



*John C. Waldron*

## *Dakota Images*

Fort Pierre native John Charles Waldron became a World War II hero when he led his torpedo squadron in its first and last engagement—an attack on the Japanese fleet in the Pacific Ocean.

Waldron was born in Fort Pierre on 21 August 1900 to Charles Waldron and Jane Van Meter Waldron, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Young Waldron attended grade school in Fort Pierre, moving to Canada when his father, a horse breeder, took his teams there to work on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. John Waldron returned to Rapid City in 1919 to live with his sister and finish high school. After attending the Ferris Institute in Big Rapids, Michigan, he was appointed to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Upon graduating in 1924, Waldron served on the USS *Seattle*. In 1926, he transferred to the naval station in Pensacola, Florida, for flight training. He flew with several scouting and observation squadrons from 1927 to 1936, including a patrol squadron at Pearl Harbor. In 1939, he served several short tours of duty at Pensacola, the Naval Academy Proving Ground in Virginia, and the Department of the Navy's Bureau of Ordnance in Washington, D.C.

In August 1941, Waldron assumed command of Torpedo Squadron Eight, based on the USS *Hornet*. Wanting his pilots to be the best in the Navy, he often drilled his men for as many as three four-hour sessions daily. On 4 June 1942, during the Battle of Midway Island, the squadron received notice that the Japanese fleet had been spotted. With no fighter cover and knowing that his fuel supply was insufficient to return to the *Hornet*, Waldron led his fifteen-man squadron in an attack on the Japanese carriers, which were filled with refueling and rearming planes. Only one of Waldron's men returned from this mission.

Lieutenant Commander Waldron was officially declared dead on 5 June 1943. He received many posthumous honors, among them the Purple Heart, the Navy Cross, and two presidential citations. An airfield in Corpus Christi, Texas, a Navy destroyer, and a street in Chicago now bear his name.

by JOAN ANDERSON

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