

**LEE KESSLER SUMMARY OF HIS WAR YEARS**  
**EVENTS 1942 – 1945**

Signed enlistment papers December 18 1941 with agreement to leave after the holidays.

Sworn into U.S. Army Air Corps, January 12 1942 at Ft. Hayes, Columbus, Ohio.

Left Ft. Hayes by train for Sheppard Field, Texas arriving January 15 1942 at Witchata Falls, Texas.

Arrived at Wendover Field, Utah, February 11 1942 Assigned to 43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group. Duties-tear down sandbag hangers and build roads for Bomb and Gunnery Range.

Qualified and received Expert Rifle Medal from Capt. McKinnon.

Arrived Las Vegas Gunnery School March 1 1942 Las Vegas, Nevada, Nevada. Class Room-target, range shooting. Week of April 4, flying air to air firing at Indian Springs, Dry Lake, Nevada. Graduated April 13 1942.

Returned to Wendover Field, Utah April 15 1942. Assigned to 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 368<sup>th</sup> the Bomb Squadron as Combat Air Gunner, Group just forming. Group Commander, Col. Charles "Chips" Overacker, 368<sup>th</sup> Squadron Commander, Major Wm. E. Lanford. Group consisted of 367<sup>th</sup>, 368<sup>th</sup>, 369<sup>th</sup>, 423<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 368<sup>th</sup> Squadrons 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Henry Cordry.

Promoted to Sergeant, May 1 1942. Assigned to Capt. Wm. Meltons crew as Top Turret Gunner training in B-17-E Flying Fortress. Other crew members-Lt. Alex Kramerinko, co-pilot-Lt. Charles "Pappy" Grimes, Navigator-Lt. Robert Levy, Bombadier,- S/Sgt. Wm. Cherry, Eng.- S/Sgt. Mahlon Snover, Radio-S/Sgt. Gilbert Shoemaker, Ball Turret, -Sgt. Ernest Garland, Tail Gunner.

My 25 1943 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday. Wendover Field, Utah. 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group declared combat ready July 28 1942. Gen. Olds flew in from Washington and held inspection.

Promoted to Staff Sergeant.

Ground Personnel left Wendover for Fort Dix, N.J. July 30 1942 for England on liner Queen Elizabeth.

Flight Crews left Wendover for Westover Field, Mass. August 1 stopping overnight at Scott Field, Ill.

Received new B-17\_F models, August 18. Serial #41-24516.

While checking plans out No. 4 engine overheated caught fire and extinguisher was used. Replaced engine.

Friday August 28 – Flew home from Hartford Conn. Airport on TWA via La Guardia, N.Y. then to Akron Municipality. Home until Sunday noon. Left Cleveland for Hartford arriving at Westover 5.00am.

All telephone calls frozen for security. Wrote letter home.

Left Westover Field, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1942 for Gander Newfoundland. Carrying two extra men. Lt. Jesse Milburn, Communications Officer and Sergeant Francis Bowes from the 423<sup>rd</sup> Sqd. Who returned late from leave and miss plane.

Stayed overnight at Gander, Newfoundland. Refuelled and prepared for flight over the Atlantic Ocean.

Left Gander 2300hrs (9:30pm) Greenwich time, September 11 1942 for Prestwick, Scotland the last of the four squadrons. Was informed of Lt. Leahy plane, 423<sup>rd</sup> squadron, exploded on way over.

About 11:45pm, No. 2 engine that was running hot, began to flame. Meton shut down and feathered it. Around 01.30 number 3 engine also overheating began flaming and had to use extinguisher. Decided to start up No. 2 again only to have it begin to burn so used extinguishers.

Found de-icers not working and ice forming on wings. Pilots decided to vary altitudes hoping to find warm air currents. Crew discussed throwing belongings over board. Continued to fly all night until daybreak with radio silence.

Spotted what was Free Ireland but would be interned if landed there so crew elected to by-pass and try for Northern Ireland.

Third engine gave out about 0700 and ditched in Irish Sea off Magilligans Point, Due to overcrowded situation I went to the waist and when we hit I smacked up against a ball turret post breaking ribs.

Sgt. Snover sent out "Mayday" signals. I left plane by rear door while the rest went into dinghies through radio hatch.

Around 0900 an English Wellington appeared and spotted me in the water and tried to drop a dingy to me from the bomb bay but air kept forcing it back up so they left. After another hour smoke appeared on the horizon. An Irish Mine Sweeper picked us up. We were later transferred to a U.S. Navy PT boat who took us to an American Navy and Marine base at Londonderry. Received medical treatment and that night was flown by transport to Prestwick, Scotland to join rest of the squadron.

Arrived at Thurleigh Airfield, September 13 1942 an RAF base located near Bedford in Bedfordshire about 60 miles northeast of London, England.

The Royal Air Force Station Thurleigh was formally turned over to the U.S. Army Air Forces December 1942. Now Station 111.

11<sup>th</sup> Mission December 12 1942 Rowen, Fr. Under heavy attack by "Abbeville Kids". I destroyed an FW-190 in a hand-on attack. 306<sup>th</sup> had 6 aircraft damaged and 4 WIA.

12<sup>th</sup> Mission December 20 1942 Romilly-Sur-Seine. 306<sup>th</sup> lost 3 planes, 12 damaged. 1KIA, 4 WIA and 29 MIA. My oxygen was shot out and did not know it until almost passing out.

Spent two days in barracks burning up with fever until taken to base hospital. Given sulfa drugs and put in tank with infra-red lights for pneumonia. Was in bed until January 29 1943. Stayed in hospital until Feb 12 when I returned to my barracks. Still off combat, went on passes to London and painted squadron insignias and Air Corps logos on Red Cross ceilings.

January 3 1943, Awarded the Air Medal from Brig. Gen. Newton Longfellow.

January 3 1943, saw the first 368<sup>th</sup> crew lost. Lt. Fergusons. Shot down over St. Nazzaire.

January 4 1943, Gen. Eaker along with Col. Frank Armstrong and Col. DiorneLey came to Thurleigh where Col. Chips Overacker was relieved of his command. 306<sup>th</sup> had a new CO, Col. Frank Armstrong. (Bierne Ley later wrote the book TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH).

January 17 1943, Gen. Eaker again came to Thurleigh and relieved Maj. Wm Lanford of the 368<sup>th</sup> Squadron Command. He was replaced by Major Mack McKay. (See 306<sup>th</sup> History FIRST OVER GERMANY).

March 4 1943 368<sup>th</sup> lost their second crew and mine. Capt. Wm. Friend along with my original crew shot down over Hamm, Ger. No bodies were ever recovered.

Lt. Otto Duddenbaum was the next squadron loss March 8 over Rennes, Fr.

Although still grounded, volunteered to fly with 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot who needed extra gunner on raid to Ameins/Longeau March 13 1943. Flew ball turret although pilot aborted because of waist gunner freezing feet. Medics saw and reported me to Dr. Munal who threatened court marshall.

March 14 Dr. Munal checked me out on altitude flight and released me for combat.

13<sup>th</sup> Mission March 18 1943, Vegesack Ger. Though we had no losses, Ed Beckert passed out while changing oxygen mask and froze his hands. This was the coldest mission (minus 67). Guns froze up and had to kick out bombs when racks froze.

14<sup>th</sup> Mission March 22 1943, Wilhelmshaven, Ger. Shipyards and docks. 1 KIA-2WIA. No planes lost.

Passes Flight Engineer, promoted to Tech/Sgt.

Lt Robert Seelons was shot down April 4 on the Renault works at Billancourt, Fr flying "Montana Power".

15<sup>th</sup> Mission April 5 1943, Antwerp Belgium. Fierce battle with Luftwaffe. Of the 20 bombers of the 306<sup>th</sup>, 4 were lost, 6 damaged. 2 WIA-40 MIA.

16<sup>th</sup> Mission April 17 1943, Bremen, Ger. the Focke Wulf aircraft plant was the target and the roughest for the 306<sup>th</sup>. Of the six planes of the 368<sup>th</sup> five were shot down. My plane was the only one to return. I was wounded in the eye when 20mm hit the floor, 306<sup>th</sup> lost 10 planes 1 WIA-99MIA.  
Hospitalized for three days. Off flying status.

Captain John Reagen took over Squadron Command from Major McKay.

Appointed by Squadron Commander for 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Commission along with three other group sergeants.

May 2 1943, back on flying status. Placed on newly formed crew. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt .Maxwell Judas, pilot-2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James Cummings co-pilot-Lt. Herschel Ezell, Navigator-Lt. Maynard Dix, Bomb Hlavac, Ball Turret-S/Sgts, Barnt & Stroud, gunners,- S/Sgt/Elwood Brotzman, Tail.

17<sup>th</sup> Mission, May 17, 1943 Lorient, Fr. Sub Pens No losses. 3 WIA.

18<sup>th</sup> Mission, May 19 1943 Kiel, Ger. Ship yards no losses 1 WIA

Took new airplane on practice bombing at the new in northern England. Collided with another plane on way. No damages. On way back flew on deck due to fog. Struck trees and crashed breaking plane in half. No injuries.

19<sup>th</sup> Mission, May 21 1943, Wilhelmshaven, Ger. Shot down by ME-109 fighters. Bailed out at 23,000 ft, with wounded pilot, Judas. Captured on ground by SS and Wehrmachh officers, beaten and paraded through village.

Taken to Wilhemshaven Navel Base in front of Grand Admiral Karl doenitz.

