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In Memory of
U.S. Army Air Force S/Sgt.

Leonard E. Kleinjan

Bruce, South Dakota
Brookings County
July 6, 1922 - June 22, 1944
Killed in Action in a Bombing Mission over France



Leonard E. Kleinjan was born on July 6, 1922, to Mr. Ira and Mrs. Hattie (Van Maanen) Kleinjan. Raised on the family farm near Volga, South Dakota, Leonard attended Volga High School, graduating with the class of 1940. Nicknamed "Lefty," Leonard is remembered as "a fun loving young man and had many friends who had the same likes and dislikes he had." After a year of college at South Dakota State University, Leonard went to work as a junior inspector for an aircraft plant. As a young man, Leonard cherished flying with an older friend who took him on many flights over their home place.

On November 13, 1942, Mr. Kleinjan entered into the Army Air Force and was trained at Miami, Florida; Gulfport, Mississippi; Las Vegas, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Pyote Texas. Leonard was home twice on leave before he left America and traveled overseas to the European theater of operations in March of 1944. Stationed in England as part of the 351st Bomb Group, 509th Bomb Squadron, 8th Army Air Force, S/Sgt. Kleinjan wrote a letter home on June 21, 1944, which said in part:

Don't worry about what you can send me for my birthday.
What I'd like to have though is a box of those chocolate chip
cookies. Boy they really are good. Don't go to so much trouble,
tho!...Well, guess I'll close for now. Take it easy and don't worry....

The following day, before his letter could be delivered to his family, S/Sgt. Leonard Kleinjan was shot down over France in the B-17 Flying Fortress Bomber for which he was a waist gunner. His family received the following telegram initially:

The Secretary of War desires me to express his deepest regret
that your son Staff Sergeant Leonard E. Kleinjan has been reported
missing in action since twenty two June over France. If further details
or other information are received you will be promptly notified.

In August of 1944, Leonard's mother was sent further details concerning the disappearance

of her son:

...the report indicates that during this mission at about 7:00 p.m., in the vicinity of the target, your son's plane sustained damage from enemy anti-aircraft fire and left the formation, losing altitude but under control. Subsequently, five parachutes were seen to leave the disabled bomber along the Northern Coast of France. The crew members of the accompanying planes were unable to make further observations of this aircraft....

In October of 1944, a surviving crew member of Leonard's plane wrote to Leonard's mother, telling her in part:

On June 22, after having dropped our bombs, we were hit by a flak burst in a half dozen places. The plane soon was beyond control and there was no alternative but to jump out. As everything was in somewhat of a state of confusion, I am not certain as to just what Leonard did. As far as I can recall, he jumped just before I did. Since we were subject to a time interval between each jump, none of us landed in the same spot.... Mrs. Kleinjan, you must be courageous. Leonard may turn up any day. It happens continually now. He was a boy with whom I was proud to be associated. A good hard worker, always willing to lend a hand wherever needed. You can be very proud of him....

Leonard Kleinjan was later declared killed in action on June 22, 1944, during his 22nd mission over enemy territory. He had earned the Good Conduct Medal, Air Medal W/2 Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Purple Heart.

Although originally buried in the American Military Cemetery in St. Andre, France, in 1949, Leonard's remains were returned and buried at Volga, South Dakota.



This entry respectfully submitted by Jason M. Nies, 8th Grade West, Spearfish Middle School, Spearfish, South Dakota. December 2, 2000. Information for this entry was submitted by Nellie Reeves, Sioux Falls, SD, sister of Leonard E. Kleinjan.

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