

Crowded Skies

William Dewees Livingston, Jr. was just 19-years-old when he volunteered for the Navy's air service. Despite his young age, Livingston was in the midst of his junior year at Clemson. A textile chemistry major, Livingston had grown up in Charleston before his family moved to Columbia his senior year in high school. At Clemson, he was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. He was also a member of the Newman Club, the organization of Catholic cadets.



Livingston entered pre-flight school at Athens, Georgia in October 1942. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and received his pilot's wings in August of 1943 at Pensacola, Florida. Livingston was designated a fighter pilot and was stationed at Jacksonville before being transferred to San Diego, California in November.

There was a great aviation concentration in southern California during the war years. More than a dozen companies, like Douglas, Lockheed, Northrop, and Hughes, had large manufacturing facilities there. Likewise, California was home to well over a hundred military and naval



airfields. Some of these were testing facilities and many were training fields where young men learned the science and skill of flying in increasingly complex aircraft.

On October 29, 1944, Lieutenant Livingston was the pilot of a Marine Corps fighter, a Vought F4U Corsair. The Corsair was coming into operational service with both the Navy and the Marines in the latter portion of 1944. It was considered the most

capable carrier-based fighter-bomber of World War II and would achieve a kill ration of 11:1 against the Japanese in the Pacific theater.

Livingston's flight took place in the crowded skies over southern California. In those days before sophisticated air traffic control policed busy airspace, military flyers were taught to "see and avoid" other aircraft. In addition to monitoring engine and navigation instruments, pilots were trained to scan for other traffic. Nonetheless, accidents, including mid-air collisions were all too frequent. The Corsair was a low wing fighter. Downward visibility was limited. Aircraft at lower altitudes were often lost in the Corsair's blind spot. That may be what happened to

Livingston. His aircraft collided with an Army Air Force P-38 Lightning fighter near Santa Ana. The P-38 pilot was able to parachute to safety, but Livingston was killed when his fighter crashed.



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