

## Cox Was Army Air Force Copilot

More than 150 Clemson alumni perished during World War II as members of the Army Air Force. One of these was James Leighton Cox, Class of 1943, from Spartanburg.

Cox enrolled at Clemson as a mechanical engineering major, but his studies were cut short and he entered the Army's rapidly expanding Air Corps. After pilot training, Cox likely found himself back in South Carolina as a member of the 446<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron then training at Walterboro Army Airfield for deployment overseas. The squadron moved to DeRidder Army Air Base in Louisiana in December 1942, departing the following month to support Allied operations in North Africa.



On March 12, 1943, the 446<sup>th</sup> established its headquarters at Ain M'lila Airfield in Northeastern Algeria. The airfield was built by the Army Corps of Engineers at an altitude of 2,580 feet and included concrete runways, hardstands and taxiways for the aircraft—but tents for the air and ground crews. Its high elevation meant the days were hot and the nights cold.

On March 24, the crew of First Lieutenant Donald Stine, with Cox as copilot, was part of a formation of B-25 medium bombers ordered to attack an enemy airfield at Djebel Tebaga in Southeastern Tunisia. The B-25 was a rugged, twin-engine bomber equipped to carry 3,600 pounds of bombs. In addition, its nose-mounted twin .50 caliber machine guns made it an effective ground attack aircraft.



Over the target on that Wednesday, the aircraft took a direct flak hit to its radio compartment. Four parachutes were seen to open, but only Stine the pilot, and Sergeant John Trepple the gunner, survived to be taken prisoner by the Germans.

Cox was eventually buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Belmont, North Carolina. Like so many others who died in the war, we know little about the circumstances of James Cox's death. What we do know is that he rendered the last full measure of devotion to his country in its fight for freedom.

