksmuide, Belgium, it was hit by anti-aircraft fire. All aboard were killed when the B-17 exploded in midair.

A German salvage crew worked for two days to recover the bodies. Anderson and the rest of his crew were buried on January 20 with full military honors rendered by members of a German anti-aircraft regiment. Anderson was later re-interred at the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium. After the war, his remains were returned to Chester, where he rests in Evergreen Cemetery.

Robert Moffat Anderson was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Anderson, a sister and two brothers.

In November 2003, the village of Pollinkhove dedicated a memorial to the men of "Buckeye Blitz."