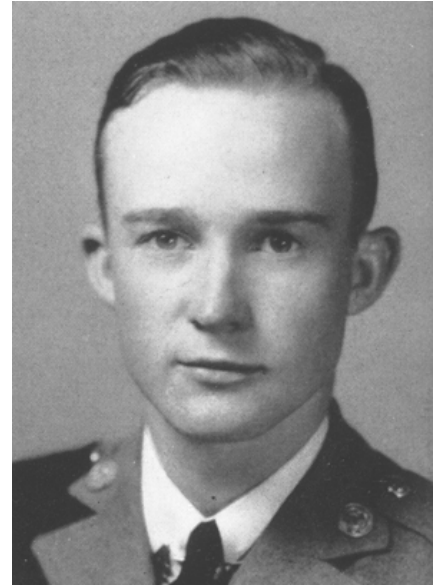


Pilot Error

Clemons Carter Miley from the Hampton County community of Brunson was an Army Air Force fighter pilot. In June 1943, Miley was killed in an accident that Army investigators attributed “100% to pilot error” -- but the error wasn't Miley's.

Clem Miley came to Clemson in 1935 to study horticulture. An honor student, Miley was selected for membership in Alpha Zeta, the honorary fraternity for agriculture. He was a member of the Animal Husbandry and Horticulture Clubs and served as the horticulture editor of *The Agrarian*, Clemson's student-produced agriculture publication. As a cadet, Miley marched with the Sophomore Platoon. Though he attended ROTC summer camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama, he finished his Clemson career as a senior private.



After the United States was attacked, Miley enlisted as a private in the Army Air Force at Fort Jackson on March 31, 1942. Because he had not been commissioned through ROTC, Miley attended Officer Candidate School and was commissioned a second lieutenant in October 1942. He was then ordered to Pinellas Army Airfield near St. Petersburg, Florida for flight training. After earning his wings as a fighter pilot, Miley was transferred across the Bay to Tampa and assigned to the 440th Fighter Squadron of the 337th Fighter Group at Drew Field.

The 337th was equipped with P-40 Warhawk fighters. The P-40 was the third most produced American fighter of World War II, behind the P-51 Mustang and P-47 Thunderbolt, but its lack of a two-speed supercharger made it inferior to the Luftwaffe's front-line fighters. As a result, it was little used in Europe, although it played a significant role in the Middle East, the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and China.

On June 16, 1943, Second Lieutenant Miley participated in an aerobatic and combat training exercise as the fourth aircraft in a formation led by a Lieutenant Johnson. Johnson was leading his flight in a string formation at 6,000 feet when two aircraft from a sister squadron decided to join the formation. One of these newcomers, Lieutenant Claycomb, noticed a gap



between the second and third airplanes in Johnson's formation and decided to fill in this space. As Claycomb guided his P-40 in closer, he determined that he was not in the proper position to join the formation, so he pulled away. His wingman, Lieutenant Arthur Easterlin, failed to follow Claycomb's lead and also failed to keep Johnson's four airplanes in view. As Johnson's

formation banked to the left, Easterlin's airplane was below Miley's and out of his sight. Easterlin's fighter collided with Miley's causing both to fall and crash.

The investigating board laid the blame for the accident on the two latecomers. It charged Claycomb with fifty percent of the responsibility for his attempt to "interpose his flight of two in between the airplanes of the four-ship flight." Easterlin was charged with fifty percent as well for his carelessness "in losing sight of" the other airplanes. The pilot errors resulted in the death of Miley and Easterlin.

Clemons Carter Miley was survived by his parents and his brother, then in the Army at Fort Jackson. He is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery near Ehrhardt.

