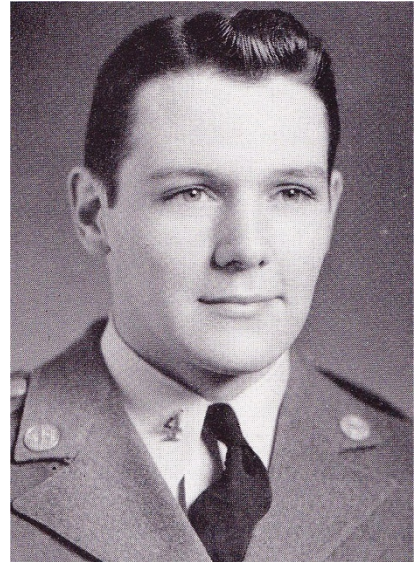


China Mustang

There was a war on. Once the young men of the Class of 1942 crossed the stage of the Outdoor Theater and received their diplomas most of them were on their way to military service. Manchester Boyington Watson, Jr. of Greenville was headed to the Army Air Force.

Bo Watson was a general science major. He was a member of the Greenville County Club and the Carnegie Music Society. As a junior, he was appointed a company first sergeant. As the United States military mobilization gathered momentum in 1941, ROTC summer training was shifted from Fort McClellan, Alabama, where it had been conducted for years, to the Clemson campus. Watson qualified that summer as a marksman on the firing range. As a senior, he was promoted to first lieutenant and served as the executive officer of Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment. Bo Watson was also already a pilot. He was a member of the Flying Cadets, an organization of upper classmen who had earned their pilot's licenses.



After reporting for active duty, Watson used his pilot's credentials to facilitate a transfer to the Army Air Force. He received his wings as a military pilot at Moore Field, Texas in August 1943. In April 1944, he went overseas where he joined the 74th Fighter Squadron of the 23rd Fighter Group at Ken Chow, China. The 23rd had started the war as the American Volunteer Group, the famous Flying Tigers led by General Claire Chennault. When the United States came into the war, the Flying Tigers were reorganized and placed under the command of the 14th Air Force. Its area of operations extended from China to Burma, French Indochina, and Formosa. By the time of Watson's arrival, his squadron had transitioned from P-40 Warhawk fighters to the new P-51 Mustang.



The Mustang could fly up to a hundred miles per hour faster than the Warhawk and its operating range was more than double, making it better suited for the long missions imposed by the vast area of operations covered by the 23rd Fighter Group. The group's missions included counter air, bomber escort, reconnaissance, and

intercepting Japanese bombers. The Mustangs were also employed in strafing and bombing missions.

On December 3, 1944, First Lieutenant Watson was dispatched with a formation of aircraft on a fighter sweep to attack port facilities on the Yellow River at Luliang in northern China. Watson's tactics for the mission included skip bombing in which his aircraft approached the target at low altitude and level attitude to skip his bomb across the water much as one would skip a stone across the surface of a pond. After releasing his bomb, Watson failed to pull up and crashed into a warehouse in the Luliang docks.

First Lieutenant Watson was awarded the Purple Heart. He was survived by his wife, their young daughter, and his parents. After the war, his remains were returned to South Carolina and buried in the Ridge Spring Cemetery in Saluda County.

