In 2017 continuing internet search for South Park High School identified students who lost their life in service, additional information was located with regard to Matthew M. O’Brien from several websites and sources.

Following graduation in 1940, he worked for a year on the New York Central railroad as a locomotive fireman. His father was an assistant general yard master at the Steam Railway.¹

He enlisted in the Army Airforce on November 5, 1942. Following in-processing, he was assigned to preflight training at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center where Aviation Cadet O’Brien advanced² to the Curtiss Flying School, Brady TX for additional training. He graduated³ in May, 1943.

Following the second portion of his training at Brady, he completed the advanced phase of his training at Foster Field, TX and received his silver pilot’s wings from the Army Air Forces Central Flying Training Command⁴ and was assigned to the 316th Fighter Squadron, a combat unit in Europe in November 1943. He was one of three members of his class who were given medals for expert gunnery on graduation.

Lt. O’Brien reported to his squadron at Cercola Field in Naples Province, Italy. The squadron had moved there from Menzel Heurr Airfield, Tunisia beginning in early October 1943. As it became fully operational the 316th provided operational support to the 5th Army.

According to the Unit History⁵,

“…on 10 May the Squadron moved a few miles closer to Rome when it shifted operations to Pignataro Maggiore, Italy. The final phase of the Rome-Arno campaign opened that month with the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies driving up both

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¹ Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Buffalo City. ED 64-50, Sheet 62B, April 8-12, 1940
² Courier Express, March 23, 1943
³ Buffalo Evening News, May 26, 1943
⁴ Courier Express, October 5, 1943
⁵ http://usafunithistory.com/PDF/0300/316th_Fighter_Squadron.pdf
sides of the Italian "boot". One of the vital keys to the German position south of Rome was Monastery Hill near Cassino, from which the enemy was able to observe much of the American front. Though almost surrounded, the enemy held on doggedly and effectively blocked progress of the Fifth Army.

On 12 May the 316th and other elements of the 324th Group sent two strikes against the Germans in one of the war's best examples of fighter-bomber accuracy. The first mission was through heavy overcast and intense ack-ack fire, but five tons of bombs were dropped on German positions on Monastery Hill (Cassino) 300 yards from American troops.

The second raid on the enemy troops, which were massing in a gulley for a counterattack, was only 75 yards from friendly forces. No American troops were hit, and both missions were spectacularly successful."

Additional targeting included a successful attack against a nearby stronghold to force the surrender of an enemy garrison.

An internet site providing Italian campaign and World War II history provides information regarding 13 May 1944. While posted in Italian, the translation relates:

"On the morning of May 13, 1944, eight Curtiss P-40 L Warhawk hunters of the 31st and 316th fighters of the 324th Fighter Group of the Twelfth Air Force (12th Air Force) were set up. The day's mission was to bomb a convoy carrying German men and men near Cori. The formation was commanded by Chief Squadron Major Edward A. Sanders Jr.; the lieutenants were Lieutenant James P. Dealy, Lieutenant Arthur F Kusch Jr, Lieutenant Matthew O'Brien, Lieutenant Kenneth Scheiwe, Lieutenant William King, and two other officers.

Coming near Cori the visibility was very poor due to many clouds. Thus, Major Sanders decided to bomb the second objective, another German convoy coming from Rome and arriving in Frosinone, who carried military means. Near the territory between Montelanico and Gavignano, however, they were suddenly attacked by German hunters Messerschmitt BF 109, in turn forming a formation of eighteen German hunters who were escorted to twenty-one Focke-Wulf FW 190 aircraft.

This was the beginning of a fiery clash during which Lt. Kusch's Curtiss P-40 aircraft began to lose weight, emitting a lot of black smoke. Soon the American plane was lost sight of the other pilots, crashing into the mountains of Gorga.

Soon after, Lieutenant O'Brien was impressed with being hit, but fortunately he managed to get on with the parachute (according to our assumption was Lieutenant O'Brien being helped by a family of Carpineto Romano, as he told that book).

6 http://digilander.libero.it/historiamilitaria4/ballini.htm
Lastly, Lieutenant Dealy was struck, who drove the parachute some ten miles away on the Ciociaria Mountains.

