

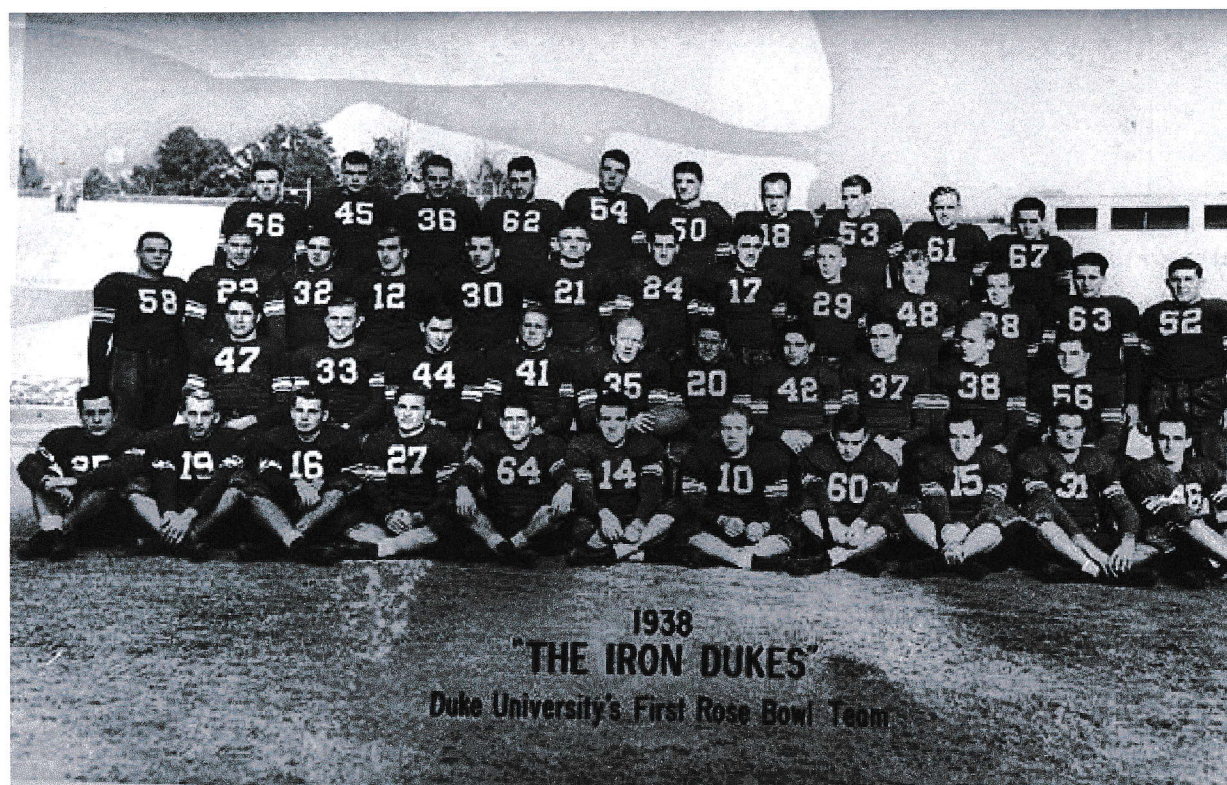


Kendrick Robertson (Sonny) Bragg (1918-1999)

When I was told to write a biography on someone important I never realized that this was an assignment that I was really going to enjoy. Wanting to be in the military I could have write about General Patton, Hitler, Homer, JFK, General MacArthur, but instead I decided to do my biography about my uncle. He was really humble, honest and loving. One look into his deep blue eyes and you were caught in his charm. Let's write about this great person, my uncle, my personal hero.

Kendrick Robertson (Sonny) Bragg

He was born on March 24, 1918 in Savannah, Georgia. He graduated from Savannah High School, where he was class president, student commanding officer of the ROTC, captain of the football and basketball teams and an undefeated springboard diving champion. He attended Duke University and played on January 1, 1939 at the Rose Bowl Game, the first Duke team to go. This team, the 1938 Iron Dukes, was undefeated, untied and unscored upon, a season record unsurpassed to date.



He attended the University of Miami on a diving scholarship and later

performed in Billy Rose's Arcade. For his sports accomplishments he was inducted into the Greater Savannah Hall of Fame.

At the outbreak of World War II, he entered the Air Force (AAF), became an officer with the rank of lieutenant and pilot, served in the European Theater, and flew in the first American raid from England to the European mainland in the Mighty Eighth Air Force Squadron. Later he was transferred to the First American Squadron to operate out of North Africa. He was in the 414th Squadron, 97 bombergroup. His plane was the "*All American*", a B-17 Flying Fortress.



Ken as a pilot

The closing days of January brought both good and bad news. The good ones were that the German 6th Army at Stalingrad had surrendered with terrible losses. The bad ones were that sandstorms could be expected over the area they would have to land and another airfield had to be found. The 301st group which had already moved into Ain M'ilia, north and east of Biskra, didn't like
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the change. On February 1 . 1943, the weather cooperated and fifty flying forts from the 97th and the 301st were airborne for the dock area of Tunis. Enemy fighters were ready and one made a pass at the formation before the bombs were dropped.

