

Mustang Pilot

Hitler's Third Reich was on its last legs, being squeezed between the inexorable advance of the Red Army from the east and the broad offensive by the Americans and British in the west. On February 22 and 23, 1945, the Allies launched Operation Clarion, a major aerial assault over Germany. Three thousand, five hundred bombers and nearly five thousand fighters attacked rail stations, docks, and bridges across Germany in an effort to destroy all means of transportation. At the controls of one of those Allied fighters was Second Lieutenant Garland McGregor, Jr. of Greenville.



Garland McGregor arrived on Clemson's campus during America's last summer of peace. Before the end of his first semester, the Japanese thrust the United States into war.

McGregor was a chemical engineering major. He was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the Cadet Brigade. During his summer break, McGregor worked with J.E. Sirrine Company's chemical engineering division. Upon his return to campus for his sophomore year, he was appointed a cadet corporal.

In February 1943, McGregor was called to active duty with the Army Air Force and he traveled to Miami Beach for basic training. Before long, McGregor was back in his hometown as a participant in the Army Specialized Training Program at Furman University. He left Furman in July 1943 headed for Nashville, Tennessee where he was classified as a pilot.

McGregor trained at airfields in Alabama and Georgia and was commissioned in May 1944. His training for aerial combat took place at Page Field, Fort Myers, Florida. In January 1945, McGregor shipped out to England, where he joined the 370th Fighter Squadron, one of the units protecting the heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force.



P-51s of the 370th Fighter Squadron

By the middle of February, Allied land armies were ready to resume the advance into Germany that had been disrupted by the Germans' winter offensive. To support the ground forces, Allied commanders requested that Anglo-American air power strike a coordinated blow against German transportation targets by simultaneously attacking as many targets as possible. The dates set for these attacks, many of which would fall on smaller towns not previously bombed, were February 22 and 23.

Missions flown on February 22 were deemed successful, with accurate bombing and few losses. Emboldened, Allied air commanders launched another round of comprehensive raids the following day. The 8th Air Force alone dispatched more than 1,200 bombers and 700 fighters to range across Germany and attack dozens of targets.

By the time the aircraft returned to eastern England's airfields, the region's weather had deteriorated. Second Lieutenant McGregor, flying his P-51D Mustang fighter, became separated from his flight leader in the decreasing visibility. His airplane crashed three-and-a-half miles northeast of East Wretham Airfield, killing McGregor instantly. An investigation surmised that McGregor "was unable to orient himself to actual instrument flying and as a result crashed."

Garland McGregor, Jr. was survived by his parents, a sister, and two brothers. After the war, his remains were returned to Greenville and buried at Woodlawn Cemetery.

For more information about Garland McGregor, Jr. see:

