

## Sunday Mission

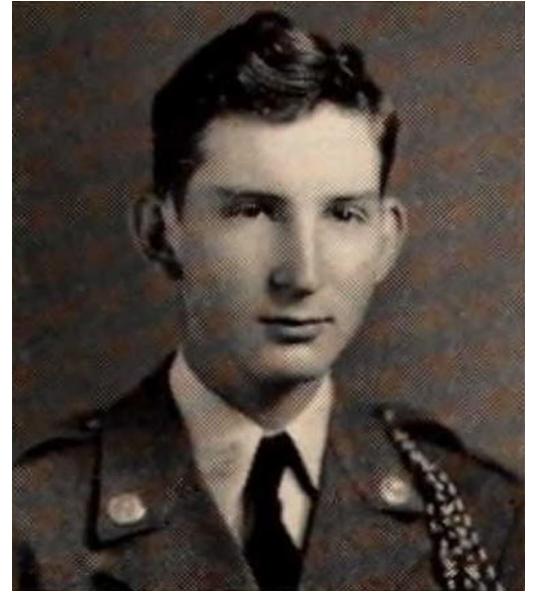
When the war finally came to the United States, Benny Folsom didn't wait for a call from Uncle Sam. An engineering major from Sumter, Folsom left Clemson after his junior year and volunteered for the Army Air Force.

John Benjamin Folsom, Jr. was a member of Clemson's Class of 1943. During his days on campus, Folsom marched with the Pershing Rifles and was a member of the Sumter County Club. As a sophomore, Folsom was appointed a corporal in Company I, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Cadet Brigade.

After leaving Clemson, Folsom was accepted into the Army Air Force's demanding flight training program. He progressed through the primary, basic, advanced, and transition training and was designated as a bomber pilot.

Folsom was assigned to the 751<sup>st</sup> bomb Squadron of the 457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group at Ephrata Army Airfield in Washington state. The group traveled to Wendover, Utah in late 1943 for unit training and in December was alerted for overseas movement. Its final inspections were conducted at Grand Island, Nebraska in mid-January 1944. The 457<sup>th</sup>'s B-17 bombers departed for Great Britain and arrived between January 21 and February 1. The group's home field was at Glatton, about 75 miles north of London. The 457<sup>th</sup> spent the month of February training for combat with both ground school instruction and practice missions.

Folsom's group entered combat for the first time during "Big Week," the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force's concerted effort to knock out German production facilities and lure the Luftwaffe into the skies where it could be dealt a death blow. As spring approached, and with it the anticipated invasion of France, the 457<sup>th</sup> bombed transportation targets to make it more difficult for the Germans to move troops and supplies to possible invasion sites. On D-Day, the 457<sup>th</sup> attacked coastal defenses along the Cherbourg Peninsula. For the remainder of June, it helped interdict targets behind the invasion beaches.



Home James, *Folsom's B-17.*

In July, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force resumed the bombardment of strategic targets, focusing on transportation and oil production facilities. On Sunday, August 6, Folsom and his crew were alerted for a mission to bomb a jet engine factory at Genshagen, Germany just south of Berlin. Flying in their B-17, *Home James*, Folsom's crew was part of a 74-bomber formation. As it approached the target at about 1245 hours, *Home James* was hit in the left wing by German anti-aircraft fire. The wing quickly caught fire and the aircraft fell out of formation. Six parachutes were seen leaving the aircraft and a seventh snagged on the airplane's wing, dooming its occupant. According to his fellow pilot, Vincent Frost, Folsom was reluctant to abandon the aircraft. He was last seen attempting to put on his parachute—but he never escaped the bomber and was killed when it crashed.

Out of the nearly 1,200 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force bombers launched that day, 24 were lost. Most of their aircrews were listed as missing in action. The German government notified the International Red Cross that Folsom had, in fact, been killed.

Second Lieutenant Folsom was flying his 21<sup>st</sup> combat mission. He was awarded the Air Medal with oak leaf clusters and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents. After the war, his remains were returned to the United States and reinterred in the Sumter Cemetery.

