

Calvin Andrew Swaffer, T-38

16 December 1920 – 17 May 1998

(aged 77)



Col Marion presenting a medal to 1st Lt Swaffer (8 July 1943)

Fortress Pilot Escapes Capture on 25th Mission

A Fortress pilot's confidence in the RAF Air-Sea Rescue Service brought him safely back to his base on his 25th mission and prevented his capture by the Germans. On a USAAF raid on Villa-Coublay, in enemy-occupied France, the Fort of 1st Lt Calvin Swaffer, ex-RCAF pilot from Memphis TN, had three engines knocked out by flak and holes torn in the fuselage and right wing. Over Le Havre the ship, a B-17 Bomber named the Memphis Blues of the 303rd Bomber Group, was steadily losing altitude and it was evident that it could not make its field in England. Swaffer decided against ordering his crew to bail out over German territory. Putting his faith in the RAF rescue service, he headed for the Channel and crash landed.



The Memphis Blues hit the water about 10 miles from the French coast. Within three minutes, the Memphis Blues sank out of sight, wrenching the heart of the man who had named her and flown her in 10 perilous missions. "It was tough to see the old girl go," Lieutenant Swaffer acknowledged. "We felt lonely and lost, floating aimlessly in our dinghies. And just to make things cozier, our Spitfire escort and enemy F.W. 190's were engaged in a terrific battle right over our heads. "We didn't know whether the enemy, if successful intended to strafe us or pick us up as prisoners. We heard later than a German launch was lurking in the vicinity "But our Spitfires won, bless them, and after almost two hours an R.A.F. air-sea rescue launch picked us up. The sea was very rough and it was difficult for the rescue launch to see us, so difficult, that it rammed our dinghy, throwing us all into the water. They quickly fished us out, however, and returned us to our base. Following his return, Lieutenant Swaffer was awarded a cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross for this work on this mission. He also holds the Air Medal with three clusters. The Memphian, who stands well over 6 feet, joined the Royal Canadian Air Forces in July 1941, transferring to the United States Army Air Force in May 1942. He had been in England about a year and numbers among his exciting experience a chat with their Royal Highnesses, the King and Queen. "I met them at a Red Cross Club for service men down in the Midlands," he recalled. "Both were genuinely gracious and the Queen made me feel as though I were talking to an old friend." A native Memphian, Lieutenant Swaffer, is the brother of Mrs. Florence Hilliard, 2473 Harvard; Mrs. Doris Scott 3252 Coleman; J. M. Swaffer, Jr., 3245 Givens and, Mrs. Thelma Allen of Jackson MS.

Information from The Commercial Appeal, Sunday, August 8, 1941.