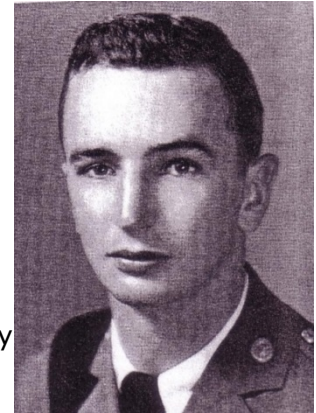


Highly Respected, Highly Decorated

"He had that certain something all great leaders have and we sensed it," wrote Dennis Scranton nearly 70 years later. Scranton was a member of John Muldrow's aircrew. "He was a great man, a brilliant man..."

John Ellison Muldrow, Jr. came to Clemson from the Lee County farming community of Bishopville. A member of the Class of 1937, Muldrow was a civil engineering major and was so respected that he was elected president of the Clemson chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Clearly Muldrow's fellow cadets saw in him the same characteristics that in a few short years would make him a highly respected military leader.



Muldrow completed the Naval Air School at Pensacola, Florida and then served as an instructor at Naval air stations in Jacksonville and Lake City. In early January 1944 Muldrow was transferred to the Pacific Theater and assigned as executive officer of VB-108, a Navy bombing squadron. Almost immediately, Muldrow saw action, as described in an article appearing later that year in the Lee County *Messenger*:

Late in the afternoon of January 7, he looked down from the cockpit of a Liberator search plane at death and destruction less than a hundred feet below on the parched surface of a coral atoll in the Marshall Islands. Two multi-engined Jap seaplanes, an oiler and a patrol boat were sinking in the harbor. A dense cloud of smoke arose from flaming hangars, radio installations, barracks and other buildings. Eight Liberator search planes, skimming low over the water from their base almost astride the Equator, had just surprised the strongly defended Jap base at Wotje Atoll with another of their spectacular attacks at tree top level.

Muldrow seemed to have a nose for the enemy, participating in one engagement after another during the first half of 1944. While on a routine search patrol over the Pacific Ocean, Muldrow's PB4Y-1 patrol bomber, the Navy version of the B-24 Liberator, passed a friendly task force steaming towards Saipan, less than 200 miles away. Six Grumman TBF Avengers, the Navy's deadly torpedo planes, darted from one of the carriers to investigate the four engine stranger. As Muldrow recounted in the *Messenger* article:



PB4Y-1 Bomber

"They flew alongside, had a good look at us. They stayed with us for about 10 minutes as we took a course ahead of the task force and towards Saipan. After the TBF's left us we were cruising along 1,500 feet above the water when Pollard, my port waist gunner sighted a twin engine plane about 10 miles away. It was coming towards us and slightly across our course. Beautifully streamlined, it was sleek and black, with gray under the wings, Red discs outlined in white told us it was an enemy plane—we recognized it as a Jap twin engine fighter plane"

Muldrow recognized the Japanese plane was on a collision course with the task force. Detection of the task force would result in a concentrated attack by enemy air and naval forces. Muldrow acted without hesitation, closing on the faster aircraft and surprising

it from the rear. His crew, whom he described as "the best gunners in the air," quickly shot down the enemy aircraft, saving the task force below from detection.

On January 26, 1944, Muldrow's mission was long-range reconnaissance during operations against Japanese forces occupying the Marshall-Gilbert Islands. About 40 miles from enemy-held Eniwetok, Muldrow sighted a large Japanese tanker escorted by two patrol boats. Muldrow guided his bomber into the attack, across the tanker just high enough to clear the masts and dropped two bombs. "I could see the ship's propeller spinning," Muldrow recounted to a reporter, "as the explosions lifted the whole stern out of the water. We did a wing over and crossed back over the ship and the two escorts, with the gunners pouring over 1,100 rounds of .50 calibre rifle fire into them." Despite damage to his aircraft, Muldrow and his crew returned safely to their base. For this mission, Muldrow was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

February was no less dangerous, as attested by the citation for Muldrow's first award of the Air Medal. *"On 18 February 1944, he participated in a low-level attack on shipping in Lele Harbor, adjoining the enemy base at Kusaie Island, scoring a direct bomb hit which contributed to the sinking of a coastal cargo vessel. On 23 February 1944, he carried out an extremely difficult mission, a low level attack on a coastal cargo vessel sheltered in Lele Harbor by hills which rose abruptly from the shore where the vessel was moored. In the face of accurate enemy anti-aircraft fire which riddled his plane, he made five successive bombing runs which so severely damaged the vessel that it was immobilized. On both of these missions, shore installations were heavily strafed. The accomplishment of these vital blows at the enemy's sole source of supply under the especially hazardous conditions faced was a deed of great intrepidity, high courage, exceptional airmanship, and in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service."*

According to Lieutenant Leo G. Wetherill, co-pilot on Muldrow's bomber, Muldrow and his crew continued to inflict significant damage on the enemy. According to Wetherill, post-war records confirmed that the Japanese submarine *I-174* was sunk by Muldrow and crew on an April 12 mission.

