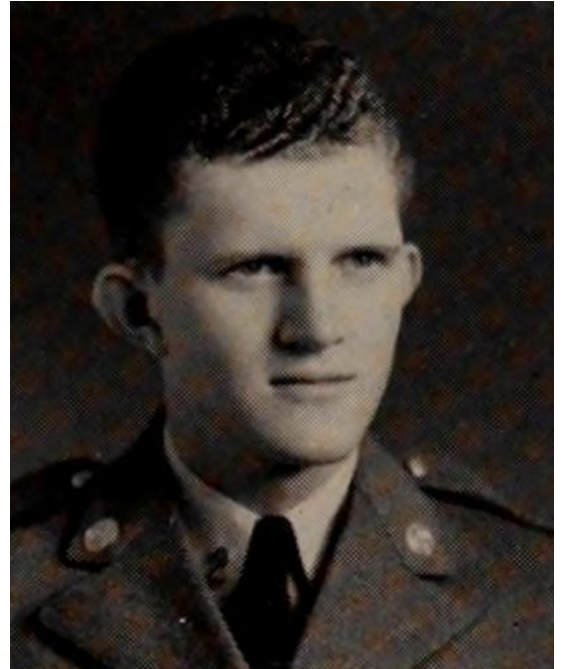


## Test Pilot

On practically every combat mission, some aircraft were damaged. When the damage was beyond the ability of the local ground crew to repair, it might be sent for depot maintenance to a dedicated repair facility. One such depot was at Langford Lodge in Northern Ireland where Richard Edward Townsend, Clemson Class of 1944, was assigned as a test pilot.

Townsend, a mechanical engineering major from Lockhart, attended Clemson from 1940 to 1942. He was assigned to Company L, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment and was appointed a cadet corporal as a sophomore. This was a strong indication that Clemson's ROTC cadre saw leadership ability in the young man. He was also selected as a sophomore to march with the Pershing Rifles.



In October 1943, Townsend enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was accepted into its flight training program. Townsend was designated as a multi-engine pilot and was trained to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bomber. He was assigned as a replacement pilot to the 367<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron stationed at Thurleigh about 65 miles north of London. Lieutenant Townsend compiled an impressive record with the 367<sup>th</sup>, flying fifty combat missions when the standard tour of duty was thirty-five. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters.

Rather than return to the States, Townsend elected to remain in the United Kingdom. He was reassigned to less stressful duties as a test pilot with the 325<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Group based at Langford Lodge, Northern Ireland. The airframe and powerplant mechanics at Langford Lodge took worn and heavily damaged aircraft, repaired, and refurbished them, and then sent them back to operational units. But, before these rehabilitated airplanes could be returned to action, they had to be flight tested by a pilot. That was Townsend's role.

On March 12, 1945, First Lieutenant Townsend was to ferry war-weary A-20 Havoc, a medium attack bomber, from the American airfield at Greencastle Cove overlooking Northern Ireland's North Atlantic Coast. His planned flight to Langford Lodge, just 60 miles away would last about twenty-five minutes. It was a flight Townsend had made many times.



The A-20 was much smaller than the B-17s in which Townsend had accumulated so many flight hours. The A-20 had a shorter wingspan and only two engines compared to the Flying Fortress's four. After takeoff from Greencastle, the left side engine on the A-20 failed. Townsend feathered the prop to prevent it from windmilling and increasing the drag on the aircraft. Townsend requested and immediately received permission to return to land. He turned on final approach, but his main landing gear did not extend. Just as the airplane was about to touch down on the runway, Townsend may have realized his gear was not in place. He gunned his remaining engine, aborted this landing, and began a go-around—an attempt to re-fly the traffic pattern and land the airplane. The A-20 gained altitude and speed. Townsend flew the traffic pattern, and reaching the crosswind segment, initiated a ninety-degree turn to the left, into his dead engine. With reduced airflow over the left wing and the torque from the right engine, the aircraft stalled and spun into the sea, killing Townsend.

First Lieutenant Richard Edward Townsend was survived by his mother. He was buried in the Cambridge American Cemetery in England.



Photo: United States Army Air Force