

John Lee



John Bennett 'General' Lee, 88, passed away on Sept. 19, 2012 in St. John's hospital (Nassau Bay, Texas). He (and his fraternal twin brother, Keith) were born June 13, 1924 in Detroit, MI. At 17 years of age, John entered Virginia Polytechnic Institute majoring in Mechanical Engineering and was in the Corp of Cadets. When he and his twin brother became 18, they both enlisted. John signed up in the Army Air Corps, and his brother signed up in the Naval Air Corp. John received his Commission and Wings as a Fighter Pilot at 19 years of age. In September 1944, he was shipped overseas in a convoy to England, assigned to the 8th Air Force at King's Cliffe Air Force Base with the 79th Fighter Squadron, 20th Fighter Group. As a P-51 Mustang Fighter Pilot in WW-II, he flew 52 combat missions (logging over 850 hours of flight time including 275 combat hours) with the 8th Air Force in England over Europe. He escorted B-17 and B-24 Bombers in High Altitude Missions and escorted the British Mosquito's on Photo Recon. He served in Europe for 13 months from September 1944 to Oct. of 1945. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, six Air Medals, and three Battle Stars.

After WW-II, John returned to VPI and received his Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering with additional courses in Aeronautical Engineering. In 1948, John went to work for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) at Langley Field in Hampton, VA. He was hired by Dr. Robert Gilruth (Chief of the Pilotless Aircraft Research Division) and was assigned to the Propulsion and Aerodynamics Branch. In 1958 when President Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), John was one of the first 35 people assigned to the Mercury Space Task Group where he was Chief of the Mechanical Systems Section. He was a lead engineer on one of the three parallel feasibility studies conducted to show that man could go to the moon, which became the Apollo Program. On the Apollo Program, he became a Technical Assistant to Dr. Max Faget (Director of Engineering and Development) at the Johnson Space Flight Center. He was the head of the Directorates Program Offices for Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo. As a lead engineer in E&D, John was involved in the design concepts for the Docking Module used for the docking of the Apollo Command & Service Module with the Russian Soyuz Spacecraft; several space station design concepts; and the concept for putting up the Space Station with the Shuttle Spacecraft.

John received numerous Group Achievement Awards, Certificates of Commendations, and The Presidential Medal of Freedom which was awarded to the Apollo XIII Operations Team from President Nixon in 1970. His most favored award was the Snoopy Award given to him by Astronaut Neil Armstrong, Commander of the Apollo 11 Crew for the first Manned Lunar Landing. He retired from NASA in 1980.

John was inducted into the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets "Wall of Fame" for both Aviation and Aerospace on September. 18, 2007. He was a member of Houston QB Hanger, Space Center Rotary Club, National Association of Retired Federal Employees, and Senior Advisor to the Board of Directors for the Johnson Space Center NASA Alumni League.

John is survived by his two daughters: Dr. Laurie Lee VanArsdale (son-in-law, Dr. Will VanArsdale) of El Lago, Texas and Dottie Mae Lee of Austin, Texas; his sister, Beth Lee Cline, of Alexandria, Virginia; his twin brother, Edmund Keith Lee of Tennessee; and his brother Harry Emmick Lee (sister-in-law, Jane Lohr Lee) of Carrollton, Virginia. He was predeceased by his younger sister, Frances Lee Whitlark of Michigan.

He will be honored by family and friends with a viewing at Crowder Funeral home in Dickinson, Texas (Hwy 517 and 646) from 5:00 - 7:00 PM on Sunday, September 23, 2012. The Internment will be held with Military Honors by the VFW and conducted with prayer by Pastor Scholtz with the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church at Mt. Olivet Catholic Cemetery on I-45 in Dickinson at 9:30 - 10:30 AM on Monday, September 24, 2012. A formal service will be hosted by the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Nassau Bay, following the internment, at 11:00 AM. In lieu of flowers, the family wishes contributions be made to organizations for: Wounded Warrior Foundation, Soldiers' Angels, or the VFW in memory of John B. Lee.

Crowder Funeral Home
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