

Once a Pilot

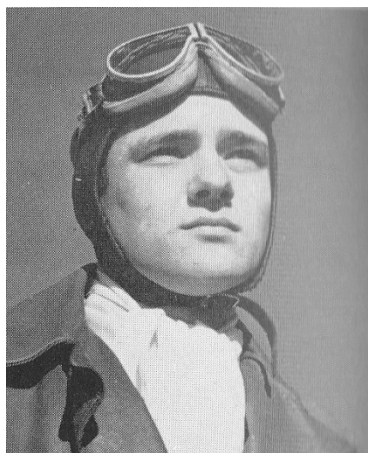
Donald Hughes Tate was already a pilot by the time he left Clemson College. In fact, Tate, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Tate of Rock Hill, was a member of the Clemson Flying Cadets, an organization restricted to juniors and seniors who had already earned their private pilot licenses.

Tate, a mechanical engineering major and member of the Class of 1942, attended Clemson from 1938 to 1941. At the end of the fall semester of his senior year, just eleven days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Tate left campus and joined the Marine Air Corps.



Clemson Flying Cadets and aircraft formed for inspection 1941

As Tate pursued his flight training, US Marines in August 1942 surprised the Japanese with a landing at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific. The landings marked one of the first offensives by the Allies against the Japanese.



As the battle at Guadalcanal intensified that autumn, Tate was earning his wings as a Marine Corps fighter pilot and his commission as a second lieutenant at Jacksonville, Florida. In early 1943, he left San Diego and was assigned to VMF-213, a Marine Corps fighter squadron based in Hawaii—but not for long.

Fierce land, air and sea battles for control of Guadalcanal and its airfield had resulted in heavy losses for both the Japanese and the US Marines and Navy. In February 1943, the Japanese withdrew their remaining ground forces from the island. The defeat at Guadalcanal marked the limit of Japan's territorial gains—but not the end of the fighting.

Tate's squadron left Hawaii in late February and arrived at Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides islands on March 1, 1943. There the squadron received its new F4U Corsair fighters and engaged in operational training. In April, Tate's squadron moved to Guadalcanal. By this point, the Japanese were gone, but still the island was subjected to frequent aerial attacks from the major Japanese base at Rabaul.

VMF-213 commenced operations against Japanese forces at New Georgia, Kahali and throughout the Solomon Islands. On June 29, Tate was assigned a patrol flight. He was killed and his Corsair destroyed when it crashed at Guadalcanal, perhaps upon its return.

Tate was originally buried in the Pacific area but was re-interred on April 16, 1949 at Beaufort National Cemetery. He was survived by his wife, the former Jacqueline Derrick of Greensboro, North Carolina, his parents and five brothers, one of whom was serving in the Navy.



F4U Corsair

