

The Sea and the Desert

The North Africa American Cemetery lies above ancient Roman Carthage in Tunisia and holds the remains of 2,841 American servicemen who fell in operations across northern Africa and the Persian Gulf. One of these heroes is Robert Eugene Woody, Clemson Class of 1940.



Woody was from Charleston and served as a company sergeant in the cadet corps as a junior. A mechanical engineering major, he did not return to campus for his senior year.

With the storm clouds of war gathering on distant horizons, Robert Woody enlisted in the Army Air Corps in August 1941. Enlistment records indicate he stood five feet, 10 inches tall and weighed a lean 140 pounds. Woody joined thousands of other young men who were beginning to fill the ranks of America's nascent air force. After completing his training, he was assigned to the 330th Bombardment Squadron of the 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy).

The 93rd was equipped with the Consolidated B-24 Liberator bomber and began its wartime operations flying antisubmarine patrols over the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. In late summer of 1942, the Group moved overseas to England and was assigned to the 8th Air Force. The Group's first combat mission was an October 1942 attack on steel and engineering works at Lille, France. In December, a large contingent from the 93rd was detached from the 8th Air Force and sent to North Africa to support Allied forces in their battle to drive Rommel's *Afrika Korps* and its Italian allies from the continent. Operating from a former French airfield near Oran, Algeria, with inadequate supplies and under difficult desert conditions, the detachment struck heavy blows at enemy communications and shipping. After just two missions as part of the fledgling 12th Air Force, the Group was transferred to Gambut Main airfield in Libya and attached to the 9th Air Force. From here, the 93rd flew missions against German and Italian targets throughout the Mediterranean Theater.

On January 10, 1943, the Group dispatched bombers from the 330th Bombardment Squadron to attack targets on Galite, a small island located 24 miles northwest of Cape Serrat, Tunisia. Although the specific nature of the target is unclear, occupiers of Galite would have been in an ideal position to monitor shipping traveling west from Gibraltar toward Corsica, Sicily and Malta, a key British base.

The radio operator aboard "Big Dealer," a B-24 piloted by Captain Owen



Robert Eugene Woody, kneeling front row second from right, with the crew of Big Dealer

Kunze, Woody's responsibilities would have included providing position reports and assisting the navigator in taking fixes and insuring radio communications were maintained according to mission orders. When needed, he would also man one of the Liberator's .50 caliber waist machine guns.

The mission to Galite would have carried Big Dealer north-northwest across the Gulf of Sidra and the near the tip of Tunisia, a journey of nearly 1,000 miles. But, on its return trip, navigational errors or equipment malfunctions doomed Big Dealer as the aircraft overshot its home base, ran out of fuel and crashed in the desert darkness some 90 miles east of its home field. Kunze, Woody and two other crew members were killed. The five other crewmen, though injured, eventually returned to duty.

Technical Sergeant Woody was awarded the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart.



