

# Leonard John Kovar collection

AFC 2001/001/33917

Prepared by Eileen Simon and Miriam Seldin



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Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center,  
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# Collection Summary

Title: Leonard John Kovar collection, 1922-2003: Veterans History Project (U.S.)

Inclusive Dates: 1922-2003

Bulk Dates: 1943-1945

Call No.: AFC 2001/001/33917

Creator: Kovar, Leonard John, 1922-

Extent (items): 384 items.

Extent (containers): 14 containers.

Extent (sound recordings): sound recordings: 1 sound cassette : analog.

Extent (sound recordings): sound recordings: 2 sound discs : analog ; 8 in.

Extent (sound recordings): sound recordings: 1 sound disc : analog ; 6 1/2 in.

Extent (manuscripts): manuscripts: 44 folders.

Extent (graphic images): graphic images: 59 photographic prints : black and white, color ; various sizes.

Extent (manuscripts): manuscripts: 1 transcript.

Extent (computer disk): 1 computer disk : 3 1/2 in.

Extent (diary): 1 diary.

Language: In English.

Repository: Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/vhp.home>

Abstract: Interview conducted for the Veterans History Project 2003. This collection contains audio recordings, civilian papers, clippings, correspondence, creative works, a diary, military papers, mixed manuscripts, mixed periodicals, unit histories, a transcript, and photographs relating to Leonard John Kovar's service in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II. The majority of this collection consists of correspondence between Kovar and his family, some of which was written while Kovar was a prisoner of war.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### People

Cross, Coy F., interviewer.

Kovar, Leonard John, 1922-

### Organizations

American Folklife Center.

Beale Air Force Base (Calif.) sponsor.

Stalag Luft III.

Stalag VII A.

United States. Army Air Forces. Bombardment Group (H), 451st

United States. Army Air Forces. Bombardment Squadron (H), 725th.

Veterans History Project (U.S.) collector.

### Subjects

Prisoners of war--Germany.

Prisoners of war--United States.

World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, American.

World War, 1939-1945--Veterans--California--Interviews.

### Form/Genre

Clippings.

Correspondence.  
Interviews (Sound recordings)  
Manuscripts.  
Oral histories.  
Personal correspondence.  
Photographs.

## Administrative Information

### Arrangement

Arranged in four series: Sound Recordings, Computer Files, Manuscripts, and Photographs.

Manuscripts are arranged alphabetically by type of material with oversize items located at the end of the collection. The correspondence is divided into six parts: Letters from the veteran to his family, 1943-1955 (MS03); Letters to the veteran from his family, 1939-1945 (MS04); Letters to the veteran from friends, 1945 (MS05); Letters exchanged by family members of men missing in action (MIA) or held as prisoners of war (POW), 1944-1945 (MS06); Letters from the military to the Kovar family, 1943-1945 (MS07); Letters from friends to the Kovar family, 1944-1945 (MS08).

### Acquisition

Accessioned, 2004.

### Related Material

Leonard John Kovar Collection (AFC/2001/001/46772), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.46772>

### Copyright Status

Duplication of collection materials may be restricted.

### Bibliography

Kovar, Len; edited by Jessica Springer, *WWII prisoner of war: how I survived* (Clackamas, OR: Koho Pono, LLC, 2011).

### Access and Restrictions

Collection is open for research; access restrictions apply. To request collection materials, please contact the Veterans History Project at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/vhp.contact>

### Online Content

Selected items from the Leonard John Kovar collection are available on the Library of Congress web site at <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.33917/>.

### Preferred Citation

Leonard John Kovar Collection (AFC/2001/001/33917), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

## Biographical Note

Leonard John Kovar was born in 1922, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1940, and was attending Macalester College at the outset of World War II. With what he describes as "mediocre grades," Kovar decided to leave school and enlist in the Army Air

Forces in 1943. Kovar was selected for pilot training at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC), Texas. He successfully completed pre-flight training in San Antonio and was then sent to the Stamford Flying School, Texas, to continue his training. Kovar “washed out” of pilot training in May 1943, and was reclassified as a bombardier. He was reassigned to SAACC before moving on to bombardier training at San Angelo Army Air Field, Texas. Kovar completed additional training with his crew at Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson, Arizona, before being sent overseas in the summer of 1944.

Kovar and his crew were assigned to the 727th Squadron, 451st Bomb Group, stationed in Italy. On August 22, 1944, while flying their eleventh mission, Kovar and his crew were shot down by enemy fire, prior to reaching their target in Vienna, Austria. Kovar successfully ejected from the plane, but was later picked up by Hungarian civilians who turned him over to German soldiers. Kovar was held as a prisoner of war (POW) at Stalag Luft III, and later Stalag VII-A, until April 1945, when his camp was liberated by General Patton’s forces. During his time as a POW, Kovar was able to correspond with his family at home. He returned to the United States in the summer of 1945, and after taking leave at home in Minnesota, he returned to active duty to await orders for the Pacific Theater. These orders never materialized and when the war ended, Kovar was honorably discharged with the rank of Second Lieutenant.

