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ABILENE, KANSAS

LEE, WILLIAM LECEL: Papers, 1927-69

Accessions 71-59, 71-59/1, 72-35, 73-20 and 73-20/1

Processed by: JWL

Date Completed: March 1992

General William Lecel Lee, career Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force officer, deposited his papers in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in 1971, 1972 and 1973.

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 2.0
Approximate number of pages: 10,500
Approximate number of items: 350

In December 1970 General Lee executed an instrument of gift for these papers. Literary property rights in the unpublished writings of William Lecel Lee in these papers and in other collections of papers received by the United States of America from others and deposited in any depository administered by any agency of the United States of America were assigned to the United States of America upon the death of General Lee in 1976.

By agreement with the donor the following classes of documents will be withheld from research use:

1. Papers relating to the family and private business affairs.
2. Papers relating to the family and private business affairs of other persons who have had correspondence with the donor.
3. Papers relating to investigations of individuals or to appointments and personnel matters.
4. Papers containing statements by or to me in confidence unless in the judgment of the Director of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library the reason for the confidentiality no longer exists.
5. All other papers with contain information of statements that might be used to injure, harass or damage any living person.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers of General William Lecel Lee are comprised primarily of Lee's diaries. The diaries, covering the years 1927 to 1952, were maintained religiously by Lee; he rarely missed making at least a brief entry for a given day. On a typical day, Lee might have noted the state of the weather, the principal activities in which he was involved, whom he dined with, activities with family and friends, leisure and recreational activities, his health, and, occasionally, world affairs.

Lee's diary observations were consistently pithy and concrete. He was not given to rumination, interpretation or extended analysis of circumstances and events. For example, diary entries on his Philippines tour of duty with MacArthur and Eisenhower describe what he did, whom he flew and where, but one does not find in the diaries frequent insights into the activities of the MacArthur mission or its principal personalities.

William Lecel Lee was born July 18, 1903, in Weatherford, Texas. In 1927 he received a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University, where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army ROTC. After graduation, he went to work for the Purina Corporation but soon resigned his position and enlisted in the Army Air Corps. In 1935, after seven years of routine post life in several Army Air Corps installations in Texas, Lee was ordered to the Philippines to assist with the establishment of a native air force. Shortly after his arrival in Manila he was given the official position of Technical Advisor to the Philippine Air Force. Soon thereafter, he was promoted to the position of Chief of the Constabulary Air Corps. During the next three years he served as chief administrator of the Philippine military's air arm, which entailed developing airfields throughout the islands, purchasing aircraft from factories in the United States, and overseeing a training program for Filipino pilots. It was during this time that Lee instructed Dwight D. Eisenhower to fly a Stearman Trainer.

On May 19, 1938, Lee's tour of duty in the Philippines ended and he returned to the United States, where he was stationed again in San Antonio. For a large part of the first year after his return, he traveled extensively to aircraft factories throughout the United States where he appraised planes for purchase for the Philippine Air Force. In 1940, Lee was assigned to the Second, then the Twenty-Second, Bombardment Groups, Langley Field, Virginia. His next year was spent training pilots, performing various administrative duties, and conducting test flying of the new B-26 bomber.

In the latter part of 1942 Lee was promoted to Colonel and appointed training supervisor for the 21st, 320th and 322nd Bombardment Groups at MacDill Field, Tampa, Florida. In early 1942 Lee and his unit were transferred to Florence, then Greenville, South Carolina. While there, Lee worked with both bomber and reconnaissance units. In 1944 Lee was named commander of the 49th Heavy Bomber Wing and shipped to Bari, Italy, where the 49th served as part of Nathan Twining's 15th Air Force. While in Italy, Lee participated in many bombing missions and was heavily decorated.

During the first half of 1945 Lee continued to take part in the Allied bombing campaign leading up to the defeat of Nazi Germany. Lee was promoted to brigadier general and received the

Distinguished Service Medal. When the war ended, he was appointed deputy to Air Vice Marshal Brodie, chief of the Air Force subcommission for Italy. It was while Lee was at Ciampino Airport, Rome, that he became involved in an argument with a man whom he believed to be an Italian citizen. The argument ended with Lee slapping his antagonist. Only a few short hours later, Lee discovered that the man whom he had confronted was John Magaron, a United States citizen whom President Truman had dispatched to oversee the forthcoming Greek elections. As a result of the incident, Lee was reprimanded and reduced in rank. Shortly thereafter, he was assigned as commander of the Smokey Hill Air Force Base in Salina, Kansas, where he served from August 12, 1946 to September 15, 1947.

