

The Training Continued

Eddie Leroy Keeffe, like so many other young men, came of age at a moment of crisis for his country and the world. Born in 1925, Keeffe's childhood was marked by the Great Depression, his adolescence by the growing tensions in Europe and the Far East. Eddie, the only son of O. L. and Alice Keeffe of Orangeburg, graduated from Orangeburg High School in 1943. He entered Clemson College that fall as an architecture major, but was destined to remain on the small campus for only one term.

With war raging around the world, America's military required a constant stream of young men to fill the needs of the Army, Navy, Marines, Army Air Force and Merchant Marine. Keeffe entered military service on May 22, 1944. Though he couldn't have known it at the time, the Allies in Europe were about to liberate Rome and invade France. In the Pacific, the Japanese on New Guinea were defeated and the island was declared secure.

Keeffe joined the Army Air Forces and was assigned to the crew of a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber. The Liberators, along with the B-17s, were delivering devastating payloads of bombs on Axis targets from their bases in England and Italy. They were also being employed against Japanese targets in the vast Pacific Theater.

Of course, these complex aircraft were machines composed of many different systems all working together to enable the crew to complete its mission. The B-24 boasted four huge 1200-horsepower Pratt and Whitney turbo-supercharged radial engines, ten .50 caliber Browning machine guns and an 8,000 pound bomb load. Mastering the aircraft and the challenges of flying hundreds of miles through often hazardous skies required rigorous training.



Even after the May 1945 surrender of the Nazi regime, training for war continued as the armed forces took in new men as replacements and began the laborious process of transferring existing fighting units from the European Theater in preparation for the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands.

Corporal Eddie Keeffe and his B-24J crew were conducting flight training on July 13, 1945 from their home base at Tyndall Field in the hot, humid Florida panhandle. According to accident reports, poor weather developed and Keeffe's aircraft, piloted by Lieutenant Paul Snyder, entered a spin and crashed approximately twelve miles northwest of Southport, Florida. The crew was killed.

Just three days later, in the arid desert of New Mexico, the successful test of a fearsome new weapon sounded the death knell for Japan and heralded an end to the war. The Trinity test of the atomic bomb led to the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japanese cities and forced the

unconditional surrender of Japan. Only then did the military's insatiable demand for young men like Eddie Keeffe relent.

Corporal Eddie Leroy Keeffe was survived by his parents and his maternal grandparents.

