

Night Mission

It seems odd to drive through campus without seeing students. The University's response to the Coronavirus pandemic has left campus and downtown Clemson with only a tiny fraction of its normal population. It is strange to note the absence of students on the grassy expanse of Bowman Field--strange, but not unprecedented.

In response to military manpower needs during World War II, practically all of Clemson's cadets left campus in the spring of 1943 to report for active duty. That year's graduating seniors, most of whom had earned Army commissions through ROTC, reported as second lieutenants. Members of the Class of 1944, like John Oscar Mauldin of Greenville, reported for basic training.

Mauldin was a mechanical engineering major from Greenville, where his father, McHardy, had served as mayor. The younger Mauldin had marched and played in Tiger Band and had been a member of the Dance Association. Like many other Clemson men, Mauldin volunteered for the Army Air Force.

He earned his navigator's wings in early September 1944 and then was ordered to report to the 422nd Base Unit at Tonopah Army Airfield in the Nevada desert. Tonopah was used as a training base for B-24 heavy bombers and their crews.

On October 25, 1944, Flight Officer Mauldin was assigned as the navigator on a night training mission piloted by Second Lieutenant Henry Rogers. At an altitude of 20,000 feet, one of the outboard engines began to overheat, so Rogers feathered it in an attempt to cool it off. According to the official crash report, the aircraft then became "hard to control" so Rogers feathered the other outboard engine as well. With two engines feathered, the aircraft could not maintain altitude.

Rogers reported an emergency and proceeded to descend over the airfield, but his attempts to unfeather his outboard engines were unsuccessful and the aircraft lost altitude so quickly that he was unable to turn on his final approach to the runway. Instead, Rogers straightened his glide and attempted a crash landing. Rogers, his copilot, radio operator, and one gunner survived the crash with injuries. Mauldin and four others were killed. He was twenty-one years old.



Mauldin was survived by his mother. His body was returned to Greenville and was buried at Springwood Cemetery.