On September 15, 1947 Lee assumed command of Turner Field, Albany, Georgia, where he was posted until August 1949. Perhaps his most notable experience while at this post was detail to the National War College from the fall of 1948 to the spring of 1949. During his tenure as commander of Turner Field he spent a large amount of time on tours around the continental United States during which he was oriented to new technologies relating to air power, such as atomic weaponry and jet aircraft.

After a short tour of duty at March Field, California, in the fall of 1949, Lee assumed command of the 3605th Navigation Training Wing, Ellington Air Force Base, Houston, Texas. He remained at Ellington until September 1952 when he assumed command of the Thirteenth Air Force, Manila, Philippines. He remained in the Philippines until the fall of 1956 where he returned to the United States as commander of an air force base near Amarillo, Texas. He served as base commander until 1962 when he retired from the U.S. Air Force and joined the American Trust Life Insurance Company as senior vice president. Lee died February 26, 1976.

Researchers should note that the Eisenhower Library conducted an oral history with William Lecl Lee, comprised of several interviews spanning the years 1970-72. Lee used the diaries extensively to prompt his memory in answering the interviewer's questions. Consequently, the interview transcript, which is available for research, "fleshes out" the diaries in a nicely complimentary fashion, providing important elaboration of the often spare comments found in the diaries.

CONTAINER LIST

Box No. Contents

Series I: Diaries, 1927-52

- 1 Diary, 1927 (1)-(3) [college life at Texas A&M; ROTC; Masonic activity; sales training with Purina, work with Purina and resignation; employment with Texas Electrical Services Co.]
- Diary, 1928 (1)-(3) [enlists in Army Air Corps at Brooks Field, San Antonio; flight training and graduation]
- Diary, 1929 (1)-(3) [more flight training; engaged to be married; commissioned as second lieutenant; sent to Ft. Crockett in Galveston; marriage; air maneuvers; PX management]
- Diary, 1930 (1)-(3) [PX management; air maneuvers; Bill Lee, Jr., born]
- 2 Diary, 1931 (1)-(3) [post life; maneuvers and training; reports to Brooks Field, San Antonio, for instructors school; moves to Randolph Field, San Antonio; duties as flight instructor]
- Diary, 1932 (1)-(3) [initial interest in duty in Philippines; routine post life]
- Diary, 1933 (1)-(3) [routine post life, San Antonio]
- Diary, 1934 (1)-(3) [impact of Depression on Air Corps; legal duties as Acting Assistant Adjutant of post; other administrative duties including supply, civilian employment; promotion to first lieutenant; receives orders to report to Philippine Department]
- 3 Diary, 1935 (1)-(3) [arrives in Manila, March 19; Assistant Adjutant at Nichols Field; assigned to work for Philippine government as technical adviser to the Philippine Constabulary; appointed chief of the Constabulary Air Corps, June 26; training of Filipino pilots and procurement of equipment; MacArthur mission arrives October 26; Lee meets with Eisenhower and James Ord]
- Diary, 1936 (1)-(3) [development of airfield at Camp Murphy; Lefty Parker detailed to Murphy to work with Lee on pilot instruction; airplane tours of islands to survey potentials for airfield development; flies Ord and Eisenhower; Parker doing most of student training, Lee most of administrative work; Eisenhower begins flight

instruction]

Diary, 1937 (1)-(3) [training and inspection flights of islands; Eisenhower; arrival of Stearman trainers; pilot training; replacement of Lefty Parker by Mark Lewis; first class of Filipino pilots graduates on October 30; Lee makes crash landing on outlying island while investigating Moro rebellion]

Diary, 1938 (1)-(3) [Eisenhower flying lessons; Filipino pilot training; Lee asks for extension of Philippine duty; death of James Ord; duty extension denied; sails from Manila May 19; returns to states and travels through Pacific Northwest; contact with J. Earl Schaefer of Stearman Aircraft; returns to Texas in July; meets up with Eisenhower at Stearman plant in Wichita; Walter Beech; meets Eisenhower in Denver, October 7]

- 4 Diary, 1939 (1)-(3) [J. Earl Schaefer and planes for Philippine Air Force; Lee travels to aircraft factories to appraise planes for Philippine Air Force; administrative duties at Kelly Field; flies B-18 bomber; assigned in September to Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field; returns in December to San Antonio]

