

MR. T. E. DEFREESE
(Thomas Edward Defreese)
Haskell County, Kansas

Written by Eva Mae Cooper

Told by Thomas E. DeFreese

* *Additional information added about certain people mentioned in this story*

“We live twelve miles northeast of Sublette and are among the country’s progressive farmers. We own and farm six hundred and forty acres of land, five hundred and sixty acres are all wheat, and the other is pasture. All of this land is free of debt.

In 1924, we averaged twenty-eight bushels of wheat on four hundred acres. Since we started farming in 1918, we have raised profitable crops every year except for one in the last few years.

We came to Haskell County in 1918 from Reno County, Kansas, where we both were born and reared. All of our lives, we have toiled with soil. We purchased our six hundred and forty acres as soon as we arrived. We have bought and sold other tracts of land but refused to give up our home place despite attractive offers. This is where we will always live. We are more than satisfied with Haskell County. Our land has increased in value about one and a half times.

We had a flock of two hundred Plymouth Rocks (*a chicken breed*), which helped us in our everyday living. We also have a limited amount of cattle.

With a header (*a grain-harvesting machine that cuts off the grain heads and elevates them to a wagon*), we could cover about seventy-five acres a day. Thus, it would take approximately twenty-four days for our harvest. Today with tractors and combines, we harvest the six hundred and forty acres in fourteen days, and we don’t have to work so hard. That includes Mrs. DeFreese, who has to prepare meals for only four workers now, two on the tractor and combine, plus the two who put the wheat in the bin. When we used the horses and headers, we had a force of eight.

Our future is bright. Haskell County will surely grow. To my notion, the land will increase in value by twenty dollars an acre, maybe more. I believe that we will raise even better crops. I am also a firm believer in early seedbed preparation and returning stubble to the soil. I have comparative fields that prove the value of this. When I harvested the last crop, I had a one-way plow following the combine and turning over the soil immediately after the cutting of the wheat.

We have done our share toward populating this new country. We are parents of seven children, six of whom are living at home.”

Additional Information
THOMAS EDWARD DEFREESE

THOMAS EDWARD DEFREESE, son of John Risley DeFreese (1851-1926) and Marcella Shore (1857-1936), was born on 29 Aug 1877 in Pretty Prairie, Reno County, Kansas. On 26 Nov 1905, Thomas married **IDA JEFFERS**, daughter of Clayborn Jeffers (1842-1914) and Anna Jenkins (1866-1961) in Turon, Reno County, Kansas. At that time, Thomas was the owner of the Turon (Kansas) Cab Line. Ida was born on 15 Oct 1887 in Reno County, Kansas.

By 1930, Thomas and Ida had left Reno County, Kansas, and moved to Lockport, Haskell County, Kansas. They were divorced in about 1935. The exact date is not known. In 1940, Thomas was found living as an inmate at the Larned State Hospital in Larned, Pawnee County, Kansas. Ida moved to Garden City, Finney County, Kansas, in about 1947.

Thomas died on 31 May 1954. Records show he died in Larned, Kansas. Burial was at the Haskell County Cemetery in Sublette, Haskell County, Kansas. Ida passed away on 15 Dec 1962 at the St. Catherine Hospital in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. Burial was at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City.

Seven children were born in their marriage:

MYRTLE RUBY DEFREESE was born on 5 Jul 1906. She married Gilbert Nicholas Yount, son of Nicholas Yount (1859-1937) and Phoebe Baird (1862-1927) on 28 Apr 1925. Gilbert was born on 9 Sep 1902 in Haskell County, Kansas. About 1936, they left Haskell County, Kansas, and moved to Washington, Dade County, Missouri. By 1950, they had returned to Haskell County. Gilbert passed away on 28 Oct 1980 in Sublette, Kansas. Myrtle died there on 4 May 1981. Burial for both was at the Haskell County Cemetery in Sublette. Gilbert and Myrtle had three daughters: Peggy Yount Melcum (1926-2015), Betty Jean Yount Kellett (1929-1975), and Janice Louise Yount (1940-1940).

LOLA MAY DEFREESE was born on 15 Dec 1908. Between 1930 and 1940, she was married and divorced. In 1930, she was living in Dodge City, Ford County, Kansas. She made Cheyenne, Wyoming her home in 1939. She passed away there on 29 Nov 1979. Her ashes were placed at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City, Kansas.

RALPH VIRGIL DEFREESE was born on 27 Mar 1910 in Turon, Reno County, Kansas. In 1931, Ralph married Lovina Adelaide Boyd, daughter of William Boyd (1881-1939) and Kathryn Elizabeth Okeefe (1886-1971). Lovina was born on 28 Jul 1912 in Flat Rock, Crawford County, Illinois. Ralph and Lovina had three children. Ralph passed away on 18 May 1965 in Burlington, Kit Carson County, Colorado. Lovina died at the age of 100 years on 17 May 2013 in Longmont, Boulder County, Colorado. Both were buried at the Fairview Cemetery in Burlington, Colorado.

LLOYD CHANDLER DEFREESE was born on 21 Jan 1912 in Turon, Reno County, Kansas. He died on 14 Jun 1960 in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. Lloyd was buried next to his mother, at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City.

HAROLD ARNOLD DEFREESE was born on 28 Aug 1913 in Turon, Reno County, Kansas. He married Crystal Solze, daughter of Milton E. Solze (1880-1946) and Crystal Estella Williams (1884-1978) on 8 Dec 1940 in Syracuse, Hamilton County, Kansas. Crystal Regina Solze was born on 2 Sep 1910 in Damar, Rooks County, Kansas. She was first married (*and soon divorced*) to Raymond W. Husband. They had a son, Emery Vern Husband (1929-2001). Harold Arnold DeFreese passed away on 14 Dec 1967 at the St. Catherine Hospital in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. He had suffered a heart attack a month earlier on November 24th. Crystal died on 22 Mar 1989 in Garden City, Kansas and the body was cremated.

BUTLER EUGENE DEFREESE was born on 7 Jun 1916 in Turon, Reno County, Kansas. He passed away on 18 Oct 1941 in Finney County, Kansas, and buried at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas.

NORMAN ELBERT DEFREESE was born on 27 Dec 1917. He was in the United States Army Air Forces during World War II. Norman was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart. He died at sea on 7 Jan 1943.

Russ Pickett provided the following information about Norman Elbert DeFreese:

Norman served as a First Lieutenant and navigator on B-26 # 40-1421, 33 Bomber Squadron, 22nd Bomber Group, in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II.

He resided in Haskell County, Kansas before the war. He had previously resided in Laramie County, Wyoming with his sister. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps on 28 Apr 1941, before the war, at Fort Riley, Kansas. At the time of his enlistment, he was single and without dependents.

B-26 #40-1421 took off, with a crew of seven, from Central Province, Papua New Guinea on a bombing mission against a Japanese Convoy off Lae, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea.

Japanese Zeros attacked them near the target. Anti-aircraft fire hit about eleven miles offshore two miles north of the Eia River, off Salamaua. They had to escape in Hercules Bay. Five crewmembers survived the ditching and eventually, four of them swam to shore. Shot by local natives after reaching the shore, was Sergeant Brown, one of the five survivors. They thought he was a Japanese soldier.

First Lt. DeFreese, who was also one of the five survivors, had severe damage to his leg from a shell exploding inside the B-26 when the anti-aircraft fire hit them. He died shortly after the crew swam to shore. During the war, Norman was declared "Missing in Action".