

Two-War Navy Pilot

King Wilcox Longtin was a bit unusual. He entered Clemson not from one of the many farming communities scattered across South Carolina, but from the New York City suburb of Teaneck, New Jersey. And, although he was enrolled at Clemson for two years, 1941-2 and 1942-3, he never sat for a Taps photograph.

Longtin was a private in Charlie Company, First Battalion, First Regiment of the Cadet Brigade and was a member of the Newman Club, which according to Taps, the college annual, consisted "of all the Catholic boys on the campus."



Longtin apparently left Clemson in 1943 to answer his country's call to military service. He became a Navy pilot during World War II, but details of his service are unknown.

Following the June 1950 invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces, the Navy began activating reserve units to send to the Pacific as part of the United Nations force. Longtin, by now married to his wife Betty and living in Seattle, Washington, was called back to active duty as a pilot in Patrol Squadron 892.

Patrol Squadron 892 of the Naval Air Reserve was activated on July 20, 1950, less than a month after the war broke out. It reported to Naval Air Station North Island at San Diego, California. By December, the squadron and its PBM-5 patrol bombers had repositioned to Iwakuni, Japan less than 200 miles from Pusan on the southeastern tip of the Korean Peninsula. From there, it flew the Korean War's first mission by a reserve squadron on December 18.



In the Korean area of operations, Navy patrol squadrons participated in the blockade of North Korea, keeping merchant shipping and fishing fleets under surveillance and deterring hostile submarine activity. In addition, patrol aircraft hunted and destroyed mines, dropped flares for air strikes, and conducted weather reconnaissance and search-and-rescue operations.

At 2035 hours on Saturday, April 21, 1951, PBM-5 Mariner patrol bomber 84663 took off from Iwakuni's Naval Air Station on a night mission. Lieutenant Longtin was the copilot. Thirty minutes into the mission, the starboard engine, a 2100 horsepower Pratt and Whitney, began to malfunction. After repeated back fires and cut outs, the decision was made to return to Iwakuni's seadrome. According to the

accident report, Lieutenant Longtin decided to dump the aircraft's excess fuel. Then, during the landing sequence, as the aircraft was about 75 feet above the water, the pilot lost control. The aircraft stalled, its wings losing lift, and cartwheeled into the water.

Immediately, a second PBM float plane taxied to the crash site along with small boats, but within one minute, the wrecked aircraft sank beneath the surface of the water. Seven crew members were rescued, but six were killed. The bodies of five of the killed crewmen were recovered, but despite the quick response to the crash, diving and grappling operations were unable to recover Lieutenant Longtin's remains.

Lieutenant King Wilcox Longtin was awarded the Combat Action Ribbon, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal.

He was survived by his wife Betty and is memorialized at Calvary Cemetery in Seattle and at the Cadet Life Garden in the South Carolina Botanical Garden in Clemson.



"They died for us, that we would never know the loss of freedom; that the values they hold dear would live on. We, their classmates, thank them for their sacrifice; celebrate their lives, and pledge to keep the faith that their deaths shall not have been in vain."