

Dover Helped Prepare the Way for the Invasion

The spring of 1944 was a season of anticipation and intricate preparation. In Italy, the Anglo-American armies were pushing German forces north toward Rome. On the Eastern Front, the Soviets were preparing to launch a massive summer offensive to smash the Germans' Army Group Center. In the air, General Eisenhower had ordered the strategic bombing offensive to target railroads, bridges and highways in order to hamper the Germans' ability to reinforce its coastal defenses once the long-anticipated invasion of Europe began. One of the young men—they were all young men—responsible for putting the bombs on the target was Clifton Massey Dover from Rock Hill.

Dover, was born in Rock Hill in 1922 and attended Rock Hill High School. He entered Clemson in 1940, just as the Germans were consolidating their hold on Europe. A mechanical engineering major, Dover was called to military service in 1943, before he could conclude his Clemson studies.



After completing basic training, Dover entered the Aviation Cadet Program, training as a bombardier at Victorville, California. Between completion of this training and his overseas deployment, he married Dorothy Ferguson of Rock Hill. Eventually, 2nd Lieutenant Dover was assigned as a replacement officer to the 96th Bomb Group operating from Snetterton Heath airfield in East Anglia, England. Sometime in early 1944, Dover was assigned as the bombardier to the crew of Lieutenant Milton Fancher in the 337th Bomb Squadron. As a member of Fancher's crew, Dover is believed to have completed six combat missions. Then came May 8.

The 8th Air Force, the United States' Army's strategic bomber force operating out of England, had steadily been increasing in size. American industry was turning out bombers (and tanks and ships) at rates which before the war would have been unimaginable. Great formations of American bombers were venturing over Germany on nearly every day on which the weather permitted a reasonable chance of hitting targets.



On May 8, the 8th Air Force dispatched more than 500 B-17 and B-24 bombers to attack targets in central Germany. Dover's 96th Bomb Group launched 30 aircraft against industrial targets in Brunswick, east of Hannover. As the formation neared its target, at about 0955, it was attacked by 30 to 50 German fighters. In this first pass, five B-17s were shot down. There was more to

come. Ten minutes later, the fighters made a second equally deadly attack. Five more bombers began to fall out of the morning sky. The 96th's mission had turned into a disaster; ten B-17s along with 109 crew men were gone—a staggering 33% loss. According to observers, the sky was filled with parachutes, and it was not possible to accurately determine from which aircraft the chutes came.

Dover's aircraft was one of the ten. It crashed near the German town of Hiddestorf. Although three members of the crew were believed to have survived the downing of the aircraft, neither Dover nor pilot Fancher were among them. They were initially buried in the Cemetery for Jews in the village of Hoya. Later, Dover was removed to the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium.

Clifton Massey Dover was awarded the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents, his wife Dorothy, their infant daughter Delores, and his brother James then serving in the Navy.

Dover's sacrifice helped prepare the way for the great invasion which came less than a month later and led to the liberation of Western Europe. Dover is one of more than 150 Clemson men who lost their lives in the Army Air Force in World War II.

