

Inflammation

Myocarditis is an inflammation of the heart muscle. During the COVID pandemic, the news media reported that the virus could cause myocarditis, among other maladies. But myocarditis, like viruses themselves, is nothing new to the 21st Century. Ward Brower Matthews of Clemson's Class of 1941 fell victim to this very ailment.

Matthews was a horticulture major from Orlando, Florida in a day when out-of-state students were far less common on Clemson's small campus. Matthews enrolled at Clemson in 1937 and was elected president of his freshman class. As a cadet, he rose to the rank of second lieutenant and was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment. Matthews clearly possessed both talent and leadership skills, for he was elected president not only of the Horticulture Club, but of the Glee Club as well.



W. B. MATTHEWS

Approximately 75% of the Class of 1941 was on active duty with the military by the following year, Matthews included. By the summer of 1942, First Lieutenant Matthews was based at Barksdale Field outside of Bossier City, Louisiana. At the time, Barksdale was a training base for the Army Air Force, preparing bombardment groups flying heavy and medium bombers for combat operations overseas.

In July 1942, Matthews was hospitalized. Viral infections are usually the causes of myocarditis, the symptoms of which include chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, and irregular heart rhythms. Severe myocarditis can weaken the heart so that the body doesn't get enough blood. Clots can form in the heart, leading to stroke or heart attack. On August 4, First Lieutenant Matthews died from chronic myocarditis at Orlando's Orange General Hospital.

First Lieutenant Ward Brower Matthews was survived by his wife Jean, his parents, and his sister. He was buried in Orlando's Woodlawn Cemetery.