During his time in the service, Kovar resolved to go back to school and upon his return to civilian life he accomplished this goal, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics and psychology from Macalester College. He then attended Andover Newton Theological School, and was ordained as a minister in 1952. He and his wife, Lorraine, lived in Hardin, Montana, where he presided over the First Congregational Church.

## Scope and Content

This collection spans the years 1922-2003, with the bulk of the material dating from 1943 to 1945. The collection contains audio recordings, civilian papers, clippings, correspondence, creative works, a diary, military papers, mixed manuscripts, mixed periodicals, regimental/unit histories, a transcript, and photographs.

The audio recordings include an oral history interview detailing Kovar’s training, first missions, being shot down, attempting to evade capture, capture by Hungarian civilians, interrogation by a German officer, transport to Stalag III, food in prisoner of war (POW) camps, marching to a new camp, liberation, the end of the war, returning to the United States, and his post-war education and career. Also included are three audio discs containing a message from Kovar to his friend Lloyd, and songs sung by a group for Kovar’s wife, Lorraine.

The majority of this collection consists of correspondence. While on active duty, Leonard Kovar wrote to his family frequently. These letters are primarily addressed to his father, Emil, his mother, Verna, and his sister, Shirley (nicknamed “Suk”). Kovar makes frequent inquiries about a much younger brother, Larry. Also, a younger sister, Susan, was born on the day Kovar’s plane was shot down, August 22, 1944. Prior to Susan’s birth, Kovar asks often about his mother’s condition and general health. In addition to inquiries about the home front, Kovar describes his training experiences, his expenses and need for money from home, and his thoughts about entering the war. After his capture in 1944, Kovar continued to send letters home. These are necessarily less detailed as they were subject to German censorship. There is also a sizable collection of correspondence from Kovar and his wife, Lorraine, sent to Kovar’s parents from 1953-1955. These describe their life in Hardin, Montana, including details about the couple’s son, Timmy, born in 1953.

Complementing the correspondence sent by Leonard Kovar is that sent by his family. His parents and older sister sent letters to him while he was a POW, and they also corresponded with the families of the other members of Kovar’s crew. This correspondence helped establish a support

and information network for these POW/MIA families. Additional POW/MIA-related materials in this collection include newsletters, official information sent to family members, instructions on how to send packages to prisoners, and information about local gatherings for families of POW/MIA soldiers.

# Description of Series

*Container*

*Series*

Series I: Recordings

Series II: Computer Files

Series III: Manuscripts

Series IV: Photographs

Oversize Material

# Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
	<p>Series I: Recordings</p> <p>Interview with Leonard J. Kovar, November 13, 2003, conducted by Coy F. Cross, II.</p> <p>1 audio cassette ID: AFC2001/001/33917 SR01 SR01: Topics covered include: training; first missions; being shot down; attempting to evade capture; captured by Hungarian civilians; turned over to Germans; interrogation; transport to Stalag III; food in prisoner of war (POW) camp; moving to new camp; liberation; end of war; returning home; post-war education and career.</p>
BOX-FOLDER OVZ212/1	<p>For Lorraine, undated</p> <p>1 sound disc ID: AFC2001/001/33917 SR02 <a href="#">Digital content available</a> SR02: Record containing a recording of the song "Happy Birthday," sung by a group for the veteran's wife, Lorraine.</p>
BOX-FOLDER OVZ212/2	<p>For Lorraine, undated</p> <p>1 sound disc ID: AFC2001/001/33917 SR03 <a href="#">Digital content available</a> SR03: Record containing a recording of the song "Oh My Darling, Clementine," sung by a group for the veteran's wife, Lorraine.</p>
BOX-FOLDER OVZ211/1	<p>For Lloyd, 1945</p> <p>1 sound disc ID: AFC2001/001/33917 SR04 <a href="#">Digital content available</a> SR04: Record made by veteran during service with personal message to his friend Lloyd.</p>
BOX FD22	<p>Series II: Computer Files</p> <p>Computer File, 2003</p> <p>1 computer disc ID: AFC2001/001/33917 CF01 CF01: Electronic copy of interview transcript (print version is MS16).</p>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1077/1-2	<p>Series III: Manuscripts</p> <p>Civilian Papers, undated</p> <p>2 folders MS01: Baptism record, school report cards, Veterans Administration life insurance paperwork, high school yearbook.</p>

