

## Atypical Path to Service

Richard Craig Wannamaker of St. Matthews served his country during World War II, but he didn't follow the typical path of a Clemson cadet.

Dick Wannamaker was a member of the Class of 1940 majoring in agronomy. His roots to Clemson ran deeper than most of his fellow cadets as his grandfather, John E. Wannamaker, a prominent farmer, had served as a life trustee of the college. Dick was very involved in campus life, participating in the Palmetto Literary Society, the Tri-County Club and Kappa Alpha Sigma, the local chapter of the American Society of Agronomy, which he served as vice president. He was managing editor of the *Agrarian*, an agricultural journal published by Clemson's students as a medium to share knowledge with the farmers of the state. Under his leadership, the *Agrarian* was recognized as the best college magazine in South Carolina.



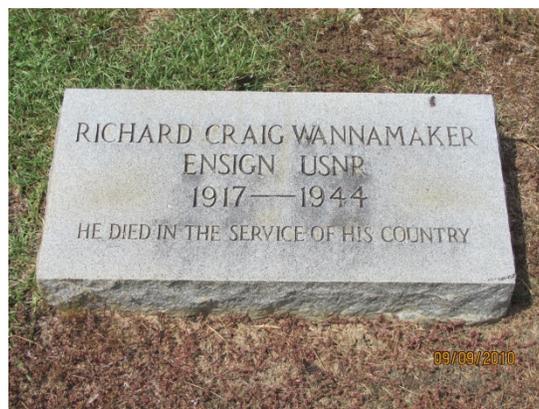
Unlike many of his classmates, Wannamaker did not pursue military training through the ROTC beyond the required first two years. That didn't stop him from participating as a member of the Rifle Team, and it didn't stop him from volunteering for military service once America was dragged into World War II. While many of his classmates leveraged their ROTC training for infantry commissions or Air Corps billets, Dick Wannamaker volunteered for the Navy's Seabees.

Following his initial training, Wannamaker was sent to the Southwest Pacific theater, likely building airfields and other facilities as the Allies slowly halted the Japanese advances and then began to roll back the aggressors. After several months, Wannamaker's intelligence, performance and commitment were apparent and he was shipped back to the States for officers' candidate school. In January 1944, he completed his officer's qualifications and was commissioned an ensign in the Navy Reserves.

In both Europe and the Pacific, amphibious operations were required to close with and destroy the enemy. These complex operations required intricate planning, close coordination between services and lots of practice exercises--and the exercises themselves were not without hazard. Numerous service members were killed in exercises and practice landings, but military leaders understood that experience gained in realistic training were worth these losses, losses which would help prevent higher casualties and even defeat during actual operations. On November 6, 1944, while conducting night amphibious training at Florida's Fort Pierce, Dick Wannamaker drowned.

He was survived by his father D. D. Wannamaker and two brothers, Captain J. T. Wannamaker then serving on the staff of Army Air Force General Hap Arnold in Washington, and Corporal R. D. Wannamaker then serving with US forces somewhere in Europe.

Ensign Richard Craig Wannamaker was buried at Saint



Paul's Methodist Cemetery in Saint Matthews on November 17, 1944. His ultimate sacrifice helped pave the way for the ultimate victory of Allied forces some nine months later.