

Howell Fulton Davis

From Pearl Harbor to D-Day to the end of World War II, most American histories focus on the war's two major theaters, the European and Pacific. Howell Fulton Davis, a member of Clemson's Class of 1942 fought the war in the lesser-known China-Burma-India theater as a heavy bomber crewman.

Davis came to Clemson in 1938 from the Rowell community in Marion County. Assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the Cadet Brigade, Davis left Clemson after his sophomore year. In October 1940, he traveled to Fort McPherson, Georgia and enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

After completing his training as an aerial radio operator, Davis was assigned to the 436th Bomb Squadron of the 7th Bomb Group. The group was equipped with the United States' modern heavy bomber, the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. In 1941, tensions in the Pacific were increasing as the United States imposed trade embargoes on Japan over its military aggression in China and French Indochina. Army chief of staff George Marshall ordered the 7th Bomb Group to the Philippines to strengthen the island nation's defenses.

On December 7, B-17s from the group were in the process of deploying to the Philippines when they flew right into the Japanese attack on Hawaii. Rather than continue with the relocation, the 7th was diverted to Australia. In March 1942, the group transferred its B-17s to other squadrons and was equipped with the longer-range B-24 Liberator bomber. Assigned to the Tenth Air Force, the 7th began operating from bases in India, then a colony of the British Empire.



A 7th Bomb Group B-24 refuels after a mission.

Burma, which had also been a British colony at the start of the war, sat between India and China where large numbers of Japanese troops were trying to defeat the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek. In 1942, the Japanese, assisted by Burmese anti-imperialist groups, drove British and



Chinese forces out of Burma. The Japanese coveted the region's raw materials which included oil, cobalt, and large quantities of rice. To disrupt the enemy's operations and interdict supply routes from these resource-rich areas, Allied airpower targeted fuel, supply, transportation, and enemy airfields in Burma.

Tech Sergeant Davis was the radio operator on a B-24 piloted by First Lieutenant Thomas Akarman. Akarman and his crew had been assigned to their aircraft since October 1942. On November 29, they departed their base in India as part of a five-aircraft formation ordered to bomb enemy targets at Rangoon, Burma's largest city. Enemy resistance on this night mission consisted mostly of anti-aircraft fire, although one crew reported encountering Japanese night fighters. During the mission, Davis's B-24 disappeared. Search flights were carried out for almost a week, but no sign of the aircraft or its nine-man crew was ever discovered. Akarman, Davis, and the others aboard were declared

missing in action. The War Department presumed the crew dead on December 11, 1945, three months after the end of hostilities.

Howell Fulton Davis was survived by his parents. He was awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. He is memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, the Philippines and at Lloyd Cemetery in Marion County.

