
MEDAL OF HONOR AVIATORS

Carswell, Horace S. Major, USAAF RP 6910-60 by William J. Bennett

The 308th Bomb Group was the only heavy bombardment unit in the 14th. Air Force in China and the four assigned squadrons were flying the long-ranging B-24 *Liberators*. As the commander of a detachment of the 308th. based at Luichow, China; Major Carswell was privy to information on 'juicy targets'. However, he did not have an aircraft nor crew assigned to him. So, he had to borrow one if he wanted to fly any missions. On the evening of 16 October 1944 Carswell borrowed Capt. Armstrong's '783 and crew to intercept a six-ship convoy half way between Hong Kong and Takao, en route to Takao. That convoy was Successfully attacked using the Low Altitude Bomb (LAB) radar set on board the the aircraft to find and target the ships. They made three runs at 600 ft. altitude at night. The aircrew observed hits on all three runs and they returned safely to Luichow that night. In his After Action Report, Maj. Carswell stated that there was no damage to the aircraft or crew despite the furious A.A. fire from the six ships.

On the evening of 26 October, with the report of another convoy within range, Maj. Carswell planned to repeat his earlier exploit. It appears that he did not take into account the waxing of the moon. On the 16th., the moon was new; on the 26th., 10 days later, the moon was 70% full. Ship-based gunners that could not spot a black under-surfaced B-24 in the dark of the moon, could find a lone B-24 in the moonlight especially when attacking with the moon behind it. The first LAB run was a success in catching the convoy by surprise. This possibly led Carswell to think that this would be as easy as his earl

ier raid and as the ranking officer insisted upon a second LAB run, That run ultimately cost the lives four aircrew, the loss of the aircraft and even Carswell's own life. But, Major Carswell was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor —the only one awarded in the 14th. Air Force.

CARSWELL, HORACE S., JR. (AIR MISSION)

Rank and organization: Major, 308th Bombardment Group, U.S. Army Air Corps. Place and date: Over South China Sea, 26 October 1944. Entered service at: San Angelo, Tex. Birth: Fort Worth, Tex. C.O. No.: 14, 4 February 1946. Citation: He piloted a B-24 bomber in a one-plane strike against a Japanese convoy in the South China Sea on the night of 26 October 1944. Taking the enemy force of 12 ships escorted by at least 2 destroyers by surprise, he made I bombing run at 600 feet, scoring a near miss on 1 warship and escaping without drawing fire. He circled, and fully realizing that the convoy was thoroughly alerted and would meet his next attack with a barrage of anti-aircraft fire, began a second low-level run which culminated in 2 direct hits on a large tanker. A hail of steel from Japanese guns, riddled the bomber, knocking out 2 engines, damaging a third, crippling the hydraulic system, puncturing 1 gasoline tank, ripping uncounted holes in the aircraft, and wounding the copilot; but by magnificent display of flying skill, Maj. Carswell controlled the plane's plummet toward the sea and carefully forced it into a halting climb in the direction of the China shore. On reaching land, where it would have been possible to abandon the staggering bomber, one of the crew discovered that his parachute had been ripped by flak and rendered useless, the pilot hop-

ing to cross mountainous terrain and reach a base, continued onward until the third engine failed. He ordered the crew to bail out while he struggled to maintain altitude, and, refusing to save himself chose to remain with his comrade and attempt a crash landing. He died when the airplane struck a



Photo of Maj. Carswell with Capt. Armstrong's crew of '783 taken between 16 Oct and 26 Oct '44 photographer unknown. Back row (L-R) Klepinger Bombardier, Carswell, Ricketson Copilot, Withiam Navigator, Armstrong Pilot, Zeyak Radar operator. Front row (L-R) Lusk Flight engineer, Nolan Nose gunner, Kunkle Radio operator, and Leonard Tail gunner. (Courtesy Lt.Col. A.T. Withian, USAF Ret.)



Photo of the crew of '563 formed at the Salt Lake City Assignment Center, trained at the 34th CCTS, AAB, Blythe, California and Langley Field, Virginia. Photo taken July 12, 1944. Standing (L-R) T/Sgt. Adam J. Hudek, S/Sgt. Kaemper W. Steinman, S/Sgt. Carlton H. Schnepf, T/Sgt. Ernest P. Watras, S/Sgt. Norman Nunes and T/Sgt. Charles H. Maddox. Kneeling (L-R) Lt. James H. Rinker, Lt. Walter W. Hillier, Lt. Charles H. Ulery and Lt. James H. O'Neal. This was the crew of the B-24J 374th BS, 308th BG, 14th AF at Liuchow, China; Maj Carswell, Squadron Commander. This is the B-24J crew, 374th BS, 308th BG, 14th AF, Liuchow, China which Major Carswell joined on that fateful mission October 26, 1944. (Courtesy Lt.Col. E.P. Waters USAF Ret.).

mountainside and burned. With consummate gallantry and intrepidity, Maj. Carswell gave his life in a supreme effort to save all members of his crew. His sacrifice, far beyond that required of him, was in keeping with the traditional bravery of America's war heroes.