Muldrow flew 40 missions in six months supporting operations in the Marshall and Carolines Islands before being promoted to squadron commander and rotating back to the States. With Muldrow now in command, the squadron was re-designated VPB-108 and the training of new crews began at Crow's Landing, California. Ensign Albert Malouf was one of the new officers joining the squadron. "I was co-pilot and navigator to the skipper, Lt. Cmdr. John Muldrow." Malouf recalled meeting Muldrow the first week of October and feeling "very lucky and privileged to be flying as a copilot with the 'skipper'." The squadron made good use of its time in California by receiving and training in their new PB4Y-2 Privateer aircraft, a larger, better-armed version of the Liberator specially modified by the Navy for use in the Pacific.



Crew One: Muldrow is center, back row. Malouf is to his left. Scranton is second from right, front row.

In the early morning hours of January 19, 1945, the squadron took off for Hawaii and Muldrow's second combat tour in the Pacific. After a stopover at Kaneohe Naval Air Station, VPB-108 continued to the far Pacific, basing operations first on Peleliu before relocating to Tinian.

According to Scranton, the radio/radar operator, there was an "unfriendly rivalry" between Muldrow's crew, Crew One, and the crew of the squadron executive officer. "We were ahead in ships sunk and raids in general," he recalled.

Malouf remembered that in early May, 1945, all PB4Y-2 Privateer Squadrons on Tinian were on a one hour alert to attack Marcus Island, about 400 miles northeast of Tinian. Marcus was a tiny island, essentially an airfield surrounded by water. Yet, from this airfield, the Japanese intended to stage suicide bombers which would then proceed to attack the US Fleet at Ulithi. On May 8th Crew One was on standby, but no strike was ordered. On May 9th, a mission against Marcus Island was called and half of squadron VPB-102 and half of squadron VPB-108 were ordered to attack Marcus at dawn. Muldrow's crew was not on standby that morning, but Muldrow, as the squadron commander, intended to lead the attack. He didn't wake up his crew but instead took the crew of Lieutenant Wallace which had been alerted and was ready to go.

Instead of rendezvousing with its sister squadron, VPB-102 attacked first stirring up the island's defenders. About twenty minutes later Muldrow led his VPB-108 squadron into the cauldron at an altitude of just 25 feet. Muldrow's aircraft was hit almost immediately by the now alert defenders. A 40 mm anti-aircraft shell exploded near the cockpit, killing the copilot and dealing Muldrow a head wound. Another shell hit the aircraft through its open bomb bay doors, blowing a crew member headlong into the sea below. Despite damage to three engines, Muldrow somehow held his bomber on course and delivered his deadly cargo of bombs onto the airfield. The plane crashed about one mile beyond the island.

"It was a small island and gunned like an aircraft carrier," Scranton remembered. "The flak was unbelievable." According to the citation for the Navy Cross, the service's highest decoration for valor behind the Medal of Honor:

Lieutenant Commander Muldrow unhesitatingly risked his life to lead his flight at perilously

low level over heavily defended enemy territory and, although Japanese antiaircraft fire disabled one engine as he entered the target area, boldly defied the rapidly increasing volume of bursting shrapnel and accurate small arms fire to continue his approach. Undaunted when the merciless barrage sheared the other engine from the wing and set the interior of the bomber ablaze, he held an undeviating course, cutting through the blasting fury of powerful Japanese gunfire and flying his plane with great skill and judgement despite the powerful opposition until his fatally damaged aircraft, with the entire crew on board, crashed into the sea during withdrawal from the target. A superb airman, Lieutenant Commander Muldrow, by his daring combat tactics and resolute disregard of all personal danger, had completed his assigned mission in the face of overwhelming odds and contributed essentially to the infliction of heavy casualties on



PB4Y-2 Privateer Patrol Bomber

enemy troops, the destruction of two hostile aircraft and the intensive damaging of vital Japanese installations during this fierce strike. His unwavering devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Services. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.

Despite crashing into the sea, there were five survivors. The submarine USS *Jallao*, picked up the survivors under heavy fire from shore-based batteries. Muldrow was not among them.

Scranton later wrote, "Flying without his own crew is a superstition of bad luck shared by all flyers. The only time (Muldrow) did, it was fatal... We would have fought for the privilege to stay in his crew. It was an honor to fly with him." Malouf agreed. "All those who flew with Lt. Commander Muldrow had great respect and admiration for him. The skipper deserved receiving the Navy Cross, his many Air Medals, and the loyalty and admiration of all the men who flew under his command. He was a brave and skilled pilot who performed his duties to the highest standards of the United States Navy... Not a May goes by that I don't think about Lt. Commander Muldrow, a great skipper and leader."

John Muldrow was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. He was also decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with four gold stars and the Purple Heart.

He was survived by his widowed mother and his wife Betty. His name is inscribed on the Courts of the Missing at the Honolulu Memorial, Honolulu, Hawaii. A memorial marker honoring Muldrow was placed by his family in the Bishopville Presbyterian Cemetery in Bishopville, South Carolina.



Dennis Scranton's book [Crew One, A World War II Memoir of VPB-108](http://www.amazon.com/Crew-One-World-Memoir-VPB-108/dp/1470055279/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1440098356&sr=8-5&keywords=Crew+One) was dedicated to John Muldrow and can be found at:

http://www.amazon.com/Crew-One-World-Memoir-VPB-108/dp/1470055279/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1440098356&sr=8-5&keywords=Crew+One