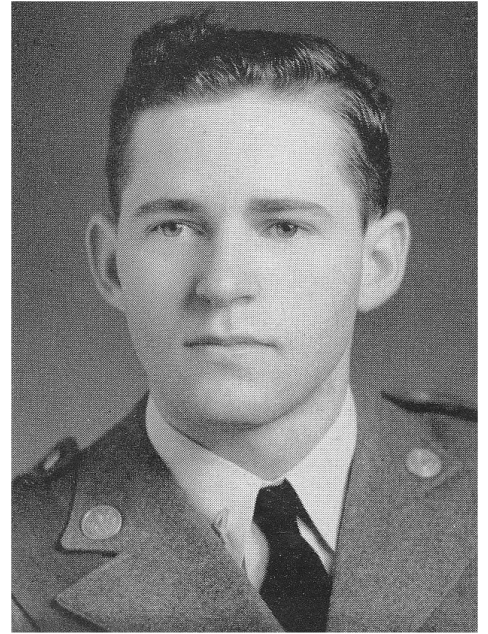


## Flak

Critical to Allied strategy, aerial superiority had to be achieved before the invasion of France could be undertaken with reasonable expectations of success. In late February 1944, the new commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Jimmy Doolittle, approved changes to the tactics used by American fighter aircraft. No longer would they be tethered to the heavy bombers flying missions to destroy German industry. Now, the fighters would be unleashed to seek out and sweep German aircraft from the sky. It worked. Bomber losses due to attack by enemy fighters were “substantially lowered,” but German anti-aircraft fire continued to claim a heavy toll on Allied bombers.



Henry Grady Way of Ridgeland was a member of Clemson’s Class of 1942. A dairy major, Way served as secretary of the Wesley Foundation Council and was president of the Dairy Club. He was a member of the Glee Club, the Williamsburg County Club, and the Young Democrats. In the summer of 1941, prior to his senior year, Way attended ROTC summer training at Clemson and qualified as a marksman on the rifle range.

Despite his skill with a rifle, it was as a heavy bomber pilot that Way would make his impact on the war. After completing flight training and transitioning as a pilot on the B-17 Flying Fortress, Way headed overseas where he joined the 358<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron of the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group based at Molesworth, about seventy miles north of London.

Way probably reached his squadron in late 1943. He flew his first five combat missions as copilot on the crew of Second Lieutenant Walter Ames. Thereafter, Way, who was promoted to first lieutenant, commanded his own B-17. On June 21, 1944, the first day of summer, Way was alerted for what would be his twenty-sixth mission, an attack on Berlin.



*First Lieutenant Way, back row, left, with his crew.*

There were competing theories on aerial bombing. The British, unable to bear the high losses attending daylight bombing, had switched to nighttime missions early in the war. Flying at night made it practically impossible to hit specific targets like factories or railroad hubs, so the British

resorted to bombing area targets—in other words, cities. The American approach was to fly during daylight in order to bomb specific military targets with pinpoint accuracy. While such precision proved elusive, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force generally eschewed area bombing, but on June 21, the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group's target was listed simply as "City Area, Berlin."

The 303<sup>rd</sup>'s bombers were among nearly five hundred B-17s dispatched on the mission. Way's bomber was flying at 25,900 feet in the low squadron of the low group of the larger combat wing formation. Although the mission report says that "A few enemy fighters were seen," none attacked the 303<sup>rd</sup>'s formations. Flak, however, was another story.

Berlin was the most well-defended city in Germany with approximately one hundred flak, or anti-aircraft batteries, protecting the capital. As the formation of bombers came within range, the flak batteries opened up with "continuous, intense and extremely accurate" fire over the target area. The low squadron was especially hard hit. Way's and one other of the low squadron's bombers were hit just after releasing their bombs. Way's aircraft was hit four times, twice in the nose and twice in the bomb bay, causing the bomber to explode. Parachutes were seen in the vicinity, but in the chaos it was difficult to determine from which airplane they had emerged. What was left of Way's airplane crashed in Berlin.

Way's navigator, tail gunner, and radio operator survived the explosion, parachuted safely, and were taken prisoner by the Germans. The other seven members of the crew, including Way, were killed. In attacks like this one and those that would follow through the spring of the following year, Berlin would be devastated.

First Lieutenant Henry Grady Way was awarded the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters and the Purple Heart. He was survived by his parents and his brother. He is memorialized at the American Cemetery in Margraten, Netherlands and at the Holly Cemetery in Holly Hill.

