

January Sacrifices

It's unlikely that Herbert Gregg Easterling would have graduated in 1944 even if he had stayed in school. Easterling, of Florence, arrived on campus as an English major in 1940, a member of the Class of '44. The war eclipsed the Clemson careers of these young men as they were called to duty at the end of the 1942-43 academic year. But by then, Easterling had already been overseas for six months.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Easterling, Herbert left Clemson in 1941. He married Frances Smith of Florence and was soon in flight school, learning to fly multi-engine bombers for the Army Air Corps. By December 1942, he was overseas and flying the famous B-17 Flying Fortress as a member of the 97th Bomb Group.



Easterling joined the group in Algeria where its mission was to support the Allies' North Africa campaign by striking enemy airfields, harbor facilities and marshalling yards around the Mediterranean Sea. The 97th supported the July 1943 invasion of Sicily and the invasion of Italy that September.

The 97th established its headquarters at Cerignola, Italy in December 1943 in order to fly long-range missions against targets in Northern Italy, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece. It was on a mission to the shipping docks at Piraeus, the Aegean Sea port near Athens, Greece, that Easterling and his crew were killed.



On January 11, 1944, First Lieutenant Easterling's aircraft was lost when it entered turbulent air. The official accident report listed "prop wash" as the cause of the accident. Easterling and his crew were reported as missing. Their remains were later found, but it was

impossible to separately identify the remains and so Easterling's crew was buried together in an American Military Cemetery near Rome.

Sadly, the heartbreak of the war was not over for the Easterling family. Twelve months later, in January 1945, the family received notice that another son, Sergeant Ben Easterling, a Wofford College alumnus, had been killed in action in France.

Herbert and Ben were remembered in a joint memorial service in August 1949 when Ben's remains were returned to Florence. The brothers were survived by their parents, three sisters and a brother.