

# Hero who stirred up a hornets' nest returns to base

By ASHA MEHTA

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**A DECORATED US war veteran who flew on 52 war combat missions made an emotional return to his former RAF base near Peterborough.**

Captain John Lee (86), a Second World War fighter pilot who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and three battle stars, travelled from Texas to the old airfield at King's Cliffe where his 79th squadron, part of the 20th fighter group, were based.

Captain Lee (86) and his daughter Dotty also visited war graves at the American Cemetery at Madingley, in Cambridge, to pay their respects to his fallen comrades.

Cpt Lee was invited for tea with Peterborough Mayor Councillor Keith Sharp yesterday and regaled him with amazing stories of his heroic feats in the air.

At the controls of his P51 Mustang aircraft, he escorted British Mosquito aircraft on photo reconnaissance missions over Czechoslovakia.

He also carried out low-flying attacks - known as strafing missions - over airfields and train yards.

He said: "There was one moment when time seemed to stand still. It was our third trip around and I remember my squadron commander saying: 'One more pass and then we can go home.'

"I started on my last pass and I encountered a group of 10 to 20 German Me-262 jet fighters. I was the first to spot them."

He initially did not get a shot in but later on, he and his comrades set a record for the most airplanes destroyed in one day.

His unit also took part in the Battle of the Bulge - fought in the Ardennes mountains between December 16, 1944 and January 25, 1945 - by escorting bombers to the battle area.

He said: "I still remember a lot from that time. My nickname was General Lee. I used to say I flew like a hornet and stung like a bee."

Cpt Lee has only visited Peterborough once before, in 1985 and he said coming back again was "very nostalgic".

He often gives presentations about his experiences and said it means a lot to him.

He said: "Meeting kids and putting a smile on their faces is great and means I am passing history on."

Cpt Lee was invited to Peterborough



**VIP:** Mayor Councillor Keith Sharp, left, welcomes John Lee to the mayor's parlour as part of his emotional return to the area in which he was based.

by Mark Kinder (46), of Lock Close, Deeping St James, who got in touch with him after tracking him down on the internet.

Mr Kinder, an enthusiast of the 79th squadron, arranged for the veteran to look round the old airfield, have tea with the Mayor, enjoy a VIP day at the American Air Museum, at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford and watch a Battle of Britain air show.

Mr Kinder said: "These young American kids came over here and put an x on the line for us."

"It's important we don't forget the sacrifices they made. Captain Lee is a real character and had a fantastic career."

Cpt Lee is currently writing a book about his incredible life story, which includes his part in the NASA space programme.

## Handpicked by NASA

**CAPTAIN Lee was one of 35 engineers hand-picked to develop the NASA space programme in the 1970s.**

During his stellar 30-year career, his proudest moment came when he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom as part of the missions operations team supporting the Apollo 13 mission to the moon.

Former US president Richard Nixon said the support team performed "a miracle, transforming potential tragedy into one of the most dramatic rescues of all time."

"The skill, co-ordination and performance under pressure of the mission operations team made it happen."

Apollo 13 was the third Apollo mission intended to land on the Moon.

The craft was launched on April

11, 1970, but the Moon landing had to be aborted after an oxygen tank ruptured, damaging the craft's electrical system.

This forced the crew to conserve batteries and oxygen needed for the last hours of flight and use the craft's Lunar Module's resources as a "lifeboat" during the return trip to Earth.

Despite great hardship caused by limited power, loss of cabin heat and shortage of potable water, the crew returned safely to Earth on April 17 and the mission was termed a "successful failure".

Captain Lee said: "We told flight control from the Mission Evaluation Room what had happened to the space craft and how they could help it return. We got a medal for helping to save the mission, which was a highlight."

**REMARKABLE MAN:** Second World War veteran John Lee; Above, a P51D Mustang, similar to the one that John flew; left, a Luftwaffe Me262 jet fighter, similar to one of up to 20 hostile aircraft that John tussled with during the war.

## LUXURY COACH HOLIDAYS INTERESTING RELAXING DAY EXCURSIONS

Holidays include luxury executive coach travel, hot / cold drink facilities, toilet, climate control, door to door taxi pick-up/peterborough area, full insurance cover on most holidays, excursions, excellent quality hotels, full english breakfasts / evening meals, entertainment.

