

From Start to Finish

Okinawa, the last major island between the Allies and Japan, had been conquered. American B-29 strategic bombers were setting fire to one Japanese city after another. Allied planners were busy preparing for the invasion of Japan, fearful of the cost in lives. The war was almost over, but few had any inkling. The men in the Pacific theater of operations knew nothing of the test twelve days earlier of a secret weapon in the New Mexico desert. What they knew was the incredible tenacity of the Japanese soldiers, soldiers who preferred death to surrender even against hopeless odds.

Charlie Turner had been in the war since the very beginning. He'd been at flight school in Pensacola, Florida when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and earned his wings that same month. Now, 44 months later, he was stationed on Okinawa, assigned as a pilot in Navy Patrol Bombing Squadron 208.

Charles Allen Turner entered Clemson College in 1937 as a member of the Class of 1941. The weight of the world was destined to fall on the shoulders of these young men—and they would respond with great courage and sacrifice. A textile engineering major from Fort Mill, Charlie was a member of the rifle team and the York County Club. He was a member of the Flying Cadets, a group of aviation-minded students, and served in the Cadet Corps as a second lieutenant.



Following graduation in May 1941, Turner headed to the Navy rather than the Army or its aviation wing like so many of his classmates. He earned his commission as a Navy Ensign and his pilot's wings in December. He was assigned to Patrol Bombing Squadron 208 and was soon flying patrol missions over the Atlantic, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico watching over convoys and searching for German submarines.

In 1944, with the German Navy no longer a serious threat, Turner's squadron was transferred to the Pacific. As a pilot and patrol plane commander, Turner flew missions against Japanese forces and in support of American operations in the vicinity of China, Japan, Korea and the Ryuku Islands. The 208th flew reconnaissance missions in the Martin Mariner, a twin-engine amphibian noted for its long range (2,600 nautical miles)



and versatility. With its crew of seven, eight Browning .50 caliber machine guns and 4,000 pounds of bombs or two Mark 13 torpedoes, the Mariner could fly offensive missions as well.

Twice the squadron bombed Japanese facilities at Yap. During the grueling campaign to subdue Okinawa, the squadron recorded four enemy planes shot down with a further six to eight damaged. In addition, ten small to medium-sized Japanese vessels were sunk and several others damaged. The versatility of the Mariner was demonstrated by the rescue of 25 men in open sea landings. These were mostly air crewman from American planes shot down in Japanese controlled waters.

On July 28, 1945, during a lull in major offensive operations, Turner taxied from the squadron's sea plane base at Chimu Wan on the north coast of Okinawa's Kinbu Bay. During take-off in rough seas, Turner's aircraft flew into the water killing nine.

Charlie Turner survived 44 months of the worst conflict in history and died just nine days before the dropping of the first atomic bomb. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. He was survived by his wife, the former Jean Ann Nelson; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Claude D. Turner; sister, Miss Elsie Turner; and brother Navy Ensign Neely E. Turner. In 1949, Lieutenant Turner's body was returned to South Carolina where he was buried in the Beaufort National Cemetery.

