

Mims Answered the Call, Made the Sacrifice

George Roland Mims, Jr., of Florence, South Carolina was a member of Clemson's Class of 1943, although he left Clemson during his sophomore year. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, which came at the end of the first semester of that sophomore year, the 21-year-old mechanical engineering major joined the Army Air Corps in April 1942.



He was selected for navigator training, and completed this instruction in April 1943. He was commissioned, awarded his wings, and sent to Columbia Field, Columbia, South Carolina where he served as an instructor until November 1, 1944 when he was sent overseas. He was assigned to the 405th Bomb Squadron and found himself in the Southwest Pacific Theater of Operations.

The 405th was part of the 38th Bomb Group assigned to the Fifth Air Force. Its mission was to support the island-hopping campaign of General Douglas MacArthur. By 1944, MacArthur's forces were on the offensive, moving north toward the General's return to the Philippine Islands.

The 405th, flying from airfields in Papua New Guinea, sortied against Japanese shipping, harbors, airfields and ground installations in an attempt to keep the enemy on his heels and help MacArthur's ground and naval forces maintain the initiative.

On Saturday, December 30, 1944, the 405th was briefed for a mission to attack Tarakan Airfield on Borneo in the Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia. Mims was slotted as the navigator aboard the B-25 piloted by Second Lieutenant Howard Drumm.

Tarakan had been a Dutch oil production center before the war. When the Japanese swept through the East Indies in late 1941 and early 1942, they had quickly overwhelmed the Dutch garrison. Despite the Dutch attempt to sabotage the production facilities, Japanese engineers quickly restored production and were soon shipping 350,000 barrels of oil per month to help fuel their war machine. The final shipments of oil from Tarakan had occurred earlier in the year as the Japanese pulled back from the tightening noose of the Allied onslaught, but Japanese aircraft remained, aircraft that could harass Allied shipping supporting the landings in the Philippines.



From their base at Pitu on the southwest

coast of the Island of Morotai, Mims and his comrades boarded their B-25 medium bombers, decorated with the 405th's Green Dragon livery, and turned west toward Borneo. The squadron reached Tarakan just after noon. Over the target, anti-aircraft fire was heavy. Mims' airplane appeared to be hit by flak as it was approaching the target. The airplane appeared to drop into a cleared area behind some trees and a column of black smoke was observed rising from the area.

The following summer, long after the Japanese had relinquished control of the area, an investigator arrived at Tarakan to determine the fate of those aboard Mims' aircraft. Based on information from two native witnesses, all aboard had been killed in the crash. Japanese troops secured the crash site and buried the crewmembers that same day. The Japanese later erected a cross at the head of the grave.

Second Lieutenant Mims was survived by his wife, Sarah O'Shields Mims, whom he married on October 1, 1943. Their son, George Roland Mims III was born one week after Lt. Mims departed for overseas. Following the war, Mims remains, along with those of the rest of his crew were reinterred in a common grave in the Little Rock National Cemetery in Arkansas.

