



CARSWELL

The Heroics of Horace Carswell

Few Americans can lay claim to a college football national championship ring, a Distinguished Service Cross, and a Medal of Honor. In fact, there may have been only one such person: Maj. Horace Seaver Carswell Jr., the B-24 pilot whose name for some 45 years graced a famous Strategic Air Command base in Texas.

Carswell, a superb Fort Worth high school athlete, entered Texas A&M in 1934, but at 160 pounds, was deemed too small for Aggie football. He switched to Texas Christian University, and it proved to be a lucky break. TCU in 1938—his senior year—went undefeated and was crowned champion of the collegiate football ranks. Among his teammates were two famous QBs—Sammy Baugh and Davey O'Brien.

Carswell's true heroics were yet to come. He enlisted in the Air Corps, received a commission, and began flying B-24 bombers. In 1944, he went to China where he linked up with Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force. Chennault had a small force of B-24s, used often in one-bomber raids on Japanese naval targets.

On Oct. 15, 1944, Carswell and his crew took off on a solo sweep of the South China Sea, where they found a group of Japanese warships. Carswell's B-24, flying through dense anti-aircraft fire, sank a cruiser and incapacitated a destroyer. Carswell received the DSC (it would now be an Air Force Cross) for "personal courage and zealous devotion to duty."

On Oct. 26, Carswell undertook a night mission against a convoy of 12 cargo ships escorted by destroyers. He ran in low and struck a destroyer. On a second low-level pass, the B-24 was hit by

enemy fire, which knocked out two of the four engines, damaged a third, and wounded the copilot. He was replaced by another pilot, Lt. James L. O'Neal.

Carswell righted the struggling bomber mere feet above the water and flew west, hoping to reach China for a bailout. When they reached land, the bombardier, Lt. Walter H. Hillier, saw that flak had shredded his parachute. Carswell changed plans, deciding to try to nurse the B-24 over a mountain range and reach a friendly airfield.

Before the Liberator could cross the mountain ridge, a third engine failed. Eight crew members bailed out, but Carswell and O'Neal chose to stay with Hillier and attempt a crash-landing. The crippled bomber didn't make it; it flew into a mountainside and exploded.

Carswell posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his valor that night. The citation read, "With consummate gallantry and intrepidity, Major Carswell gave his life in a supreme effort to save all members of his crew. His sacrifice [was] far beyond that required of him." He was buried at a nearby Catholic mission—the first of six different resting places. He was subsequently reinterred once in China, once in Hawaii, and three times in Fort Worth.

Carswell Air Force Base, so named in 1948, was long the home of SAC heavy bombers and was open until 1994, when USAF passed it to the Navy. Today, it goes by the name Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth. Several Air Guard and Reserve units are based there. One airstrip is still called "Carswell Field." 🇺🇸

HORACE SEAVER CARSWELL JR.

Born: July 18, 1916, Fort Worth, Texas
Died: Oct. 26, 1944 (KIA) Tungchen, China
Colleges: Texas A&M, Texas Christian University
Service: United States Air Corps and Army Air Forces
Era: World War II
Years of Service: 1940-44
Grade: Major
Honors: Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, Air Medal
Occupation: US military officer
Famous Friends: Sammy Baugh (two-time All American, NFL Hall of Fame) and Davey O'Brien (Heisman Trophy)

CARSWELL AIR FORCE BASE

State: Texas
Status: Closed (but reopened by Navy)
Opened (by USAAF): 1941
Original Name: Tarrant Field Airdrome
Renamed: Fort Worth Army Airfield (1942);
Renamed: Griffiss AFB (1948);
Renamed: Carswell AFB (1948)
Closed (as full AFB): Sept. 30, 1993
Closed (as Air Reserve Base): Sept. 30, 1994
Reopened (by US Navy): Oct. 1, 1994
Renamed: NAS JRB Fort Worth
Area: 4.1 sq mi / 2,619 acres
Nearest City: Fort Worth
Current Owner: United States Navy
Home of: 301st Fighter Wing (AFRC)
USAF Presence: ANG and AFRC units

1. Horace Carswell. 2. Carswell AFB, Texas, as a SAC base in 1955. 3. An F-16 of the 301st Fighter Wing at Carswell.