### Holidays

13th -17th September Bournemouth, Dorset 3 star Ocean View Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast, Excursions, Entertainment	£289.00
18th -22nd Sept The Cornish Riviera Perranporth, Cornwall Ponsmere Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast, Excursions, Entertainment, Leisure Facilities	£299.00
4th - 8th Oct Elegant Eastbourne The Sussex Coast & Downs Haddon Hall Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast, Entertainment, Excursions	£269.00
18th-22nd Oct Morecambe Bay Seaside Resort - The Lake District - Yorkshire Dales - Blackpool Illuminations Headway Hotel Seaford Position Dinner Bed Breakfast, Excursions, Entertainment	£299.00
25th-29th Oct Autumn in Criccieth, North Wales 'The Good Old Days' Themed Holiday Dinner Bed Breakfast, Excursions, Full themed Itinerary	£275.00
25th -29th Oct Turkey & Tinsel- Blackpool Illuminations- Lytham St. Annes Holiday Dinner Bed Breakfast, Excursions, Full Fun Itinerary	£265.00
1st -5th Nov Turkey & Tinsel West Country Holiday - Minehead New Beach Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast- Mock Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Full Entertainment Itinerary, Two Day Coach Excursions	£255.00
1st -5th Nov Fun Filled Turkey & Tinsel Holiday - Eastbourne Hadleigh Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast- Excursions- Full Daily Entertainment Itinerary	£295.00
8th -12th Nov Turkey & Tinsel Holiday - Torquay Ashley Court Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast- Excursions- Full Entertainment Itinerary	£255.00
18th -22nd Nov Turkey & Tinsel Beautiful Pembrokeshire Coast Tenby, Wales The Cliffe Norton Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast- Excursions- Full Mock Christmas Itinerary	£280.00
Sat 11th - Sun 12th Dec Bargain Pre-Christmas Weekend Break- Festive Shopping Sightseeing Weekend, Wrexham. Explore Medieval City of Chester - Shop Til You Drop Trafford Shopping Centre, Manchester Ramada Plaza Hotel Dinner Bed Breakfast	£199.50
23rd -27th Dec Christmas Holiday Torquay, Torbay English Riviera	£438.00
23rd -27th Dec Bournemouth, Dorset Christmas Holiday	£499.00
30th Dec - 2nd Jan New Year Celebrations Llanelli, South Wales	£335.00

### Day Trips

Mon 13th Sept Chesterfield Crooked Spire Town Market Day & Annual Well Dressing	£22.00
Wed 15th Sept Woburn Safari Park Observe over 800 animals as you drive through a 330 acre park. Enjoy Wild World Leisure Area with Indoor / Outdoor Adventure Playgrounds & Walk through Animal Encounter Areas. Full Programme Demonstrations, talks, feed times	Adult £30 Sen. Cit. £28.00 Child £25.00
Sat 25th Sept Late Summer in Kew Gardens & Kew Palace Adult £34.00 Sen Cit	£32.00
Sun 26th Sept Autumn Shades in the Wye Valley & Forest of Dean	£25.00
Tues 12th Oct 16th & 23rd Nov Fenland Pub Carvery Lunch Musical Afternoon	£22.00
Sun 17th Oct Petticoat Lane - Covent Garden, London	£20.00
Wed 20th Oct 17th Nov 8th Dec The Black Bear Carvery Lunch/Musical Afternoon	£23.00
Sat 23rd Oct 13th & 20th November Channel Tunnel Cite Europe, France Adinkerke, Belgium (Cigarette & Tobacco Route)	£44.00
Sun 7th Nov Christmas Shopping Experience Milton Keynes Centre	£18.50
Sat 13th Nov Disney On Ice '100 Years of Magic' 65 Disney Characters from 18 Disney Stories, NIA Birmingham Matinee Performance	£37.50
Wed 17th Nov Lakeside or Bluewater Shopping Centres	£22.00
Thurs 18th Nov Enjoy Mickie Driver's Christmas Special 'Palace of Varieties' London Famous Fabulous Show, Super Christmas Turkey Lunch & Christmas Pudding/Tea/Coffee, Six Wonderful Variety Acts, Carols, Fun Galore	£35.50
Sun 21st Nov Classical Spectacular Royal Albert Hall, London Mat. Perf.	£69.00
Wed 24th Nov Wicksteed Park 'New The Way We Were Show 50's 60's' Lunch & Afternoon Tea Included	£36.00
Thurs 25th Nov Meadowhall, Sheffield Shopping Centre	£20.00
Thurs 2nd Dec Wed 8th Dec Fri 17th Dec Thursford Christmas Spectacular Carol Concerts Mat. Perf.	£49.50
Sun 28th Nov Thursford Christmas Spectacular Carol Concert Mat. Perf.	£53.00

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