## Series III: Manuscripts

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1077/3	Clippings, undated  1 folder MS02: Clippings about units veteran served with, includes articles from Minneapolis newspapers about veteran's capture as a prisoner of war (POW) and eventual return.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1077/4-9	Correspondence, 1943-1955  6 folders MS03: Letters from the veteran to his family. Topics covered include: veteran's reaction to "washing out" of flight school (06/02/1943); veteran thanking his father for the gift of a hand-crafted knife he later used after being shot down; expressions of veteran's strong religious feelings; letters home from Stalag Luft III prison camp. <i><u>See also Oversize.</u></i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1078/1-13	Correspondence, 1943-1955  13 folders MS03 continued
BOX-FOLDER MSS1079/1	Correspondence, 1943-1955  1 folder MS03 continued
BOX-FOLDER MSS1079/2-3	Correspondence, 1939-1945  2 folders MS04: Letters to the veteran from his family written while he was a prisoner in Stalag Luft III prison camp. <i><u>See also Oversize.</u></i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1079/4-5	Correspondence, 1942-1945  2 folders MS05: Letters to the veteran from friends. <i><u>See also Oversize.</u></i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1079/6-7	Correspondence, 1944  2 folders MS06: Letters between veteran's family and the families of other POW/MIA soldiers. <i><u>See also Oversize.</u></i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/1	Correspondence, 1945  1 folder MS06 continued
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/2	Correspondence, 1943-1945  1 folder MS07: Official military letters to veteran.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/3	Correspondence, 1944-1945  1 folder MS08: Letters from the veteran's friends to his family.

## Series III: Manuscripts

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/4	Creative Works, June 1945  1 folder MS09: "I Was There," story about veteran's wartime experiences written by his mother, Verna Kovar, while he was on leave after being liberated from prison camp; includes a brief foreword by veteran.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/5	Creative Works, undated  1 folder MS10: Copy of a pencil drawing of veteran. <i>See also Oversize.</i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/6	Diaries and journals, 1944  1 folder MS11: Veteran's diary 07/23/1944 - 08/17/1944.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/7	Military Papers, 1943-1945  1 folder MS12: Includes invitation to bombardier training graduation ceremony, list of names, personal affairs checklists, official personnel documents, training and expense reports. <i>See also Oversize.</i>
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/8	Mixed Manuscripts, undated  1 folder MS13: POW/MIA related papers including newsletters, official information sent to family members, instructions on how to send packages to prisoners, information about local gatherings for families of POW/MIA soldiers. <i>See also Oversize.</i>
BOX-FOLDER OVZ286/7	Periodicals, 1943-1955  1 folder MS14: Various personal papers including Stamford Flying School newsletter, church mailing from First Congregational Church in Hardin, Montana.
BOX-FOLDER OVZ288/1	Periodicals, May 29, 1945  1 folder MS14: "Roosevelt Standard," Roosevelt High School newspaper.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1080/10-11	Regimental/unit histories, undated  2 folders MS15: Brochure on San Angelo Army Air Field Bombardier School; Silhouette Handbook of US Army Air Forces Airplanes.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1081/1-2	Regimental/unit histories, undated  2 folders MS15: "The Shack," 43-15 DR and 44-1 DR, training yearbook.
BOX-FOLDER MSS1081/3	Transcript, November 13, 2003  1 folder

## Series III: Manuscripts

### *Container*

### *Contents*

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MS16: Transcript of interview SR01.

## Series IV: Photographs

BOX-FOLDER  
MSS1081/4

Original photographic prints, 1940-1953

1 folder

PH01-PH59: Images of Kovar and his crew, friends, published photographs with captions, family photographs.

## Oversize Material

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/1

Correspondence, 1945

1 folder

MS03: Letters written while the veteran was a prisoner of war (POW).

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/2

Correspondence, 1944-1945

1 folder

MS04: Letters to the veteran from his family written while he was a prisoner in Stalag Luft III prison camp.

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/3

Correspondence, 1945

1 folder

MS05: Letters to the veteran from friends.

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/4

Correspondence, 1944

1 folder

MS06: Letters between veteran's family and the families of other POW/MIA soldiers.

BOX-FOLDER OVZ6/1

Creative Works, undated

1 folder

MS10: Original pencil drawing of veteran, artist unknown.

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/5

Military Papers, 1943-1945

1 folder

MS12: Includes invitation to bombardier training graduation ceremony, list of names, personal affairs checklists, official personnel documents, training and expense reports.

BOX-FOLDER  
OVZ286/6

Mixed Manuscripts, undated

1 folder

MS13: POW/MIA related papers including newsletters, official information sent to family members, instructions on how to send packages to prisoners, information about local gatherings for families of POW/MIA soldiers.