

## Target Towing

The Army Air Force had a training problem. Its gunners were often unable to fire accurately at enemy aircraft at the high altitudes at which Air Force bombers flew their missions. Ballistics, the flight characteristics of projectiles like bullets, were much different at higher altitudes, but the Army Air Force had no airplanes that could tow a target above 10,000 feet. It became obvious that a high-altitude, target-towing aircraft was required. David Gaillard Lenoir, Jr., Clemson College Class of 1944, would become the pilot of one such aircraft.



David Lenoir was a mechanical engineering major from Sumter. He was assigned to Company F, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment in the Cadet Brigade and attended Clemson from 1940 to 1942. During his sophomore year, following the December attack at Pearl Harbor, Lenoir left school to enlist in the Army Air Force aviation cadet program.

After completing his basic training at Camp Croft near Spartanburg, Lenoir entered flight training. He earned his pilot's wings at Ellington Field, Texas in May 1943. Assigned as a bomber pilot, Second Lieutenant Lenoir was trained to fly the twin-engine B-26 Martin Marauder medium bomber.

Air gunners in combat units were not achieving the level of success Army Air Force leaders had hoped for. The problem was that the gunners were trained at lower altitudes where thicker air increased the resistance on the bullets fired from their machine guns. In combat at higher altitudes, the thinner air changed the bullets' trajectories. The B-26, then at high levels of production, was identified as the aircraft that could help close this training gap.



Two hundred eight B-26s were modified as tugs, aircraft to tow aerial gunnery targets aloft. These aircraft, now designated AT-23s, had their armor and armaments, including their dorsal turrets, removed. A windlass was added to which the target sleeve itself could be attached and trailed behind the towing airplane.

Second Lieutenant Lenoir was the pilot of a 21<sup>st</sup> Tow Target Squadron AT-23 dispatched on an administrative flight from Casper, Wyoming on January 29, 1944. The preflight briefing included the possibility of bad weather en route to Pierre, South Dakota. Lenoir's AT-23 departed Casper at 1204 hours Mountain War Time. After encountering the predicted weather over South Dakota, Lenoir decided to turn back toward Casper. Before he could reach safety, the aircraft's wings iced over, degrading the lift needed to keep the airplane flying and adding such excess weight to the wing as to cause structural failure. At approximately 1900 hours, Lenoir's aircraft crashed near Conata, South Dakota. Lenoir and his two crewmembers were killed.

Second Lieutenant David Gaillard Lenoir, Jr. was buried at the Episcopal Church of Ascension in Sumter County. He was survived by his parents and his brother, who was then serving as a Marine at Parris Island.

