

2LT James LeRoy “Lee” Clingan

1921 - 2011

EARLY LIFE

Lee was born near Kingman, Indiana on October 11, 1921, the fourth of six children of Roy and Edna Shelton Clingan. He graduated from Kingman High School in 1939. As a boy he worked on the Clingan family farm until his father’s death in 1938. He later worked as a farm laborer, in a coal mine, at the Coffing Brothers’ apple orchard and as a ticket taker at the Indiana State Fair. Lee’s experiences growing up on a farm during the depression provided him with extraordinary measures of resourcefulness, frugality and practicality, as well as a deep respect for hard work.

MILITARY YEARS



Lee Clingan at Camp Shelby

In April of 1941, Lee enlisted as an Army Private, with a one-year commitment of service and was on K.P. duty at Camp Shelby, Mississippi when he heard about Pearl Harbor. He guarded the bridge that night.

From Camp Shelby, he was transferred to Fort Benning where he entered officer’s candidate school to become an infantry platoon leader for the invasion of Normandy.

“The average life expectancy of a platoon leader was seven days,” he said, referring to himself as a “replacement” for the many who died before him.’



Lee Clingan - right- at Ft. Benning



He quickly rose through the ranks and trained officers, among other things, on how to put together M-1 rifles. Following graduation in 1943, he was transferred to Camp Robinson, Arkansas where he spent the next few weeks and witnessed FDR inspecting the troops.

Camp Adair at Corvallis, Oregon was his next destination. After attending a meeting, at which General Marshall informed the officers about the fighting in Italy, Lee trained the troops there and about a year later was sent back east on a train just prior to D-Day.

On June 7, 1944 Lee left for New York and then shipped out on the British ship, Mauretania, with approximately 9,000 troops. Lee said that it took nine

days to get to England but the British had good food. While on board, he spent most of his time playing poker and paid another officer to stay down with the troops when his turn came up. (He loved poker.)

After training for several days in England, and in late June of 1944, Lee crossed the English Channel to Omaha Beach where the devastation brought by the D-Day Invasion was still evident, also noting that blood in the bunkers was still clearly visible. At the repo depot, he waited to be sent to the front lines, finally being sent to the 48th AIB, Company A, near St. Lo. He told his men that that they knew more about war than he did but he was there to help them. He led them in October through two major battles, one at Metz, then Asten Holland in the Peel Marshes. They were outflanked during the third day, captured on October 30, 1944, and sent to Berlin.

“The Germans put Clingan and the other survivors on a train destined for a POW camp in Poland. En route to the camp, British planes bombed the train’s engine, sparking chaos. Clingan and nine other officers were traveling in a boxcar sandwiched between two others, each filled with 75 infantrymen.

“The men in the car ahead of us were panicked,” he said. “You see, the car ahead of them was full of ammunition, and everyone was afraid the whole thing would go up.” Clingan defied orders from a German guard and jumped from the boxcar to help rescue the men. “I don’t know how I got that car open,” he said. “I guess luck was on my side that day.”

Lee was on the train when he heard some German ladies talking about “growing them big in America”. The group he was with were from 6’ 2” to 6’ 6”. After arriving in Berlin, he was interviewed, by short-wave radio, about who he was, etc. The War Dept. and a short wave man from Dayton, Ohio picked up the interview and notified my Grandma Clingan by telegram that he was alive. He was MIA until then.

“The Germans sent another engine and the train would eventually make its way to the POW camp designated as Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland. The camp was established in June 1943 by the Germans to detain American officers. It initially held 150 prisoners. By the time the camp was evacuated in January 1945, their ranks had grown to 1,400.”

Lee spent the next three months at Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland until a forced march would move them west.

“Clingan and the other prisoners would not stay at the camp much longer. On Jan. 21, 1945, they were sent on what was later termed the “Poland Death March”



[also known as the “Long, Cold March”] through Central Europe as the Germans tried to outpace the Russian forces on their tail. “We knew we’d be going,” he said. “We had a radio in the camp and we could pick up the BBC. We knew things weren’t going well for the Germans.” The Oflag 64 men were forced to march during the bitter winter. Clingan recalls marching about 10 miles a day during blistering cold weather. At night the men would sleep in barns, sheds or any other structure that could be found. “I’d try to find some hay and curl up,” Clingan said. “My feet were always so cold.” Each night he’d take off his wet boot[s], place them next to his stomach and wrap his body into a tight ball. “I was hoping my body heat would dry those boots.” Food also was scarce, which meant the men often had to fend for themselves.”

On that bitter cold January day, more than 1,000 POWs were forced to march with only what they could carry on their backs, and return to Germany, a distance of over 300 miles. They arrived at Hammelburg (Oflag XIII-B) in Germany on March 9, 1945. Among the many prisoners at Hammelburg, as well as at Oflag 64, was Lt. Col. John K. Waters, the son-in-law of General George S. Patton. The infamous Patton raid, “Task Force Baum” took place while Lee was there.

“After the raid on Hammelburg, the remaining POWs were marched out on the second leg of their journey, farther south to Moosburg. The POWs had no way of knowing, but those who would finish the trip, start to finish, traveled about 450 miles. It was done in two stages, and took from Jan. 21 to April 20 to complete, about 90 days.”

Lee escaped from Hammelburg and was free for 2 days, but was recaptured and sent to Nurenberg where 25 men were lost in bombing raids. (It’s interesting to note that he was in the same stadium where Hitler gathered his large crowds and also where Jesse Owens ran in the Olympics.)

