

## Vanished

At one point during World War II, the 706<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron based at Flixton near the village of Bungay in Suffolk, England, completed sixty-two consecutive missions without a loss—but in wartime, the law of averages eventually evens out.

John Byron Dickson was a civil engineering major from Brevard, North Carolina and a member of Clemson's Class of 1944. It was a class, like those that immediately followed, that would have its time on campus interrupted by the call to military service. Dickson, a cadet private assigned to Company F, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, applied for and was accepted into the Army Air Force's flight training program.

As Dickson progressed through the demanding and fast-paced training program, he was designated as a multi-engine pilot and prepared to fly heavy bombers. He most likely shipped overseas in the autumn of 1944 as a replacement pilot and was assigned to the 706<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron of the 446<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The group flew B-24 heavy bombers and mainly attacked strategic targets like U-boat installations, ports, chemical plants, ball bearing factories, aircraft production plants, oil refineries, and transportation facilities.

On December 2, 1944, Second Lieutenant Dickson and his crew were alerted for their fifth mission, an attack on the railroad marshaling yard at Bingen, Germany, about forty miles west of Frankfurt. At this stage of the war, Allied leaders were attempting to limit the mobility of German forces and to interrupt their logistics operations.



*A 706<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron B-24 releases its bombs.*



Railroad facilities were frequently targeted by the increasing numbers of heavy bombers available to the Allies.

On this cold Saturday morning, Dickson was the pilot of a B-24 aptly nicknamed *Tiger* in a formation led by squadron commander and Clemson alumnus Lieutenant Colonel Milton Willis '40. The weather was overcast with layers of clouds at

varying altitudes. Some of the lower squadrons in the large formation were forced to fly through layers of clouds. No enemy fighters were observed and anti-aircraft fire was also absent as those on the ground could see the

attacking bombers no better than the bombers could see the ground. Aided by radar guidance, the B-24s dropped their bombs through the clouds which prevented the assessment of results.

After leaving the target, Dickson's *Tiger* began to fall behind the formation, as did the B-24 piloted by Second Lieutenant John Ilstad. Both aircraft disappeared into the clouds. Neither was seen again. Airmen returning from the mission speculated that once obscured in the low visibility of the clouds, the two big bombers collided, sending them on a final plummet to the ground. None of the remains of the crewmen of the two aircraft were recovered.

Second Lieutenant John Bryson Dickson was awarded the Purple Heart. He is memorialized at the American Military Cemetery in Cambridge, England and at Blue Ridge Gardens in Brevard.

