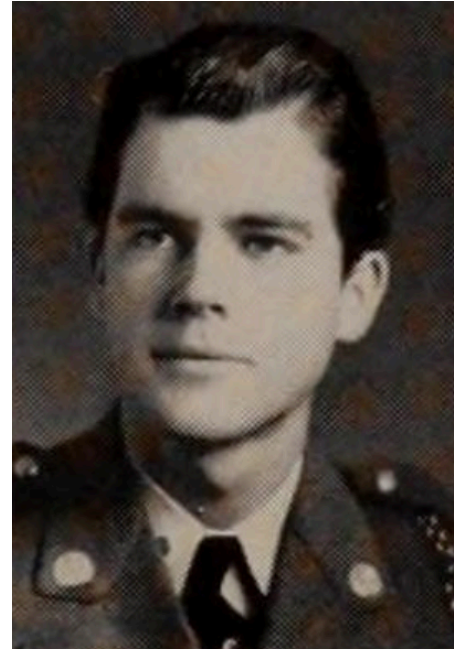


## Hero in Two Countries

Jack Dupre Hodge was the “handsomest boy” in his high school class in the small Clarendon County town of Alcolu. He came to Clemson College in 1940. Although Jack’s uncle was a professor in the School of Chemistry, the younger Hodge chose to study electrical engineering.

Hodge was assigned to Company F, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. His classmate Albert Henry recalled that when the United States was plunged into war halfway through their sophomore year, Jack, mature and serious-minded, left Clemson and joined the Army Air Force.

After qualifying for the aviation cadet program, Hodge completed flight training, earning his wings and a commission as a second lieutenant. Designated as a single engine pilot, Hodge was selected to fly America’s new, game-changing fighter, the P-51 Mustang. The Mustang, with its speed, maneuverability, and extended range, was destined to help clear the German Luftwaffe from the skies above occupied Europe.



In late 1944, Hodge deployed to England where he was assigned to the 83<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron of the 78<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group based at Duxford, about fifty miles north of London. The 83<sup>rd</sup> flew escort missions to protect American heavy bombers as they delivered their lethal payloads on German industrial, petroleum, and transportation targets.

Hodge was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts on one such mission. When a large number of enemy aircraft were sighted closing on the bomber formation, Hodge “flying as the leader’s wingman, destroyed two enemy aircraft... permitting the leader to also destroy two aircraft.”

On March 11, 1945, Hodge and his squadron, flying with the call sign Cargo, were assigned to escort American bombers in an attack on targets in the vicinity of Hamburg. At approximately 1330 hours, Hodge, flying in the Cargo Black 3 position, reported a coolant leak from his engine. His flight leader ordered him to turn back toward England and dispatched Lieutenant Bill Davis as Hodge’s escort.



Over Denmark’s Jutland Peninsula, the two pilots steered their fighters to a heading of 220 degrees. As they neared the North Sea coast, Hodge reported that his aircraft could not make it back to its base. Instead, he turned to a course of 90 degrees to attempt to reach neutral Sweden. By this time, Davis recalled, the

engine of Hodge's craft was running very roughly and trailing a great deal of smoke. Hodge was losing altitude and after about ten minutes radioed that he would have to bail out. Hodge turned back toward the west and then descended into the clouds below. Davis did not see him again.

As he lost altitude in the clouds, Hodge cranked back the canopy of his fighter and struggled against the slipstream to climb out. He pulled the rip cord of his parachute, but it became entangled on the tail of the aircraft. Unable to free his chute, Hodge was dragged through the air as the terrain loomed ever closer.

According to observers on the ground, Hodge struck a hedgerow just before his plane crashed near the tiny village of Øster Starup. The local citizens, who had lived under German occupation for nearly five years, immediately came to the aid of the American flyer. A doctor was called, but Hodge lived for only twenty minutes before succumbing to his injuries. Hodge's body was taken to a local church and the German authorities were notified. With the consent of the Germans, Hodge was given a Christian funeral and buried in the churchyard two days later. Vicar Gambourg-Andersen told the overflow crowd "we know only his name, but we know that he comes from a friendly nation. May this young man's death bear fruit." Less than two months later, Germany surrendered.

After the war, the families of American service members buried overseas were given the option of having their loved one's remains returned to the United States. Hodge's mother decided her son's body should remain in Øster Starup. She donated a baptismal font to the church as an expression of gratitude for the congregation's compassion toward her son in the final moments of his life. On March 11, 2005, sixty years after his untimely death, members of Lieutenant Hodge's family, representatives from the American Embassy, the Danish Home Guard, and the Øster Starup Parish Vestry joined local citizens for a memorial service at Hodge's grave.

A hero in two countries, First Lieutenant Jack Dupre Hodge was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters, and the Purple Heart.

