



Leon E. Thompson (1922 – 1943)

Leon Thompson had listed his home state as California. The 1930 Census does list a “Leon E. Thompson, age 8, living in Granite, California living with his aunt and uncle.

He was a Second Lieutenant (2LT) in the United States Army Air Force (O1). His service number was 0-734032.

He died on 20 June 1943 and his name appears on the “Tablets of the Missing” at the North Africa American Cemetery located in Carthage Tunisia. He was a pilot in the 27th Fighter Squadron, First Fighter Group, 15th Air Force. The 27th Fighter Squadron is the oldest fighter squadron in the US Air Force. The squadron earned Distinguished Unit Citations on August 25, and August 30 1943 and on May 18 1944. The squadron flew the Lockheed P-38 “Lightning” in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

A brief history of the 27th Fighter Squadron and the first Fighter Group for June/July 1943 follows:

Early June	Captain John Eiland relieved as 71st C.O. by Captain Joe Miles. After escorting a York transport en route to Tripoli the group discovered the identity of its passenger, the King of England.
5 Jun 1943	Lt Ed "Bo" Shaw of the 27th shot down and taken prisoner
20 Jun 1943	While the Group escorted B-26 Marauders to Castelvetrano in Sicily, Lts James Cronin and Edward Esser, both of the 94th were reported missing after heavy resistance. They ended up as prisoners of war. Lt. Leon Thompson went down and Herbert McQown was wounded, both were from the 27th. The group accounted for a total of eight 109s in two separate engagements.. Harold Lentz of the 94th alone claimed three in 45 seconds.
24 Jun 1943	While dive bombing in Sardinia 94th pilot John Hay went down and Lts David Conn and Thurman Nielson went down Nielson became a prisoner of war and Conn was reported missing in action. On the same mission Gilbert Butler found himself stranded from his flight with four Me 109s after him. He remained ahead of the 109s on a run for home even with a left engine shot out. Knowing they would hit him while landing Butler made a 180 and faced his enemies. By "beautiful shooting, accident, luck, or all three" he hit the lead 109 and splashed it. When he turned again for home with three 109s remaining and firing at him Butler rammed rudder and skidded the plane. He turned again and downed a second 109 after which the remaining two "bugged out."
25 Jun 1943	Five pilots ended up missing after another Bocca di Falco dive bombing attack including XO Cpt. Stentz, Lts Bennett, Hall and Frenq of the 27th, and Max Rayburn of the 94th. It turned out Max received serious wounds to the right arm and landed near a hospital in Tunis where he received medical treatment and some helpful advice.
Late Jun	The Group moved to Mauter #3 a dry lake bed south of Ferryville, Tunisia and a mile north of Mateur.
1 Jul 1943	Major Too Weelensiek took over the 94th from Maj George Sutcliffe.
10 Jul 1943	OPERATION HUSKEY began with eight separate strafing and dive bombing missions to eastern, southeastern and central Sicily. Two pilots ended up missing and two pilots killed, Lt. Robert Kuba, a 27th pilot seen to crash into an enemy tank, and Howard Gilliam from the 94th.

- 11 Jul 1943 Dive bombing and strafing continued. Four more pilots ended up missing. Lts Chapman and Diamond collided in mid air, however Chapman would bail out and return to his unit on the 16th after evasion. On the second pass late in the afternoon anti aircraft fire from tanks hit Dee Johnson from the 94th. Johnson managed to keep his plane flying for awhile until he plunged into the sea. Charlie Brown, a 27th pilot bailed out over the target area when he was hit by anti-aircraft fire, resulting in a bizarre encounter with Italian troops.

- 15 Jul 1943 After being ordered to bombard a bridge in Catania, the 94th, Jack Hanton noticed Lt. Holcomb flying erratically, suddenly Holcomb struck Boggess cutting the two both tail booms and both drove straight into the ground.

- 16 Jul 1943 The 94th commander, Otto Wellendiek, and Archie Jackson were directed to deliver what turned out to be a set of invasion maps to Sicily.

- 17 Jul 1943 This day consisted of massive bombing raids on the Naples area a major hub of transportation for assets from Germany to Sicily.

Lieutenant Thompson was awarded the Air Medal with Oak Leaf cluster and the Purple Heart. The Montecito Ridge housing subdivision of Otay Ranch development honors his name with a street named in his honor.



27th pilots at Chateau d'un. Top: L - R McKay, Pate, Newbury, Diesenroth, Brown, Nielson, McQuown, Hloucal, McIntosh. Middle: Smythe, Hurst, Stunkard, Wellner, Styer, Bancroft, Holden, Szarfanski, Butler. Bottom: Weinberg, Wenergren, Kuba, Shahan, Kennedy, Purvis (Caughlin)