Major Carswell had taken over B-24J-120 CO S/N 44-40825 and its crew led by 1st. Lt. James P. Rinker on 26 October '44. The complete aircrew manifest of 825 when it had sortied consisted of:

Command Pilot	• Major Horace S. Carswell (KIA)
Pilot	• 1st.Lt. James H. Rinker (KIA)
Copilot	• 2nd.Lt. James O'Neal (KIA)
Navigator	• 2nd.Lt. Charles A. Ulery
Bombardier	• 2nd.Lt. Walter A. Hillier (KIA)
Flight Engineer	• T/Sgt. Charles Maddux Jr.
Radar Operator	• T/Sgt. Adam J. Hudek
Radio Operator	• T/Sgt. Ernest P. Watras
Asst. Flight Engineer	• S/Sgt. Carlton H. Schnepf
Asst. Radio Operator	• S/Sgt. Dorian N. Nunes
Gunner	• S/Sgt. Kaemper W. Steinman (KIA)

The expected eight-ship convoy was found by Radar and had become a 12-ship convoy. The first LAB run was a successful surprise attack targeting a destroyer. '825 was then flown out of range of the convoy but was still keeping it under radar surveillance as it rearranged its formation. The wisdom of a second LAB attack with alerted gunners looking for them in a moonlit sky was discussed. Maj. Carswell pulled rank and insisted upon a second run at least. Ten days earlier, such an attack was successful—but on a smaller convoy. The second run was made and they did hit a tanker at least. But the alerted gunners also hit the aircraft—hard. The No.1 and No.3 engines were knocked out and the No.2 was damaged and could not deliver full power. Lt. Rinker, in the copilot seat was severely injured in his right hand, Lt. Ulery was hit in his left leg Sgt. Maddox was hit in his right leg, The aircraft was out of control. Carswell and Rinker were able to regain control of a badly damaged '825 and they headed for the Chinese coast, Lt. O' Neal replaced Lt. Rinker in the right-hand pilot's seat so the Rinker's bleeding hand could be treated by Hillier and Ulery. The remainder of the crew were throwing out everything

they could lay hands on (except the 'chutes) to lighten the load. Reaching land, the crew expected to hear the bailout order; but Hillier discovered his 'chute was flak damaged and would not jump. '825 limped along towards home for another hour, then the No.2 engine quit completely. Decision time was at hand. Carswell and O'Neal elected to remain in the aircraft with Hillier and try to bellyland it so the bombardier would have a chance to survive while everyone else bailed out. The eight jumped at about 23:15 hours at an estimated 2000 feet altitude somewhere around 22° 15' N and 111° 20' E in the dark of night over unfamiliar territory behind enemy lines. The pilot and copilot did not Succeed; the B-24 was seen to crash and explode about 10 miles further west into a mountainside. Carswell, O'Neal and Hillier had bought the farm. Rinker and Steinman also bought it. Rinker couldn't use his right hand and he was unable to pull the D-ring with his left hand. Steinman's 'chute had been drenched with hydraulic fluid and did not fully deploy before his body hit the ground. The remaining survivors had to return to base as best they could. Aided by a Chinese manned British Army Aid Group established to rescue downed flyers from enemy territory and by the Chinese people in general, they walked back dodging the Japanese troops, crossing one ridge after another. This 270 mile trek was an epic in itself. Finally, on 9 November '44, six weary aviators rejoined the USAAF at Kunming and told of their adventures. They also requested mirage and per diem pay for the time and distance travelled without government quarters or transportation for the 14 days. This was disallowed.

Attempting to match claims of the Carswell LAB attacks with Imperial Japanese ship losses in Reference 5 gets a tad sticky. The *Matsumoto Maru*, a tanker, is listed as being lost in the area of the 26 October attack; but the date given was 25 October. destroyer of the *Tomodzuru* class, the *Hato*, was sunk on 16 October, but the credit was given to U.S. Naval Aviation. The light cruiser *Abukuma* was listed as being bombed by USAAF on 24 October and sunk on 26 October – another possibility and an interesting one. In December 1941, The *Abukuma* was the command ship for their Destroyer Flotilla No.1 At that time, it and the flotilla were at sea escorting six carriers, two battleships and two heavy cruisers that arrived at

a point about 180 miles north of Hawaiian Waters on the 7th of that month unbeknown to the U.S. Armed Forces.