Diary, 1940 (1)-(3) [appointed Administrative Inspector at Brooks Field, San Antonio; returns to Kelly Field as commander of Eighth Transport Squadron; Assigned to Second Bombardment Group, Langley Field, Virginia; transferred to Twenty-Second Bombardment Group, Langley Field]

Diary, 1941 (1)-(3) [B-18s and air exercises; Lee training pilots; detailed to Wright Field to test new B-26s; Lee promoted to major; dissatisfaction with B-26; Lee transferred to Jackson Field, Jackson, Mississippi, as commander of 69th Bomber Squadron of the 38th Bombardment Group; continues criticism of B-26]

Diary, 1942 (1)-(3) [still at Jackson Field; more criticism of B-26 and approval of B-25; appointed commander of 21st Bombardment Group, Key Field, Meridian, Mississippi; transferred to MacDill Field, Tampa Florida; Lee promoted to colonel and appointed training supervisor for 21st, 320th and 322nd Groups; continued training accidents involving B-26s]

- 5 Diary, 1943 (1)-(3) [Lee and his unit transferred to Florence, South Carolina; transferred to 49th Bomber Operational Training Wing, Greenville, South Carolina; 65th Reconnaissance Group, 316th Airdrome Squadron; Hap Arnold rejects B-26s in favor of B-24s]

Diary, 1944 (1)-(3) [Lee and his 49th Heavy Bombardment Wing arrive in Bari, Italy, assigned to Twining's 15th Air Force; oversees construction of Catelluccio Field; first combat mission; bombing mission losses; Ploesti; Lee decorated and nominated

for brigadier general]

Diary, 1945 (1)-(3) [Linz marshaling yards; stepped-up bombing of Axis; Lee appointed commander of Fifteenth Air Force; Lee receives Distinguished Service Medal; Lee appointed deputy to Air Vice Marshal Brodie, head of the Air Force Subcommission for Italy; Allied occupation of Italy]

Diary, 1946 (1)-(3) [Lee at Ciampino Airfield, Rome; John Maragon slapping incident, Lee's reprimand and his reduction in rank; on same day, French award him Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre; leaves Italy on May 3; assumes command of Smoky Hill Air Force Base, Salina, Kansas, on August 12]

- 6 Diary, 1947 (1)-(3) [Strategic Air Command and Smoky Hill; Drew Pearson and the Maragon "slapping incident"; Lee assumes command of Turner Field, Albany, Georgia, on September 15; segregation at Turner]

Diary, 1948 (1)-(3) [Lee speaking to service clubs on role of the new U.S. Air Force; Cold War and role of Air Force; Lee attends National War College in fall]

Diary, 1949 (1)-(3) [Lee at War College; graduates from War College June 21; Lee spends summer in long cross-country training tour of Air Force installations during which he is oriented to jet aircraft, nuclear weapons, radar bombing; testifies before Senate August 9 on Maragon incident, and wire services resurrect Maragon story; assumes command of March Field, California, August 20; relieved as commander of March Field, December 12; Lee's disillusionment with SAC]

Diary, 1950 (1)-(3) [Lee assumes command of 3605th Navigation Training Wing, Ellington AFB, Houston, Texas, on March 1; Maragon again; contact with Eisenhower]

- 7 Diary, 1951 (1)-(3) [Ellington]

Diary, 1952 (1)-(3) [Ellington; assumes command of Thirteenth Air Force, Manila, September 8]

Items Removed From 1927 Diary

Items Removed From 1928 Diary

Items Removed From 1929 Diary

Items Removed From 1930 Diary

Items Removed From 1931 Diary

Items Removed From 1932 Diary

Items Removed From 1933 and 1934 Diaries

Items Removed From 1935 Diary

Items Removed From 1936 Diary

Items Removed From 1937 Diary

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Items Removed From 1939 Diary

Items Removed From 1940 Diary

8 Items Removed From 1941 Diary

Items Removed From 1942 Diary

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Items Removed From 1944 and 1945 Diaries

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Items Removed From 1948 Diary

Items Removed From 1949 Diary

Items Removed From 1950 Diary

Items Removed From 1951 Diary

Items Removed From 1952 Diary

Items (Miscellaneous) Removed form Lee Diaries

Series II: Miscellaneous

Eisenhower Correspondence, 1938-69

Newspaper Clipping Re Lee's Retirement

Patton's Speech to the Third Army, July 5, 1944

Photographs Removed From Diaries

Pilot's Book

END OF CONTAINER LIST