Major Sanders tried to make a reconnaissance over the place, but noticing signs of life returned to the base.

This duel, also recounted on some American aviation books, went to history because that May 13 was supposed to be the last mission for P 40 aircraft in the Mediterranean theater."

Additional internet search located a summary of the “dog fight” from Lt. James P. Dealy. Posted in the 324th Fighter Group Honor Roll, his harrowing account of the event reads:

“…Now, at last, to my forty third mission! This took place in the late morning of Saturday the 13th of May, 1944 (I've been wary of May the 13th now for over four decades!) and just two days after the powerful offensive thrust against the Axis forces in northern Italy. Intelligence called for an air strike against a train loaded with enemy troops enroute to relieve their garrison at Monte Cassino. The train had left Rome and was on its way to Frasinone. Most of the pilots in all three squadrons of the 324th were already on sorties or were otherwise out of the camp area at Pignataro (we had recently moved there from Cercola to be closer to the front). I was resting in my tent after flying twenty nine missions in the preceding twenty eight days, when they dug me out of my sack for that ill-fated scramble....four pilots from out of the 315th and four of us from the 316th.

Major Sanders led the eight ship sortie and his element leader was Lt. Scheiwe. One wing man was Lt. Kusch. Lt. King led our flight and I was his element leader. Lt. Mathew O'Brien (his second or third sortie) was on King's wing and another new recruit flew on my wing. Another minus for me was that my own P40, number 79, "The Lovely Lois", was out for a routine maintenance check; therefore they borrowed Lt. Sven Jernstrom's number 93 Warhawk for me to fly. Each pilot left his parachute in the bucket seat all the time. Since "Jerky" was about six inches taller and fifty pounds heavier than I, you can imagine how his 'chute fit me!

We searched all the way up the Liri Valley railroad tracks to the suburbs of Rome and then Major Sanders led us back for another look. At some point over the high mountains approximately 45 miles northeast of Anzio, we were jumped by about twenty of the crack "Ace of Spades" ME109 Luftwaffe fighter pilots. They probably scored several hundreds of conquests over Allied planes (they counted four for a four engine bomber), and they would add more victories to their score before this engagement was over! There were also two or three dozen FW190s armed with bombs under the MEs, but I do not recall seeing any of those planes in the dog fight. Sanders pulled into a

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7 http://raf-112-squadron.org/324thfghonor_roll.html, 13MAY44
Luftberry left and ordered "Bombs away!" Before the circle was completed, Lt. Kusch was hit and (I was informed later) went in with plane and bomb.

After the second circling and upon resuming to the Luftberry from shooting nearly head on at the 109s (I noted they attacked in pairs), I saw Lt. O'Brien just ahead of me level off to the right and leap out of his plane. I honestly believe that "Obey" made a speed record for hitting the silk, and we were flying about 250 mph! On the third orbit of the Luftberry, I saw "Obey" floating down in his white 'chute just below us remaining six 324th pilots and a striped parachute about 2,000 feet above our level (one less Kraut pilot who nailed him?).

No time to keep count though I knew King was right in front of me now. I don't know how many orbits we made, perhaps five or six, that's about how many times I levelled off to spray some 50 cal. rounds at them. On that last one, I had levelled off to get a good burst at a yo-yo-ing Jerry pilot (and I thought I was being successful) at the same time that our leader called "Tally ho!" and made a split S down toward a distant bank of clouds between mountain ridges. I was too intent on getting a second victory, so I wound up being "Tail end Charlie" and quite a distance rearward. Although I could yet see the others in single file, with several pursuing MEs, I could not count them and assumed my wingman was behind me. I nearly red lined the throttle and was in a more vertical flight than the others to try and catch up. Soon, barely above the huge rock boulders in that valley, I was gaining very well on the others. Shortly before the leader reached the cloud cover, the second or third American pilot behind him suddenly pulled left and up the mountain slope and so fiercely fired at a 109 that he must have seriously damaged it. Then, another ME flew in on our pilot's tail immediately in front of me. I whipped my plane left and up into that enemy's tail and with my "catch up" speed I was firing almost point blank. I was still firing when old number 93 was very well clobbered. In these last four sentences we're talking fractions of seconds in elapsed time. Despite being stunned, my reflexes saved further damage through pulling right and up into that welcomed thin cloud cover."

