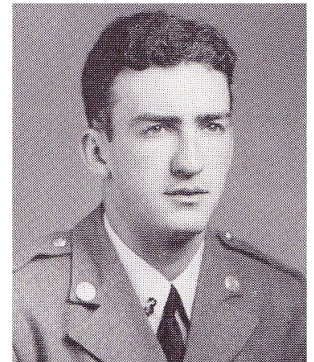


Cargill Carried the Airborne to Victory Against Germany

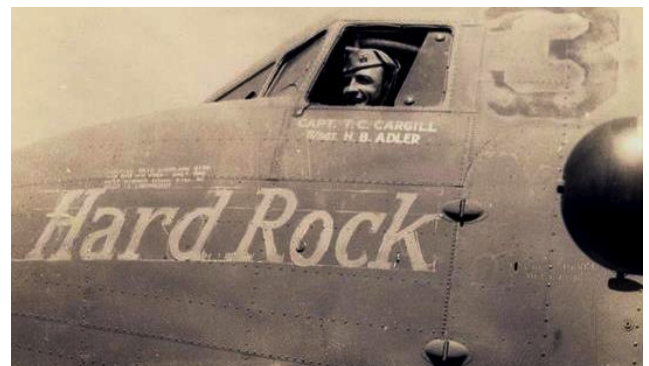
Thomas Clayton Cargill was a gifted athlete. Quarterback of his high school football team in Columbia, Cargill in 1938 accepted a scholarship to play football and run track at Clemson College. At Clemson, Cargill, or 'Doc' as he was known, continued to display athletic prowess. He played halfback on Coach Jess Neely's '38 and '39 Tiger teams and in track set a school record in the 440 yard dash. Two years later, Doc Cargill would be playing for a different team: Uncle Sam's.

A textile science major, Cargill left Clemson and in 1941 joined the Army Air Corps. He quickly applied the same skill and coordination to flying that had marked his athletic career. He soloed quickly and moved to basic and then advanced flight training for multi-engine aircraft. In May 1942, the former cadet earned his pilot's wings and the gold bars of a second lieutenant. By this time, the United States was immersed in World War II and Cargill was assigned to fly the C-47 transport which would carry the Army's new airborne divisions into battle.



Doc soon became one of the top pilots of the 15th Troop Carrier Squadron. Throughout the balance of that year, Cargill and his unit worked to master the operations for transporting parachute and glider infantrymen into battle. In May 1943, now first lieutenant Cargill and the 15th deployed to Tunisia in North Africa to continue training in airborne operations with the 82nd Airborne Division. The 82nd would be the vanguard of the pending invasion of Sicily, the stepping stone to continental Europe.

On July 9, as a captain, Cargill flew his first combat mission piloting "Hard Rock" as it carried elements of H Company, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment into battle near Niscemi, Sicily. All planes and crews returned safely from this mission, but the next, flown two days later, was a different story. Communications between General George Patton's Seventh Army and its supporting naval forces broke down. Nervous Navy gunners fired on the C-47s carrying a second wave of paratroopers to the battlefield, mistaking them for German bombers and downing 24 aircraft, including two from Cargill's 15th Squadron.



On September 2, the 15th moved to a new base in Sicily from where it supported Operation Giant, the dropping of 82nd Airborne units into Italy. The 15th operated from Sicily until February 1944, when it was transferred to Barkston Heath, England to begin preparing for the invasion of France. In April, Cargill was promoted to major.

Doc Cargill celebrated his 25th birthday by taking off at 2:32 am with a plane load of 82nd Airborne troopers bound for St. Mere Eglise, France. It was June 6, 1944. Although the weather deteriorated badly as the C-47s neared their drop zones, seventeen of the eighteen planes of Cargill's 15th Squadron delivered their soldiers within one mile of the drop zone.

In mid-December, the commanding officer of the 14th Troop Carrier Squadron was killed in an accident and Doc Cargill was transferred in to assume command. As the Germans retreated, air assets supporting the combat troops moved onto the Continent. In March, the 14th headed to Abbeville, France.



From here, Major Cargill led his squadron as part of the war's largest, single day airborne operation. **Operation Varsity** kicked off on March 24 and involved more than 16,000 paratroopers and several thousand aircraft. The British 6th Airborne Division and the American 17th Airborne Division were dropped across the Rhine to help Field Marshal Montgomery's 21st Army Group seize river crossings.

Cargill and the 14th were again in the lead, carrying elements of the Canadian 1st Paratroop Regiment across the Rhine to its drop zone near Wesel, Germany. After dropping the Canadians, Cargill banked his aircraft to the left to begin the turn back to its base in France. The aircraft flew into a stream of tracer fire from the ground and immediately began to trail smoke from the left wing. Smoke was also seen coming from the cockpit. The plane never came out of its bank and quickly lost altitude. The left wing hit a house as it neared the ground tearing it off and the rest of the ship hit the ground and exploded. There was evidence of one parachute coming out of the plane at about tree top level. The parachute was shredded in the trees and all aboard the plane were killed.

Major Thomas Clayton Cargill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 2 Oak Leaf clusters, and the Purple Heart. He is buried at the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, Plot P, Row 3, Grave 3.



For more information about Thomas Clayton Cargill visit:

<https://cualumni.clemson.edu/page.aspx?pid=1330>

For additional information about Clemson University's Scroll of Honor visit:

<https://cualumni.clemson.edu/page.aspx?pid=764>