From Nurenberg, Lee walked to Moosburg, where he was finally liberated by Patton after about a week. Shortly following liberation, he and some other officers left the camp, found a Volkswagen and drove until they hit a Bailey Bridge which the vehicle could not cross. They hitchhiked a ride with a vehicle going west and arrived at Camp Lucky Strike where Lee stayed until being shipped home. When Lee arrived home, he had dropped from 170 to 135 pounds and had stomach trouble the rest of his life, mostly likely from being starved and being fed back so quickly.

Lee was released from military duty as a First Lieutenant and for his military service during the war, earned the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and Combat Infantryman’s Badge.

POST WAR YEARS

After discharge Lee returned to Kingman where he drove a stock truck. Sometime later, after stopping in at Hub Insurance and after the owner heard his big voice, Lee was hired, out of the blue, because he had a salesman's voice. Following life insurance and marketing classes at Purdue University, he went to work as an insurance salesman for Carl Songer and eventually built his own insurance and real estate agency, which he ran from 1946 to 1995.

Referring to himself as a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none, some of Lee's other businesses included suit salesman, bail bondsman, auctioneer, livestock buyer and truck driver. In 1953 Lee enrolled at Reppert's School of Auctioneering in Decatur, Indiana and then worked for six years at the Danville Livestock Commission in Danville, Illinois selling livestock while working in the insurance business. Another note of interest: Lee later met Harry Truman in the elevator at the National Auctioneers' Convention.

Lee had the pleasure of entertaining thousands of people in western Indiana and eastern Illinois at his many farm, cattle, antique and land auctions. His deep voice, cadenced auctioneering chant and colorful local stories never failed to entertain his crowd.



Speedway, Indiana early 1970's

In 1958 Lee married the lovely and lively Thelma Tucker Tyhurst of Danville, and he raised her daughter, Lynne Suzanne "Suzie" Tyhurst, as his own from when Suzie was nine years old. That same year the newly created Clingan family moved to Covington to start a new life at 121 Elm Dr. in the brand-new Beck Addition. Thelma T. served as Lee's chief advisor and supporter until her death in 1987 after 29 years of marriage and partnership.

SERVICE TO HOME AND COUNTRY

Lee entered the Indiana State Senate in 1960 and served for 8 years (Placeholder1) until his seat was reapportioned in 1968. In 1972 he ran for the House of Representatives and won, serving for 16 years. Every year of the 24 years that Lee served in the General Assembly he was a member of the Agriculture and Insurance Committees of



Lee Clingan speaking to members of the Senate

the chamber in which he served, and he was at one time the chairman of the Insurance Committee of each chamber. During Lee's 24 years in the legislature he represented districts that included all or parts of Fountain, Vermillion, Warren, Vigo, Benton and Parke Counties.

Generous of heart and spirit, Lee was committed to his community. He was a past president of the Kingman High School Alumni Association; member of the Indiana Auctioneer's association, American Legion and past commander of the Kingman American Legion Post; past commander of firing squads and colors for many military funerals; member of the V.F.W; former member of the Masonic Lodge, Scottish Rite, Zorah Temple and Elks Lodge; and member of the Fountain County draft board for 25 years. He was also instrumental in moving the Ernie Pyle home to Dana, Ind., in the mid-1970s in order to establish the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site.

In 1985 Lee's 99 colleagues in the Indiana House of Representatives rated him as "Best Liked" in Indianapolis Monthly magazine. Other honors include a certificate of merit awarded by the Department of Indiana Disabled American Veterans, a service award by the Department of Indiana Veterans of Foreign Wars, and a service award from the Fountain County office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service. In 1989 Gov. Evan Bayh awarded Lee the prestigious Sagamore of the Wabash award, bestowing upon him the state's highest award for a citizen and honoring him for his many years of service to the State of Indiana. In 1988 Lee was honored by House Concurrent Resolution No. 97, praising his 24 years of service to the Indiana General Assembly.



The conclusion of a long and fascinating life journey arrived for former state senator and state representative Lee Clingan of Covington, Ind., who died peacefully surrounded by his family at the VA Illiana Health Care Hospital in Danville, IL, at the age of 89, on Saturday, January 15, 2011. Lee was a well-known area auctioneer, farmer, legislator, realtor, insurance agency owner and Fountain County gentleman.

TAPS



Lee's great passions were the Chicago Cubs, poker and politics. Known for his trademark Stetson hat, pipe and booming voice, he never knew a stranger, was loved and respected by many and will be missed by all who knew him. His generosity, sense of humor and patriotism were appreciated by countless friends and loved ones.

Lee is survived by his two sons, Gregory Lee (wife Pam) of Covington and David William of Indianapolis; four grandchildren, R. Chadwick Armstrong (wife Jennifer) of Nolensville, Tenn., Shannon Lyn Bogue (husband Curt) of West

Lafayette, Ind., Amanda Lee Strawser (husband Allen) of Covington and Hannah Marie Clingan of Greencastle, IN.; and six great-grandchildren, Jackson and Tucker Bogue of West Lafayette, Reece Lynne and Bricyn Elaine Armstrong of Nolensville and Reis Lauren Lewsader and Remi Lynn Strawser of Covington. Lee was preceded in death by his wife, Thelma T.; daughter, Lynne Suzanne Tyhurst Armstrong; brothers, Gordon, Fred and Bert; sisters, Alberta Holland and Almeda Samuels; and parents, Roy and Edna Shelton Clingan.



SOURCES

Quoted material: One of the Lucky Ones -- Poland Death March Survivor Recalls WWII Experiences by Tina McGrady, November 10, 2008
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James LeRoy "Lee" Clingan Obituary
<https://www.shelbyfuneralhome.com/obituary/1042276>

Memories and Photos from Clingan family archives

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers in collaboration with the Clingan family.