

The Price of Preparation

Faced with a world war for which it was ill-prepared, the United States in early 1942 was in the early stages of a massive mobilization of manpower and materiel. By 1945, more than 12 million Americans, men and women, would be in uniform. But before they developed the skills that would enable them to win the war, they had to be trained.

The Army Air Corps, to meet the demands for air power in theaters circling the globe, established airfields all over the country. Here, young aviators were trained in the basics of flying, went on to advanced training and graduated to fighters, bombers or transports. Flight training was rigorous, designed to identify men with the aptitude for flight and the skill and good judgement needed to survive in combat. One of these young pilots was William Perry Brady of Columbia.

Brady was a member of the Class of 1941 and was a textile engineering major. Forgoing his senior year, Brady swapped his cadet uniform for Army khakis and signed up for the Air Corps. He graduated from flight training at Kelly Field, Texas in October 1940 and by the time the war broke out was probably already flying the Army's front line fighter, the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk. Perhaps best known for its employment with the "Flying Tigers" in China, the P-40 would also be deployed in North Africa and the Pacific Theater.

February 1942 found Brady, a second lieutenant, assigned to the 55th Pursuit Squadron at the Wilmington, North Carolina Army Air Base. At this point, Brady's training was most likely focused on operational matters like aerial gunnery, navigation and formation flying, skills that he would need to master before being shipped to an operational squadron to engage the enemy.

On February 18, 1942, Brady was part of a flight of P-40s practicing formation flying. The flight of three aircraft was six miles northeast of Brandon, Mississippi when at approximately 12:50 pm, Brady's aircraft and another P-40 piloted by Second Lieutenant H. H. Woodford collided in low visibility weather. Witnesses said they heard a sound like trucks crashing together and looked up to see two aircraft falling out of the clouds. Both Brady and Woodford were killed and their planes destroyed.

Brady was survived by his wife Betty, his parents Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Brady, two sisters and a brother, also a lieutenant in the Air Corps. He was buried in Columbia's Elmwood Cemetery.

The rapid pace of mobilization was accompanied by tragic accidents, but this preparation led to the eventual victory of the Allied Powers.

