

Meadors Was Among the First Clemson Men to Fall Against the Japanese

We don't really know what happened to Joe Meadors' plane; only that it crashed right after taking off from Australia's Garbutt Field.

Joe Hutchinson Meadors, Jr. was a graduate of Dillon High School and a member of Clemson's Class of 1937. He graduated with a degree in Science and was already in the service by the time the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Joe had been serving as an instructor in the Army Air Corps. In November of 1941, he had entered the Bombardment Training School at Barksdale Field, Alabama and was later transferred to Love Field in Dallas, Texas for primary training.



As the Army scrambled to build up and deploy units to fight the expansionist Japanese in the Pacific, Joe was assigned to the 33rd Bombardment Squadron of the Air Corps' 22nd Bomb Group. The squadron was first shipped to California where it flew anti-submarine patrols. Then, in February of 1942, it was assigned to the new Fifth Air Force based in the Philippines. By the time the squadron arrived in the besieged islands, the situation was already desperate. Instead of sacrificing the squadron, commanders evacuated it to Australia.

The 22nd Bomb Group was the first complete Air Group of men and aircraft to reach Australia. It was also the only Group totally equipped with the newer B-26 Martin Marauders. The Group settled at Townsville, on the northeast coast of Australia. From there, it flew combat missions against Japanese targets on New Guinea and New Britain.



On Tuesday April 21, 1942, the crew of 1LT Louis Almeida was scheduled for an early morning departure. Two days earlier, this crew had flown its first combat mission, an attack on the Japanese naval base at Rabaul. On this morning's flight, Almeida's crew included 27-year-old bombardier Joe Meadors.

At about 0400 on that Tuesday morning, Garbutt Airfield was shocked by a "thunderous" blast. Something had caused Meadors' aircraft to crash not too distant from the end of runway 19. Witnesses hypothesized that the pilot, 1LT Almeida, might have retracted the aircraft's flaps rather than its landing gear, causing the B-26 to lose lift at a crucial moment of the flight and crash. Moments after the aircraft's impact, its bomb load exploded, waking every living creature in the area—and spelling the end of Almeida's crew.

The eight members of the crew, who ranged in age from 21 to 27, were initially buried in the US Military Cemetery, Townsville. 2LT Meadors was later disinterred and returned to Hawaii where he was buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii.





Garbutt Airfield, Townsville, Australia