

Alaskan Flyer

The Army airfield on Adak, in Alaska's Aleutian Islands, was plagued by the severe weather of the North Pacific Ocean. In addition to high winds and bitter cold, Adak was subject to heavy fog. US Army Air Forces at Adak were under the command of the 11th Air Force, which included the 15th Tow Target Squadron and pilot First Lieutenant Jason Sanford Greer.

Jason Greer arrived on the Clemson campus in 1937. An industrial education major from Carlisle in Union County, Greer was assigned to F Company, 2nd Battalion of the Cadet Regiment. A member of the Class of 1941, Greer remained at Clemson for only his freshman year.

On January 20, 1942, Greer enlisted at Camp Gordon, Georgia. He was accepted into the aviation cadet program and began the arduous process of becoming an Army Air Force pilot. After a preflight ten-week boot camp, Greer made the cut for continuing his flight training at primary school. He then advanced to basic, advanced, and transition training. Transition training lasted about two months and prepared the pilot for the type of operational flying to which he would be assigned.

While Greer was in the midst of flight training, the Japanese were in the midst of the operation that would become the turning point of the war in the Pacific. The Japanese attack on Midway Island would be recorded by history as a crushing defeat. Little remembered is the northern portion of the operation which landed Japanese troops on American soil—the only invasion of the United States during the war. Six thousand Japanese soldiers landed at the western end of the Aleutian Islands at Attu and Kiska on June 6, 1942. The United States responded by mounting aerial attacks on the two islands. To facilitate the attacks, made more difficult by Alaska's harsh weather and frequent Pacific fogs, the Army Air Force in September constructed a new airfield on Adak, 250 miles east of Kiska.

Jason Greer, having completed his flight training, shipped to the west, where he joined the 15th Tow Target Squadron in Alaska. In May of 1943, US forces landed on Attu and destroyed the

Japanese garrison there. In July, the Japanese Navy, under the cover of fog, succeeded in evacuating the Japanese forces from Kiska. Unaware that the Japanese were gone, American and Canadian troops landed on Kiska on August 15, securing the island and ending the Aleutian campaign. But air operations



continued from Adak, as Army aircraft remained vigilant to the threat from the Imperial Japanese Navy and patrolled out into the waters of the North Pacific.

On September 21, 1943, First Lieutenant Greer was ordered to ferry a Lockheed B-34 from Adak to Shemya Island, about 400 miles to the west. The B-34 was a twin-engine, medium bomber which had proved to slow and cumbersome in combat and had been relegated to scouting and patrol duties. The flight departed Adak's main runway at 1707 hours. Immediately after takeoff, the left engine began to miss and caught fire. Greer made a 180 degree turn and contacted the tower for emergency clearance to land. The tower granted the clearance, but Greer radioed that he could not make it back to the field. With the left engine dead and the wing engulfed in flame, Greer attempted to set the wounded aircraft down on Adak's rugged terrain rather than risking a landing in the ocean. The aircraft crashed and burned, killing Greer and his five crewmates. The cause of the accident was later determined to be the failure of the left engine's carburetor.

First Lieutenant Jason Sanford Greer was survived by his wife, his mother, three sisters and two brother, one of whom was serving in the Army at Fort Meade, Maryland. He is buried at Grace United Methodist Church in Union.