After letting his bombs go over enemy targets, he would occasionally shout over his earphones "Boy-o-boy, we got 'em today! Boy, we really got 'em.", as he later told a Savannah Newspaper on April 1943.

Turning from the target, bombs already dropped, Ken spotted two fighters circling to attack once more. Glancing at the bomber formation smoke could be seen coming from four of them, as they were hit by enemy fire, while another struggled to maintain the formation. Still the two Messerschmitt 109s pointed to Major Coulter, piloting the lead ship of the formation. Guns were hammering and maybe the leader of the fighters had been struck by our bullets, as he would later recall. As the pilot began a roll through the bomber formation it crashed into the lead Fort, ripping off a wing causing it to crash while three of the crewmen survived and entered prison camp.

But this didn't end the action for the fighter, who careening crazy through the air crashed into the rear of the fuselage of the "*All-American*", causing the fighter to break apart with pieces remaining in the Fortress. The left horizontal stabilizer and left elevator of the airplane were completely torn away. The vertical fin and rudder were damaged. The tail swayed in the breeze. One elevator cable continued to function and when the Fortress neared the base in Tunis a flare was fired to signal an emergency landing. An ambulance was waiting at the end of the runway. When the plane ground to a halt Lt. Bragg called from the cockpit window, "No business, Doc." as for my crew are all safe and uninjured.



Air photo of the *"All-American"* approaching to landing

Associated press dispatch on February 1943 the conditions of the plane and the possible inability to fly back home. A Boeing engineer, manufacturers of the Fortresses, who inspected it, stated that the airplane would not fly in such condition. When three sightseers crawled into the plane to have it inspected, the entire tail fell off and the plane will brake in two. This made the *"All-American"*, the most photographed airplane during World War II. This plane was later restored to action by the 50th Service Squadron.



Ken with the tail of the "*All-American*"

The hit ballad "*Comin' In on a Wing and a Prayer*", was written and dedicated to this episode, and he received the "Distinguished Flying Cross". There were several different versions of the song later to fit different war strikes. He retired from the service with the rank of Captain of the Air Force.

My uncle is featured in exhibits at the Mighty 8th Air Force Heritage Museum in Savannah, GA, his hometown.

After the war, he graduated from Princeton University with a degree in architecture. He worked in New Jersey, Puerto Rico and then moved to Saint Thomas, US Virgin Islands where he practiced architecture for 30 years. He received various recognitions during his time. He was charter member and past president of the Rotary Club of Saint Thomas. He was director of project design for the Public Works Department in St. Thomas. His passion was playing golf, where he spent all his free time.

On October 13, 1999, Ken lost the last battle in the Health War, when he succumbed to leukemia, a form of cancer. He died at Duke University Hospital in Durham, SC at the age of 81 years old when the Angel of Death took him during his sleep from the arms of his beloved wife Aura. On one of my visits to the hospital, he still had his high spirits to beat cancer. He never ceased to be himself, loving, caring and a wonderful human being.

The Secretary of the Air Force will quote at his passing, "He accomplished the impossible and made this world a better place." "The song "*Comin' In on a wing and a Prayer*" is a lasting legacy to his indomitable spirit".

His remains were cremated and put to rest at the Greenwich section of the Bonaventure Cemetery on a Tuesday on October 19, 1999, at 2 P.M. He is survived by his wife, Aura Ferrer Bragg, his daughter, Carol Louise Thomas of Tulsa, OK; a brother, Dr. Vernon C. Bragg, a sister, Lillian Atkinson

Davis of Savannah and a great family that will never forget him.

I know that right now, he is playing eternally his passion, golf in the Elysian Fields.



Ken & Aura Bragg
Gone, but never forgotten.
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OPINION

LETTERS, FAXES, E-MAIL

'Sonny' Bragg will be remembered by many

Upon returning home after visiting out-of-town relatives, I learned of the death of Kendrick R. "Sonny" Bragg. Sonny was a campus hero who left a wonderful legacy of leadership and character to those of us who followed him at Savannah High School.

The Morning News' obituary duly recorded his accomplishments as a student, an athlete, a soldier and a patriot, and a successful architect. He was even more than all that, though. He was an inspiration to any and all who ever met him.

As a collegiate football player on Duke University's undefeated team of 1937, and a player in the 1938 Rose Bowl game, Sonny never made All-American. Even so, he was to many Savannahians the "All-American boy," a natural leader and an exemplary fellow.

His late mother, Lillian C. Bragg, was a popular member of the Savannah High faculty. She also was one of Savannah's most active citizens, involved in many civic endeavors. She was, in fact, the catalyst for the political reform movement when, in 1947, her letter to the editor of the Morning News blew the whistle on fraud at the voting polls. Her letter was the shot heard across Savannah.

Yet, even with Mrs. Bragg's accomplishments and contributions to the community in her own right, she was also known to one and all as "Sonny Bragg's mother." It was a sobriquet she carried with pride. And his surviving sister, Lillian "Chappie" Atkinson Davis, still beams with pride when she's referred to as "Sonny Bragg's sister."

News of Sonny's passing has triggered many good and cherished memories scattered across Savannah.

TOM COFFEY