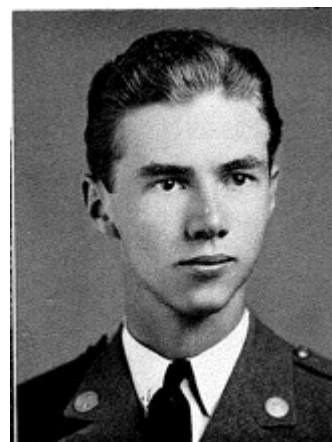


Decorated Flyer, Smith Was Lost Near Sicily

Captain Robert Dempsey pulled back on the stick and lifted his P-40 Warhawk into the early evening sky. It had been a long, hot day; July was always hot on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, even when the coastal breezes brought some relief. Dempsey turned his fighter northeast from El Haouaria airfield in Tunisia and set a course for Marettimo Island some 85 miles away. Dempsey, commander of the 316th Fighter Squadron, had started the morning as leader of a fighter escort for bombers flying in support of General Patton's looming invasion of Sicily. Now, with less than an hour of daylight remaining, he was heading back toward Sicily, his mission to find and hopefully rescue his comrade, Lloyd Smith.

Lloyd Brown Smith, Jr., entered Clemson College as a member of the Class of 1941 from Rainelle, West Virginia. Rainelle was a tiny town whose 985 residents scratched out a living by working in the lumber mill or coal mine. At Clemson, "Smitty" quickly demonstrated military proficiency and leadership ability. He served on the YMCA Council, the Ring Committee and was listed in Who's Who. On the military side of the ledger, Smitty was selected as the best drilled corporal as a sophomore and the best drilled sergeant his junior year. As a senior, he served as the brigade adjutant with the rank of cadet major. He was a member of the military honor society, Scabbard & Blade, and was an honor military graduate. His military aptitude no doubt helped him secure assignment to the Air Corps.



In March 1943, the 316th Fighter Squadron began flying combat missions in support of British ground forces in their battle against the German *Afrika Korps*. By early June, the 316th and its P-40 Warhawk aircraft were based at El Haouaria, on Tunisia's northeastern coast. From there, Sicily, the Allies' next target for liberation, was only a short 20 minute flight away.



On the morning of July 6, Smith, Dempsey and the 316th were assigned escort duty for a flight of A-20 Havoc bombers. The bombers were striking key German and Italian positions on Sicily in preparation for Operation Husky, the Allies' planned invasion of the island. At approximately 1100 hours, Smith reported by radio to his squadron leader, Dempsey, that his engine was overheating, possibly as the result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Dempsey suggested that Smith attempt to reach Marettimo Island, a few miles to the west of the Sicilian coast. Smith agreed, but shortly after reported that his aircraft was on fire and that he was bailing out. Dempsey dispatched First Lieutenant James Fenex, Jr. and two other pilots to follow Smith and orbit his position pending the arrival of a rescue mission. Fenex saw Smith's parachute open, saw him land in the water and successfully deploy his dinghy. At that point, Fenex and the other pilots had to leave the area due to low fuel reserves. Fenex reported that Smith, when last seen, was alternating bailing and paddling and was only about one mile from shore.

Now, as the sun sank lower in the western sky, Dempsey, with Fenex as his wing man, was back, crisscrossing the area in which Smith had last been seen. Despite a thorough search of the area, Dempsey and Fenex failed to find any signs of Smith or his equipment. In his after action report, Dempsey said that he believed Smith had reached Marettimo, which was then still occupied by the enemy. Fenex's view of him in his rubber dingy was the last American sighting of Smitty. His remains were never recovered.

Lloyd Brown Smith, Jr. was awarded the Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters and the Purple Heart. He is memorialized at the North Africa American Cemetery, Carthage, Tunisia.

