

Inabinet Flew with the Eagle Squadron in Defense of Freedom

Most Americans have never heard of the Clayton Knight Committee. Knight was a Greenwich Village artist who had served as a pilot in World War I. Along with his Great War comrade, Canadian ace Billy Bishop, Knight set up a clandestine organization known as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The BCATP sought to circumvent American neutrality laws and recruit pilots from America's growing aviation industry to join the Royal Air Force and help Great Britain turn back Hitler's Luftwaffe in the skies over England. William Burness Inabinet, Clemson College Class of '41, was among the Knight Committee's recruits.

Inabinet, "Boogs" as he was known to his family and friends, grew up in the low country community of Bishopville where he was a member of Bethlehem Methodist Church. Considered an excellent high school athlete, Boogs competed in football, swimming and tennis. He enrolled at Clemson in 1937 and completed two years of studies before enlisting in the Army Air Corps. Perhaps Boogs was one of the growing number of young Americans who believed the widening conflict in Europe would eventually ensnare the United States. And perhaps he was anxious to get into the action.

In the spring of 1941, Inabinet volunteered for service with the Royal Air Force through the Knight Committee's office at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. In June, Inabinet was assigned for flight training to the British Aviation Refresher Course in Glendale, California. From there, he probably traveled across the border to Ottawa, Canada to await orders for overseas posting.

Eventually, the 22-year-old Inabinet joined 71 Squadron, the first of three RAF Eagle squadrons composed of American volunteers. By the time of his arrival, the squadron had been equipped with the legendary Supermarine Spitfire fighters which had helped win the Battle of Britain.

After combat orientation training at Martlesham Heath airfield in Surrey, Inabinet began flying operational missions. On the afternoon of Friday, January 9, 1942, he was assigned a convoy patrol mission. Following a dogfight with German raiders, Inabinet's Spitfire crashed into the North Sea. On February 3, Inabinet's craft washed ashore and his body was recovered.

Inabinet was the first member of the Class of '41 killed in World War II. Members of this class comprise more than 11 percent of the Heroes on Clemson University's Scroll of Honor, making it the Scroll's most heavily represented class.

To Inabinet's parents, King George VI sent his condolences, writing:



The Queen and I offer you our heartfelt sympathy in your great sorrow. We pray that the Empire's gratitude for a life so nobly given in its service may bring you some measure of consolation.

Inabinet was buried with full military honors at Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey on February 11, 1942.

More than 130,000 Americans joined the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the war. Of these, almost 1,000 were killed. William Burness Inabinet was one of these Heroes.