Consolidated B-24J-120 CO, S/N 44-40825 was built at San Diego by Consolidated A/C with an H2X Radar set having a retractable scanner antenna installed instead of the Sperry Ball turret. The H2X was an improved version of the H2S Bomb-Through-Overcast Radar developed by the British for their night bombers to find German targets more accurately. It could pinpoint targets hidden under cloud cover, smoke screens and even in the dark of night. This also included finding ships at sea in the dark. This aspect interested the 14th Air Force and its aggressive commander, Gen. Chennault. When it was completed, the A/C was turned over to the USAAF in an unpainted condition with just the blue bordered star and bar insignias on the fuselage forward of the waist gun positions, the upper left wing and the lower right wing. On the outboard sides of the tail fins in black were the numbers "440825", the basic call sign of that aircraft.

B-24J '825 was turned over to a new aircrew headed by 1st Lt. James Rinker at Langley Army Air Base, Va. The crew began familiarizing themselves with "their" aircraft while continuing their training with LAB exercises with their radar. They also flew on some operational sea search missions off the East Coast going as far north as Labrador, seeking Nazi U-Boats on the surface. Some were found, but without any bombs or depth charges, all that could be done was to report the sighting times and locations to the U.S. Navy. Finally, the crew was deemed ready for combat, so on 11 July 1944, '825 and crew departed Langley A.A.B. for the Far East taking the KOLA (Gandor) to HINT (Azores) route; thence to BLOT (Marrakech, Morocco) and FONY (Tunisia), continuing on to ACHE (Cairo, Egypt) with the next stop at ELIK (Abadan, Iran). From there they flew on to DAUB (Karachi, India) then to SWIM (New Delhi, India); their next stop was Lattamahat, India, then Chabua, India. They flew over the Himalayan Mountains (commonly called The Hump,) to their last stop at Chenyungkung, China, the home of the 308th Bomb Group on 4 August 1944.

They were assigned to the 374th Bomb Squadron and '825 was given the tactical call sign **QUEEN EASY ONE EIGHT (QE-18)**. As soon as the underside of their aircraft was painted black and the paint had dried enough so it wouldn't flake away in flight, they were put to work operationally dropping live bombs at sundry places such as Hong Kong, the Japanese occupied part of the Burma Road, Changsha City and Kowloon Docks among other less familiar named places. Sometimes,

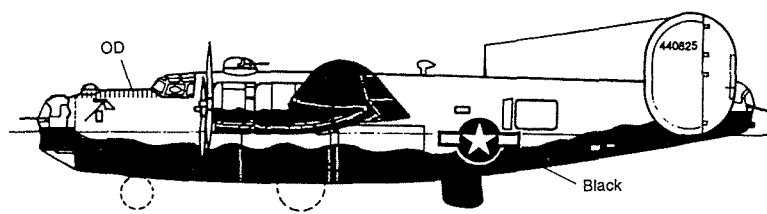
they even hauled aviation gasoline from India into China to be able to go places to drop bombs. Their main job was the LAB attacks against night time shipping on single plane missions.

A careful reading of the text of the Carswell M.O.H. Citation leads one to believe that only Carswell and Hillier were in the B-24 when it crashed. There is not even a hint that Lt. O'Neal was also there trying to bring the bird down gently. All of the surviving aircrew knew it and it would have been included in their reports. There was precedence for pair awards of the Medal of Honor already established. Lt. Col. Baker and Maj. Jerstad were both awarded posthumous M.O.H.s for their efforts during the 1 August 1943 low-level Ploesti raid. Second Lt. Truemper and S.Sgt Mathies were both posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for their efforts to save the life of their unconscious pilot when their copilot was already dead on 20 February 1944. Later, on 9 November 1944, Lts. Gott and Metzger were both awarded the M.O.H. posthumously, for attempting to crashland their damaged bomber after every one else had bailed out, to save the life of their Flight Engineer who couldn't jump. It appears that whoever wrote the Carswell Citation text did not base it on the After Action Survivor reports.

From a surviving aircrewman, it was learned that '825 went operational so fast that it was never named nor was there time to paint on the 374th. squadron tail markings. Several names were thought of, but Rinker wanted one that the entire crew would like. She was lost before they could choose one. There were also no mission tally marks. ✱

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Right wing insignia overpainted black, natural metal, O.D. anti-glare panel

NOTE: On natural metal aircraft the white striping could have been left as aluminum. Blue was lighter than USAAF insignia usually.

B-24J-120 CO 44-40825

