

Heading for Home

William Algernon Dalton of Asheville, North Carolina enrolled in Clemson College in September 1942. An engineering major, Billy Dalton was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the Cadet Brigade and given the rank of private, just like the rest of his Class of 1946. And, just like most of the rest of his class, he left campus at the conclusion of that first year to join in the fight for freedom then being fought around the globe.

Dalton volunteered for the Army Air Force, applied for and was accepted into flight training. He emerged as a multi-engine pilot and was designated to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress, one of the main heavy bombers executing the 8th Air Force's strategic bombing campaign over Germany.

Second Lieutenant Dalton shipped overseas in the autumn of 1944 as a replacement pilot and was assigned to the 327th Bomb Squadron of the 92nd Bomb Group based at Podington, England. Dalton was the copilot on the crew led by aircraft commander Second Lieutenant Erwin Schmidt.

By March 3, 1945, the Germans had lost the war—but they had not given up. Hitler's last great offensive through the Ardennes Forest in December had been defeated and Allied Armies had closed to the Rhine River inside Germany's western border. Every day with favorable flying weather, 8th Air Force B-17s and B-24s were raining down tons of bombs on transportation and oil production facilities, crippling the German economy and its war-making capability.

On that Saturday, Lieutenant Dalton and his crew departed Podington on their 20th combat mission. Their target for the day was the railroad marshalling yards and targets of opportunity at Fulda in central Germany. The formation dropped its bombs and turned back to the west and its home bases in England. One of the B-17s from Dalton's squadron, *Winnie B* piloted by Second



Lieutenant Art Huether, had been damaged by enemy anti-aircraft fire, but was gamely sticking with the formation as it headed toward safety.



Dalton's B-17, 44-6584, in flight.

At about 1430 hours, 25,000 feet above Belgium, *Winnie B*

was flying above Dalton's bomber. According to witnesses, the damaged *Winnie B* got caught in propwash from aircraft ahead of her in the formation. Suddenly, *Winnie B* crashed into Dalton's bomber from above. Dalton's aircraft was broken into three pieces by the midair collision and

both aircraft began to spiral out of control. Cut off and alone in the tail section of Dalton's plane was Staff Sergeant Edward Bartley, Jr. Despite the centrifugal forces caused by the spiraling of the wreckage, Bartley was finally able to struggle out of the tail section about 700 feet above the ground. His parachute saved him, but his hard landing left him with a broken ankle. Bartley was the only man to escape the aircraft; the other eight men were killed when the plane crashed into the ground near Forchies La Marche, Belgium.

Second Lieutenant William Algernon Dalton was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with oak leaf cluster, and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents. He is buried in Asheville's Green Hills Cemetery.

