

First Son

"Those Dent boys are a credit to their parents, to the county and to the state," proclaims an undated World War II era newspaper clipping. "They are also patriotic and want to do all they can to help Uncle Sam in any way they can."

Hampton Nathaniel Dent, Jr. was the oldest of the five Dent boys, the sons of Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Dent, Sr. of St. Matthews, South Carolina. "Fritz," as he was known, graduated from St. Matthews High School in 1937 and enrolled at Clemson in late summer. As a cadet, Dent was active in several facets of campus life, serving as a cheerleader, a member of the elite Pershing Rifles and the Senior Platoon. An agricultural engineering major, he was a member of ASAE, the Tri-County Club and Sigma Epsilon, which he served as secretary-treasurer. Dent attended ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama and was appointed cadet captain and executive officer of Third Battalion, Second Regiment during his senior year at Clemson.



Dent was commissioned as a second lieutenant upon graduation and was assigned to the infantry. Like many of his classmates, Dent was attracted to aviation and transferred to the Army Air Corps at Camp Croft, South Carolina. Selected for the Aviation Cadet Program, Dent received basic flight training at Bennettsville Field and advanced training at Shaw Field before moving to Moody Field in Georgia. In October 1941, he married Wanda Newell of Alabama. The following May, with the United States now at war, he earned his pilot wings. Dent's training continued at Florence Army Air Force Base in South Carolina and then at Battle Creek, Michigan.

Dent was promoted to first lieutenant before shipping overseas in September. On the way over, Dent's aircraft was forced to ditch in the Strait of Gibraltar, where he was fished out by rescue boats. Based on the timing of his movement



overseas, Dent likely flew transport missions in support of the North Africa landings in November. Fritz, according to his brother Harry, was a C-47 pilot. The C-47, the military variant of the DC-3, was a workhorse cargo aircraft which served in all theaters during the war. Dent's missions included towing gliders and carrying paratroopers into battle. He is believed to have flown more than 50 missions.

In October 1943, Dent's troop carrier unit was likely supporting Allied operations in Italy, perhaps flying from airfields in Sicily. On the 24th, Dent was reported killed in a plane crash, although he is not listed as pilot on the three Missing Air Crew Reports or Aircraft Accident Reports for troop carrier aircraft lost that day. Fritz Dent was the first young man from St. Matthews to be killed in the war, but sadly would not be the last. His younger brother Richard was killed in action against the Germans in December 1944.

Fritz Dent was survived by his wife, Wanda and their daughter Doris Joy, as well as his parents and four brothers. He was awarded the Air Medal and was buried at Palermo in Sicily. He was reinterred at St. Matthews' West End Cemetery in November 1948. "Those Dent boys" had done all they could to help Uncle Sam.

