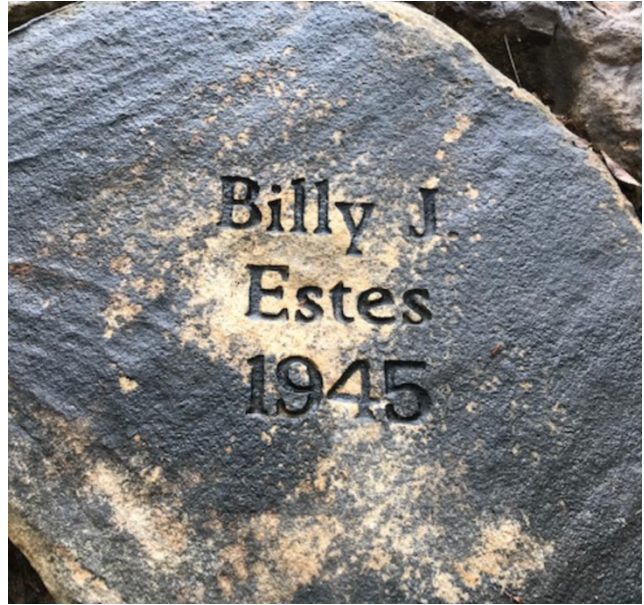


## Planning for More Pilots

Billy James Estes of Winnsboro was a member of Clemson's Class of 1945. He majored in engineering and was assigned to Company L, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. He left Clemson after his freshman year to prepare himself—and others—for the frightful challenges of World War II.

Estes must have recognized the developing importance of air power. The Germans had employed revolutionary close air support tactics in their Blitzkrieg across France, then turned the Luftwaffe loose to bomb London and other English cities. The Japanese had plunged America into war with their devastating aerial attack at Pearl Harbor. These attacks accelerated the already dizzying expansion of US Army Air Force—and somebody would need to train all of those new pilots. Estes reckoned he might fill that role.



Unlike most of the other belligerents in the war, the United States had no separate air force. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Army supported their own internal air arms. In the late 1930s, the Roosevelt Administration recognized the need to increase the number of trained pilots available for military service. In 1937, only 184 men graduated from advanced pilot training. Faced with German and Japanese aggression in Europe and the Far East, plans were made to increase the number of graduates to 4,500 per year. Yet the Air Corps, the Army Air Force's predecessor, lacked the facilities to produce such high numbers of pilots. As a result, the Air Corps contracted with civilian flying schools to train military pilots. After France fell to Germany in the summer of 1940, the Air Corps again increased its target, this time to 7,000 pilots annually. By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Air Corps had engaged 45 flying schools all across the country.

In October 1943, Estes was training at the Southern Aviation school in Camden. He was taking a "refresher course" and building up his flight hours in order to qualify as an instructor pilot. On Wednesday, November 3, Estes, along with Bob Anderson a student at the school, were on a routine training flight when their aircraft crashed near Winnsboro's Mount Zion Institute. Both men suffered from multiple fractures and head injuries and were rushed to the post hospital at Fort Jackson. Anderson was reported to be improving, but Estes died from his injuries two days after the crash.

Accidents would plague the Army Air Force pilot training program throughout the war. Nevertheless, the system Estes was working to be a part of would produce not 4,500 pilots per year or even 7,000. During World War II, 193,000 new pilots would enter the Army Air Force, an average of more than 48,000 per year.

Estes was survived by his wife, his parents, a sister, and three brothers, one of whom was serving overseas with the Army.