Many years later amateur researchers in Italy located wreckage from the May 13, 1944 air battle. An article online,⁸

“…discovered dramatic evidence for one of World War II's last Curtiss P-40 Warhawk and Luftwaffe's JG 53 "Aces of Spades" dogfights, revealing a forgotten story of courage and survival.” It chronicles the events including the first shoot-down and the loss of Lt. Kusch. It continues, “The plane of Lt. Matthew O'Brien was the next to come under fire, and he was able to bail out, wounded in a leg. O'Brien was befriended and hidden away by three Italian civilians for more than a month, until the liberation of the region by the advancing Allied troops.

⁸https://www.seeker.com/wwii-dogfight-evidence-found-in-italy-1767727186.html; WWII U.S. Pilots Downed Outside of Rome: Photos by Rosella Lorenzi August 26, 2013 6:00 am EDT
So for more than one month, Lt. Matthew O'Brien, 21yrs, was recovering from a leg wound he received while engaged in aerial combat, a “dog fight” with the Nazi’s, escaping his stricken aircraft at approximately 250 miles per hour, parachuting into enemy held territory, was found and hidden by an Italian family and then safely returned to American units who entered the region a month later. He received a Purple Heart.

The date and location of his return are not currently known. His squadron, according to the unit history, had moved to Le Banca Airfield, Italy on 7 Jun 1944 and then to Montalto Di Castro, Italy, 15 Jun 1944.

A local article appeared reporting, “Graduated as a fighter pilot and commissioned last October, Second Lieut. Matthew M. O'Brien Jr. son of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew M. O'Brien of 14 Teresa Pl. was wounded in the Mediterranean area. He was one of three members of his class who were given medals for expert gunnery on graduation.”

At home in March 1944 his sweetheart, Edna Holland was recognized as an Aid to the War Effort, along with two others for contributing their time and services as volunteer drivers of Army cars on official business to and from the Curtiss-Wright plants and other locations in Buffalo. As a member of the American Women’s Voluntary Service, she was presented with gold wings by Col. Walter E. Richards, Army Air Forces representative at Curtiss-Wright. The wings were awarded for driving at least one day each week for six months.

According to the News in August 1944, “Miss Edna Mae Holland, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward B. Holland, leaves Tuesday for Selma, Ala., where her wedding to Lieut. Matthew M. O'Brien Jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien of Buffalo, will take place later in the week. Lieut. O'Brien is stationed in Craig Field. Miss Holland will be accompanied by her mother and Mrs. O'Brien.”

From his assignment as a Flight Instructor in Selma, Ala. he was selected and assigned in December 1944 to an Instructors' School at Randolph Field, TX. After the conclusion of the four week training course he was re-assigned as a flight instructor at Stewart Field, Newburgh NY.

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9 Buffalo Evening News, July 19, 1944  
10 Courier Express, March 26, 1944, Pg 4-B  
11 Buffalo Evening News, August 23, 1944  
12 Courier Express, December 1, 1944
On May 27, 1945 Lt. O’Brien and a colleague flew into Buffalo on a two-ship training flight. After having dinner with his parents on Teresa Pl. the two took off from Buffalo enroute to Stewart Field. At 2202hrs while flying in instrument conditions, Lt. O’Brien crashed into east face of Mount Tremper, approximately 2 miles south-east of Phonecia, NY at 2,300 feet. Lt. O’Brien was killed in this crash. The second plane piloted by Lt. Joseph Cook and Sgt. Lucidi also crashed about the same time and were rescued not long after.

Funeral services were held from the family residence on Teresa Place and at St. John the Evangelist church. Lieutenant O’Brien was buried at Holy Cross Cemetery, Section R-R, Lot 10, Grave 2, Lackawanna NY on June 4, 1945. He was 22 years old.

The Buffalo Evening News reported the birth of a son to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew M. O’Brien, Jr. of 87 Henrietta St. on June 26, 1945.

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13 Buffalo Evening News, July 16, 1945