

## Raymond Anderson Sloan '39 was first Clemson graduate to fall in World War II.



The tense days of November 1941 were filled with activity, training and preparation at Nichols Field, the Philippines. Because of the strained relations between the United States and Japan, the P-35 and P-40 aircraft of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron were placed on 24-hour alert, armed and fueled with pilots available at 30 minutes' notice. P-40 Pilot Raymond Anderson Sloan [far left], Clemson Class of 1939, was one of a number of Clemson men serving in the Philippines. Sloan and his Air Corps comrades trained intensely in day and night enemy

interception, air-to-air gunnery and in escorting friendly bombers.

Sloan, a native of Marion, South Carolina, enrolled in Clemson in 1935, to study agronomy. Tall and handsome, Sloan, or "Soph" as he was known on campus, was active in cadet life. He was a member of the Swamp Fox Club, the Taps staff and the Central Dance Association. He was also a cheer leader and a member of the Minor Block "C" Club. During Sloan's time at Clemson the shape and look of the campus were evolving as the new Agriculture Building (now Long Hall) and the new Textile Building (Sirriner Hall) were completed.

Between his junior and senior years, Sloan and his Clemson classmates traveled to Fort McClellan, Alabama for ROTC camp. The training and camaraderie must have made a lasting impression on Sloan for shortly after his graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy, he joined the Army Air Corps. He was ordered to Kelly Field in Texas where, in March 1940, he earned his pilot's wings. In November, Sloan was transferred to the Philippines where he was assigned as assistant to the chief of the Philippine Army Air Corps and later was stationed at Nichols Field, Manila, with the 17th Pursuit Squadron.

During the first days of December 1941, on four consecutive nights, Army radar reported an unidentified aircraft over nearby Clark Field. After the first sighting, instructions were given to force the aircraft to land or destroy it. On the three succeeding nights, attempts to intercept the mysterious aircraft were unsuccessful as Army pilots could not find it in the darkness. On the fifth morning all aircraft were kept on the ground and the anti-aircraft batteries were alerted for the interception; but again the ominous aircraft could not be located.

On the night of December 7, 1941, the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron reported 18 P-40Es in commission. The P-40E was America's best fighter, or pursuit, aircraft at that time.

At about 3:30 am on Monday, December 8, the commercial radio station at Clark Field intercepted a message from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii about the Japanese attack there. No verification was available through official channels so no action was taken other than notifying the Base Commander. All squadrons remained on alert.

Beginning about 4 am, radar stations on the north coast of Luzon, the largest of the Philippine Islands and home to Manila, issued a number of reports of unidentified aircraft approaching. American pursuit aircraft were dispatched but were unable to make contact. At approximately 4:45, notification was received that the United States and Japan were at war. Twice more that morning pursuit aircraft were dispatched in search of Japanese planes but failed to make contact.

Repeated missions and fruitless searches no doubt frustrated Sloan and the other pilots. The physical and mental stress must have caused both anxiety and fatigue. The enemy air feints continued until the early morning hours of December 9, when Japanese aircraft bombed Nichols Field. The next night, the 17<sup>th</sup> was alerted for a dawn mission to escort Army B-17 bombers in an attack on an approaching Japanese invasion convoy. After the attack, the 17<sup>th</sup> returned for re-fueling and re-arming and went back on alert. Later that morning a warning was received of large formations of Japanese aircraft approaching from the north. The 17<sup>th</sup> was dispatched to intercept the planes over Manila Bay. The Japanese bombers were escorted by the highly maneuverable Zero fighter and by the end of the day, only about 30 US pursuit aircraft remained. Far East Air Force headquarters ordered that American pursuit aircraft not be dispatched without its orders. From this point on, Sloan and the other pilots flew only reconnaissance missions.

With no supplies or replacements available from the United States, ground crews used parts cannibalized from wrecks. Oil was reused by straining it through makeshift filters. Tail wheel tires were stuffed with rags to keep them usable.

Two days before Christmas, the Japanese invaded along the western coast of Luzon. Aircraft were loaded with fragmentation bombs and dispatched to attack the enemy landing. Twelve P-40s and six P-35s were all that remained to form the strike force. The attack created confusion among enemy personnel in landing barges and around supply dumps ashore, but it wasn't sufficient to halt the Japanese juggernaut. Air Corps units were forced to withdraw to dispersed airfields on Luzon.

The Luzon landings caused General MacArthur to declare Manila an open city. A second set of Japanese landings in southern Luzon turned a grim situation more desperate. With aircraft, parts, oil and fuel in short supply, Air Corps personnel were ordered to augment the infantry. Sloan's unit, the 17<sup>th</sup>, took up beach defenses on the Bataan Peninsula.

The Japanese advanced relentlessly, secure in the knowledge that no American reinforcements would reach the Philippines in time to bolster the American defenders. On February 9, Sloan was promoted to captain. A day later, he was wounded defending Bataan. "Soph" Sloan, the cheer leader, CDA member and Taps staffer died from his wounds on February 11, 1942, the first Clemson graduate to fall in combat during World War II. He is buried in the Manila American Cemetery: Plot A, Row 9, Grave 68. Sloan was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. A Japanese soldier is believed to have removed Sloan's Clemson ring and pawned it. After the war, the ring was discovered in Japan by Dr. Sam Witherspoon '48, who redeemed it and returned it to Clemson.

Sloan's sacrifice, like so many who fought and died in the Philippines and in other outposts in the vast Pacific Theater, bought time for the United States to gear up its industrial might, expand its armed forces and come to the aid of the rest of the world.

