

Bomber Collision

Robert Lee Pearson, Jr. came to Clemson College in 1936 to study electrical engineering. Pearson, from the Balsam community in North Carolina's Jackson County, was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and was fittingly assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment in the Cadet Brigade. Pearson was a cadet private who finished three years at Clemson but did not return for his senior term.

We know nothing of Pearson's life between 1939 and the time of his enlistment in the Army Air Force in 1942. Pearson completed officer's training and was commissioned a second lieutenant. By mid-1945, he was serving in the Army Air Force at Hendricks Field outside of Sebring, Florida. Hendricks Field was under the jurisdiction of the 76th Flying Training Wing which trained heavy bomber pilots to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberator.



By June 1945, the war in Europe had ended with Germany's surrender, but the war in the Pacific continued. US Army and Marine Corps troops were nearing the end of the costly Battle of



Okinawa, the last major island on the way to Japan. In the States, the training of air crews continued in anticipation of the next phase of the Pacific war, the coming invasion of Japan which Allied planners were targeting for November 1.

On June 21, First Lieutenant Pearson was assigned as one of the officers on a B-17 piloted by Richard Wallis. A B-17 commanded by Lawrence Copenhaver was also in the formation that day for a training

mission. As the bomber formation flew southwest toward Arcadia, these two aircraft collided. Pearson's aircraft crashed, killing its occupants. Copenhaver's bomber was damaged, but without loss of life.

First Lieutenant Pearson was survived by his parents. He was buried at the Abner Creek Baptist Church Cemetery in Duncan.

