

## “The Hump”

Wilfred C. Wells hadn't been at Clemson College very long when World War II reached out and snatched America in. He had come to campus only three months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, at a time when most war worries were focused on Europe. At that time, not very many Americans could have found Burma on a globe.

Wilfred, the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Wells, was born and grew up in the Shandon section of Columbia. He joined the Sons of the Legion, an association of the sons of American Legion members. His friend Dick Mattox remembered marching with Wilfred in the organization's Drum and Bugle Corps at the State American Legion Convention in Florence in 1939. Mattox recalled his delight at finding the seat next to Wilfred vacant for the bus ride from Columbia to Florence. “I expect I pestered him all the way from Columbia to Florence and back,” Mattox said of Wilfred who was six years his senior. “But, I just thought no one could be the equal of Wilfred.”



After graduating from Dreher High School in June, Wilfred made his way to Clemson, enrolling in September 1941 as a member of the Class of 1945. Wilfred studied civil engineering and became a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Newman Club, which represented the “Catholic boys on the campus.”

Following the completion of his sophomore year, Wilfred was called into military service in August of 1943. Assigned to the Army Air Force, he trained at Miami, Florida; Amherst, Massachusetts; Maxwell Field, Alabama; and San Marcos, Texas; graduating as a navigator in September of 1944. After completing crew training at Charleston Army Air Base in December, Wells shipped literally to the other side of the globe to the China-Burma-India Theater in January of 1945.



The 308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (Heavy) of the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force was headquartered at Hsinching, China in February 1945. The Group had one of the more difficult missions of any of the Army Air Force bomb groups. Not only did the group fly bombing missions against Japanese targets throughout China and Southeast Asia, it also had to fly its supplies—fuel, food, munitions, aircraft parts and replacement aircrews-- over “The Hump,” the treacherous and towering Himalaya Mountains which separated the 308<sup>th</sup>'s base from Allied supply depots in India. In his memoirs, General Claire Chennault, commander of the legendary Flying Tigers, recalled “that all gas, bombs, ammunition, and other supplies had to be flown over the Hump in the unit's own planes, thus making it necessary to fly about three Hump flights for every combat mission.”



The 308<sup>th</sup> “took the heaviest combat losses of any Group in China,” Chennault wrote. “However, their bombing of Vinh railroad shops in Indo-China, the Kowloon and Kai Tak docks at Hong Kong and the shipping off Saigon were superb jobs unmatched anywhere. When the Army Air Force

Headquarters in Washington tallied the bombing accuracy of every bomb group in combat, I was astonished to find that the 308<sup>th</sup> led them all.” The 308<sup>th</sup> earned a Distinguished Unit Citation for its successful interdiction of Japanese shipping in 1944-45.

It’s probable that Flight Officer Wilfred Wells was one of the reasons for the group’s accurate bombing. Helping guide formations throughout long flights over rugged terrain with few landmarks, navigators made tremendous contributions to their unit’s success.

In June 1945, the 308<sup>th</sup> moved its headquarters to Rupsi, India. It continued to ferry gasoline and other supplies from there back into China. On July 27, Wells was part of the five-man crew of a B-24 bomber returning over “The Hump” from a supply mission to China. The aircraft disappeared, its crew was never found.

Flight Officer Wilfred C. Wells was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart.