

That Which Binds Us Together

Football fans across South Carolina have long had November 25 circled on their calendars. That's the day the Tigers and Gamecocks will renew a gridiron rivalry which dates back to 1896 and includes one hundred fourteen games. While we'll chose sides and don our Orange and Purple or Garnet and Black for the big Thanksgiving weekend game, it's worth remembering that which binds us together.

William Harris Crawford White would have observed an interesting streak within the state's storied football rivalry. For six straight years beginning in 1931, the annual Big Thursday game between Clemson and Carolina was decided by shutout—the longest such streak in series history. Carolina held the Tigers scoreless in 1931, '32 and '33, White's freshman year. Then it was Clemson which showed its defensive muscle, blanking the Gamecocks in three straight games including a 19-0 victory in 1936, White's senior season. Those three shutout wins were the first of a seven-game Clemson winning streak, the longest by either team in the series.

Crawford White was born in 1915 in Atlanta where his father was an executive special agent for the Hartford Fire Insurance Company. The Whites moved to Columbia in 1919. Crawford was an accomplished golfer, winning the Forest Lake golf club championship at the age of thirteen. He graduated from Columbia High School and then enrolled in Clemson College as an architecture major. As a collegian, Crawford was a member of one of the campus literary societies and served as captain of the golf team. He was also a member of the German Club and served on both the student newspaper and yearbook staffs.

After earning his degree in 1937, White followed his father into the insurance business, taking a position with Siebels, Bruce and Company in Columbia where he was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church.

In January 1942, as America struggled to find its wartime footing, Crawford White, like so many young men of his generation, volunteered for the Army Air Corps. His training took him from Maxwell Field in Alabama to Ocala, Florida; Santa Ana, California; and finally to Williams Field in Chandler, Arizona where he earned his second lieutenant's commission and bombardier wings in September. Before shipping overseas in early 1943, White was briefly stationed at Columbia Army Airfield.

White joined General Claire Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force when he was assigned to the 11th Bomb Squadron of the 341st Bomb Group then stationed in India. The squadron flew the workhorse B-25 Mitchell medium bombers with White serving as a navigator/bombardier. In a letter written December 11, 1943, White described to his mother Elizabeth a recent forced landing by his airplane. It was the last letter she would receive from her son.

On Thursday, December 30, 1943, First Lieutenant Crawford White was assigned as navigator/bombardier on a B-25 piloted by Second Lieutenant William Arnold. The flight lifted off from Suichwan, China at 0850 hours, its mission to attack enemy shipping along the Yangtze River. It would be the last mission for Arnold, White, copilot Harland Keating and gunner/engineer Lynnwood Smith.



Lt. Crawford White

Approximately ten miles west of Anking, Arnold turned his aircraft to the north and lowered its nose to begin a low-level bombing run against an enemy river boat. White released one bomb, intending to skip it along the surface of the river and into the target. As the target flashed past them, the crew felt a sudden, sickening jolt as the airplane collided with the mast of the river boat, sheering off six feet of the right wing. Arnold fought to lift the nose up, but the aircraft yawed and then pitched down into the muddy bank of the river where it exploded. Other pilots in the flight testified that the bomb White released just seconds before the crash exploded almost at the same instant. No survivors were observed from White's aircraft.

William Harris Crawford White was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his mother and sister, three aunts and three uncles.

Crawford White began his collegiate career at Clemson, but he remained only one semester before transferring to the University of South Carolina in 1934. He earned his AB degree from Carolina in 1937. Far from being just a "Clemson hero" or a "South Carolina hero," Crawford White reminds us that what binds us together goes far beyond the colors we wear or the teams we cheer for. He is an American Hero whose sacrifice helped preserve and extend the freedoms which we all enjoy and which unite us under a banner of red, white and blue.