Taken by truck to pick up other survivors of crew. Picked up body of Lt. Foster Daniels, Navigator who was flying with us. Parachute did not open. Body of Roy La Blanche, ball gunner who was pitch-forked by civilians. John Geimer, waist, broke toes in foot, Graziano, broken hip when chute opened, Stroud, broken pelvis when chute opened. Lt. Frank Arrison, flying as Bomdadier killed in plane.

Seventeen put in box car on back of passenger train to Frankfurt, Ger. Arrived about 10 o'clock pm when air raid alarm went off. Locked in box car while RAF bombed freight yards at station.

Went by street car to Oberusal, Dulag Luft for interigation. Stayed in solitary confinement for ten days. Spent 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday there.

Arrived by train at Stalag VII-A, 5am June 3 1943, Mooseburg, Bavaria, Germany.

Mother and father presented my Distinguished Flying Cross, July 3 1943 at ceremonies in Canton, Ohio.

After eight months left for Stalag XVII-B, Krems-Gneixendorf, Austria, arriving October 13 1943.

May 25 1944, 23<sup>rd</sup> Birthday at Stalag VXII-B Krems, Austria.

Left Krems on forced march, April 8 1945. It is now discovered that we were to be executed as per Hitlers orders at Mauthauson Concentration Camp. Wittnessed atrocities to Hungarian Jews who were inmates of Mauthauson on road back from working in a quarry.

Held in woods at tributaries of Inn and Salsach Rivers near Uberackern, Austria.

Liberated May 5 1945 by Gen. Pattons 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Tank Division they moved on turning guards and guns over to us. 7<sup>th</sup> Army arrived within the week and moved us to an aluminium factory at Randshoven.

Walked to an air field where C-47 Transports flew us out to Nancy, France. Had bad case of dysentery. Deloused, received clothing and travelled by train to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre, Fr.

Boarded Liberty Ship at Le Havre, France for U.S. June 2 1945.

Painted nose art on 7 aircraft. Eager Beaver-Yankee Raider-Montana Power-Sons of Fury-Grim Reaper-Avenger-Melton pot.

Flew 1<sup>st</sup> mission October 9 1942 to Fives Lille Locomotive Morks, Lille, France. 306<sup>th</sup> lost 1 plane, 1 wounded, 9 MIA.

Weather cold and foggy.

2<sup>nd</sup> Mission October 21 1942, Lorient, France-Sub Pens no losses.

3<sup>rd</sup> Missions November 7 1942, Brest, France-Sub Pens no losses. 1 fighter destroyed, 2 probables, 5 damaged.

4<sup>th</sup> Mission November 8 1942, Fives Lille Locomotive Works, Lille, France. 369<sup>th</sup> lost 1. Grp. Had 4 damaged 2 wounded 11MIA.

5<sup>th</sup> Mission November 9 1942, St. Nazaire, Fr.-Sub Pens. Experimental Low Level, 8000ft. 367<sup>th</sup> lost 1 423<sup>rd</sup> lost 2-12 aircraft damaged-1 KIA-32MIA.

November 13 1942 King George VI and family visited the 306<sup>th</sup> at Thurliegh accompanied by Gen. Carl Spaatz, Gen. Ira Eaker and Brig. Gen. Newton Longfellow of Bomber Command.

6<sup>th</sup> Mission November 14 1942, St. Nazaire, Fr. Sub Pens no losses.

7<sup>th</sup> Mission November 17 1942, St. Nazaire, Fr. Sub Pens. 423<sup>rd</sup> Squadron had 1 KIA & 3 wounded. Intense enemy action Lt. Regans plane took direct hit in No.3 engine and crashed landed on English coast, destroying "Grim Reaper".

8<sup>th</sup> Mission November 18 1942, La Pallice, Fr. Sub Pens. 367<sup>th</sup> Squadron lost 1 plane. 1 KIA, 3 WIA, 10 MIA. Lt. Charles "Pappy" Grimes was killed flying with Lt. Seelos. Four other 306<sup>th</sup> planes were badly damaged

November 25, 9<sup>th</sup> Bomber Command took the 306<sup>th</sup> off combat for the rest of the month.

Flight Surgeons demanded Bomber Command set limit of missions. Decision made to limit of 25 missions.

Due to extreme cold conditions at altitude (-60s) Oxygen masks freezing up, we are to carry two mask and change when passing out occurs. Guns are also freezing up and are hoping to get oil that does not freeze.

10<sup>th</sup> Mission December, 6 1942 Mock diversion to Abbeville, Fr. Drawing up Luftwaffe fighters. Had running battle.

Arrived Boston, Mass. And to Camp Miles Standish June 11 1945

Greyhound bus turned over on way to Columbus, Ohio. Stayed three days in Columbus.

Arrived home June 24 1945 on 60 day furlough.

Left by car for Miami Beach, Florida with Casebolt and Caldwell. Caught in Portsmouth, Ohio when War with Japen ended, August 14 1945.

Sent from Miami Beach with twenty-seven other men to fort McCellan, Alabama when hurricain struck.

Discharged from Army, Saturday, September 22 1945.