

Spencer K Chatfield

Compiled by Judy Hansen

July 2020

Spencer Kelsey Chatfield born 26 Dec 1911 in Salt Lake City, Utah to Arthur Kelsey and Naomi Spencer Felt Chatfield was their oldest child of five. Spence, as he was called, had siblings Barbara, Robert, Karlyn, and Arthur. He attended Lincoln Jr. High and graduated from L.D.S High School in Salt Lake. He also attended the University of Utah for a short time. In 1928 at age 17 he moved with his family to Lehi, Utah. It was while in Lehi that he enlisted in the Airforce on Jan 28, 1942. He went to Hamilton Field, California. He was transferred to Westover Field, Mass and they sailed for England on July 26, 1942.



Spence had been assigned to 64th Carrier Group of the United State Air Force.

This group was in England August 1942 to receive additional training. This is where Spence was promoted to Sargent. The 64th Carrier Group was then assigned to drop para-troopers and capture airports in ‘Operation Torch’ which was the invasion of French Morocco and Algeria from Nov 8-16, 1942. They were based out of the Maison Blanche Airfield which is known today as the Algiers International Airport. When they weren’t doing that they were constantly running troops and supplies to the front line. In 1943 his group was assigned to ‘Operation Husky’ in Italy. Their goal was to gain control of the western side of Sicily.

A historical note written by his sister Karlyn Chatfield Russon states,

“When World War II started, my brother Spence joined the Air Force. He felt he was the one in the family that should go because we had a baby, Bob and his wife Joe, had a little girl and Kelse was too young. He was training to jump out of planes and land in a field. Spence’s assignment took him to some place in North Africa. He was a sergeant. When he would write letter to us, they were often cut and edited. Once day, we received a letter saying, “I am at a base camp hospital. I can’t tell you what is wrong with me. Please fast and pray for me on Dec 10th.” He died on Dec 1st. We never had a chance to hold the family prayer. There was some indication that he may have died from Malaria.”

The WWII Hospital admission cards tell us that Spencer K Chatfield service #19072817 died by suicide from strangulation. The sad part of Spencer’s story is that in 1943 no one ever talked of suicide. Many of our WWII veterans wouldn’t even talk about the war. It appears his family was never told how he died. The cause of his death is not even listed on his death certificate. It wasn’t until the late 1950’s that the military started providing a treatment facility for victims of attempted suicide. During WWII veterans often were said to have ‘shell shock,’ but today we

call it PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). During WWII they did not treat PTSD nor did they gather statistics on veterans who died by suicide. Today in 2020 support for our U.S. Military Veterans from the effects of PTSD and attempted suicide are of the highest priority in our military through “trauma resorts”.

Spencer K Chatfield died Dec 1, 1943 in Tunisia, North Africa. He was originally buried in Tunisia but his remains were brought home by the ‘reinternment program’ where he is permanently laid to rest at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Salt Lake City, Utah. His name is also honored on the Lehi City Veteran’s Memorial Wall in the Lehi City Cemetery

This story is a combined effort of the Lehi Historical Society and the Stories Behind the Stars project, a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WW2 fallen on Fold3. Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

Sources:

U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947

https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2238/images/44041_04_00020-00965?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=f2c0d9da0392e754101e8f494d77f1ed&usePUB=true&phsrc=htD120&phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pId=10883808&backurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.ancestry.com%2Fcgi-bin%2Fsse.dll%3Findiv%3D1%26dbid%3D2238%26h%3D10883808%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26queryId%3Df2c0d9da0392e754101e8f494d77f1ed%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26phsrc%3DhtD120%26phstart%3DsuccessSource

WWII Army Enlistment Records at Ancestry.com

Utah, Military Records, 1861-1970 at Ancestry.com

U.S. WWII Hospital Admission Card Files, 1942-1954 at Ancestry.com

Wikipedia 64th Air Expeditionary Group https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/64th_Air_Expeditionary_Group

U.S. WWII Hospital Admission Card Files, 1942-1954; 19072817

<https://www.fold3.com/record/702781848-chatfield-spencer-k?terms=spencer%20k%20chatfield>

Military Headstone application - <https://www.fold3.com/image/320456884?terms=chatfield,k,spencer>

Wikiwand 517 Airlift Squadron https://www.wikiwand.com/en/517th_Airlift_Squadron