

Trained In Infantry, Served In Navy

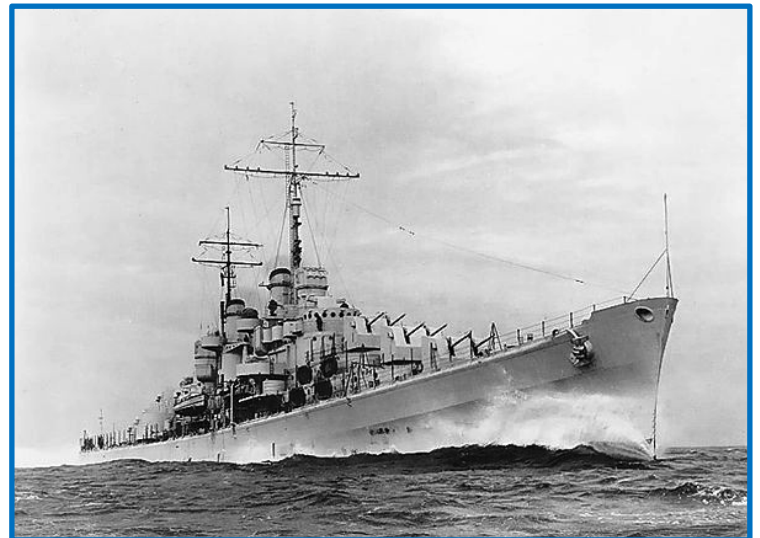
Relatively few Clemson alumni served in the Navy during World War II. Clemson's ROTC program was infantry-oriented, its cadets attending summer training at the Army's Fort McClellan in Alabama. Most of the graduates of the Class of 1941 who went into military service entered active duty as soldiers. Most, but not all.

Allison Phidel Rhodes of Walhalla was commissioned as an ensign in the Naval Reserve on June 2, 1941, probably the first from his class to enter active duty as a sailor. Rhodes' military record at Clemson suggests that the Navy made a good decision. As a senior, "Dusty" as he was known to his fellow cadets, served as a cadet captain and was the commander of Company F in the Second Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. An excellent student, Dusty was an electrical engineering major who, according to a local newspaper, "held high scholastic honors." He was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the Oconee County Club, the Senior Platoon and the Pershing Rifles. At ROTC summer training, he qualified as a Sharpshooter on the rifle range.



Following his commissioning, Rhodes was sent to Atlanta, where he took special officer's training at Georgia Tech. He was sent for additional training to Washington, DC and then to Bowden College in Brunswick, Maine. While Rhodes was training during the summer and fall of 1941, the Japanese were preparing for their infamous attack on the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. On January 10, 1942, Rhodes reported for duty, again to Atlanta, this time the USS *Atlanta*, one of the Navy's newest light cruisers as an assistant engineering officer. *Atlanta* had been launched the previous September and commissioned into active service on Christmas Eve.

With Rhodes on board, *Atlanta* conducted shakedown training that winter, first in Chesapeake Bay and then in Maine's Casco Bay, after which she returned to the New York Navy Yard for post-shakedown repairs and alterations. Deemed "ready for distant service" on the final day of March, the new cruiser departed New York for the Panama Canal Zone on April 5. After transiting the canal, *Atlanta* proceeded to Pearl Harbor, arriving on April 23.



Atlanta was designed to provide anti-aircraft defense for aircraft carriers and battleships, so following a brief stay in Hawaiian waters she sailed with Vice Admiral William F. Halsey's Task Force 16, formed around the carriers *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, in time to meet an imminent Japanese thrust in the direction of Midway Atoll. During the crucial Midway battle, *Atlanta* screened *Hornet*, providing protection from the Japanese carrier-based planes desperately hunting for the American flattops. Midway was the turning point in the naval battle of the Pacific as the American forces sank four irreplaceable Japanese carriers. But the Japanese Army had still not been defeated.

Following a quick stint in Pearl Harbor's dry dock, *Atlanta* put to sea again in July, sailing for Tongatapu. *Atlanta* was assigned to Task Force 61 and designated to provide protection for

American carriers as they launched air strikes in support of the August landings on Guadalcanal.

As the Japanese struggled to reinforce their Guadalcanal garrison, the war on the waves reached a new intensity. Screening the carrier *Enterprise*, *Atlanta* on August 24 shot down five enemy aircraft. A week later, *Atlanta* helped protect the *Saratoga* after it was struck by a Japanese torpedo and had to be towed back to Tongatapu.

From mid to late October, *Atlanta* returned to operations supporting the ground forces on Guadalcanal. Rhodes and his crew conducted escort missions as well as shore bombardment in support of Marines battling the Japanese.

As more men and materiel were poured ashore on Guadalcanal, *Atlanta's* mission became the defense of the transport ships. On November 12, as a group of transports was unloading, the first of a series of Japanese aerial attacks commenced. From about 0930 through 1415 hours, three separate flights of enemy aircraft attacked. None of the transports was damaged, but one Japanese bomber, damaged by anti-aircraft fire, crashed in to the cruiser *San Francisco*.

The air attacks ended, but now a Japanese surface force was detected steaming south toward Guadalcanal. *Atlanta* was one of the ships sent out to meet this new threat. About an hour before midnight, the cruiser *Helena* picked up the first radar contact with the Japanese. As the gap between the American and Japanese forces closed, *Atlanta's* radar began to pick up contacts as well. A Japanese destroyer opened fire on *Atlanta* and Rhodes' vessel, along with other nearby US ships overwhelmed the attacker with return fire. *Atlanta* then engaged two other Japanese destroyers. At about this time, *Atlanta* was struck by a torpedo which slammed into the forward engine room. *Atlanta* lost its auxiliary power and her gunfire was interrupted. In the chaos and confusion of the night battle, *Atlanta* next came under fire from a surprising source, *San Francisco*. Approximately nineteen 8-inch shells from the friendly ship struck *Atlanta*, many passing through her thinly armored sides without detonating. After this firing ceased, *Atlanta's* captain, Samuel Jenkins, suffering from a wounded foot, determined that his ship was badly battered and largely powerless. One third of his crew was dead or missing, including Lieutenant (j.g.) Rhodes. Due to its unsalvageable condition, Jenkins ordered *Atlanta* to be sunk by a demolition charge. He was the last man to leave the battered, sinking ship.

The story of Dusty Rhodes doesn't end with the sinking *Atlanta*. The USS *Rhodes*, a destroyer-escort was named in honor of the Clemson alumnus and first Oconee County man lost in the war. The *Rhodes'* keel was laid down in April of 1943 and launched the following June, an indication of the amazing response of American industry to the war effort.



Rhodes was commissioned in October and served in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters providing protection against submarines and air attack for Navy vessels and convoys.

"Dusty" Rhodes gave his life, his youth, for a cause he believed in. He fought and accepted death, alone, many miles from his home and loved ones. Many of us fear death, none of us understand death, but perhaps this quiet, unassuming youth faced the darkness and

uncertainty with this thought of Tennyson's in his mind: "For tho' from out our Bourne of time and place, The flood may bear me far, I hope to meet my pilot face to face, When I have crossed the bar."

Allison Rhodes made the supreme sacrifice. He gave up man's most guarded possession, the only thing which man has not been able to create - Life!

He gave his life so that you and I, your children and my children might have a better, a freer world in which to live.

Extract from *The Tiger*.

Allison Phidel Rhodes was survived by his parents, a sister and two brothers, one then serving in the Air Corps. He is memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery, Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines.