

History of John Leslie Anderson,
compiled by Leila Rae Anderson Hight (daughter)

John Leslie Anderson was born on July 26, 1889 to John Albert Anderson and Ellen Evelyn Quinn in Ephraim, Sanpete County, Utah. John Leslie Anderson was the first of nine children. Following are his siblings:

Nellie Elizabeth, Ivy June, Zella Christina, Floyd Wilson, Lewis Arthur, Francis Leo, Goldie Maurine and Kenneth Devere.

Little is known of John Leslie Anderson's childhood years, a great loss, but judging from his later years he must have been a typical boy, being a handful one minute and a sweet loving person the next. (When compiling this history of my father, I was able to talk to his sister, Goldie Maurine, on one occasion, I shall include her few insights into his history, as every insight is precious).

John Leslie Anderson's (referred hereafter as Les, as that is what his family and community members called him) family once lived in Castle Gate, Utah, were his father, John Albert Anderson, was the "barn boss" in charge of the mules or horses that worked the mine. Les stayed in Cleveland, Utah, and developed the farm while his father was in Castle Gate.

Schools in those days were not as they are today, Les' sister, Maurine is sure that Les went through the eighth grade, which was the maximum then. She does not remember Les ever participating in sports.

Les hung around with a rough crowd and he used profanity, which his mother did not like, she used to tell him, " you don't have to talk like that."

One of the activities Les participated in as a boy, was when Matt Warner would go down to the ranch and get Les, they would ride their horses up over the bench and find dead horses. They would take their manes and tails and braid hair ropes from them.

Les' sister, Maurine, does not remember him doing much of anything on the farm. She does remember him coming down to the farm a lot after he was married and helped with the haying, etc. but surmises that "he wasn't much of a farmer." That may explain his later profession as a coal miner.

John Leslie Anderson joined the United States Army on February 19, 1918 at Price, Carbon County, Utah. He was one of fourteen men from Utah. He was assigned to the 324th Field Signal Battalion, in June he became a member of C Company, 304th Field Signal Battalion, 79th Division stationed in Fort Meade, Maryland. For some unknown reason he was known on the army records as Leslie J. Anderson. Around the 6th of July, he and 11,999 troops embarked on the S.S. Leviathan for a six day cruise, one of the quickest trips a transport ever made, to

Brest, France. Company C was in active service from September 15th until November 11th. During this time they were practically always under shell fire and for twenty days they were actually engaged in offensive work against the enemy. Nine men from the company were killed in action and thirty three others were gassed or wounded.

During the war Les strung telephone line. Many times our men, while laying a wire, were called upon and commanded to get under cover. Shells of every description were constantly tearing the lines to pieces in a dozen places at the same time. When this happened there was a backup plan. They used carrier pigeons. For the Signal Man there was no rest, because of constantly cut lines. Wire communication to the outposts was difficult to maintain. The problem was solved by having two circuits to each post laid at a considerable distance apart. Only once or twice were both lines out at the same time and then the trusty little pigeon and projector lamps served in good stead. Several of the men were gassed in this area, mustard gas was often being met with in the wooded areas.

Les was gassed at Charney France on November 7, 1918. The mustard gas caused a temporary lose of his eyesight. Four days later when the Armistice was signed Les was on his way to the hospital. According to mother " he was blind as a bat and kept asking the nurse if he would ever be able to see again, she did not know. One morning when he woke up he could see just a streak of light under his closed lashes and that gave him a little courage. Every day the streak of light got a little brighter. When he died in 1953 he had very good eyesight." Someone else tells it this way, "He was told he would never see again. One day after being taken outside in the sun he thought he saw a shadow. He asked them to place him in the same area, facing the same direction each day. He regained his eyesight a little at a time and came to realize it was a pine tree he was seeing."

By order of Major Mitchum, dated Dec. 30th, 1918, Les was authorized to wear the wound chevron on his uniform.

Les along with most of the men received \$30.00 a month for pay as Buck Pvt. In February 1919, Les received a letter from Gen. Pershing, he was a Pvt. 1st class.

On March 3rd, 1919, Les was sent to Barle Duc for the purpose of finding and arresting an A WOL soldier.

Les lost his hair when he was young, it is thought it may have been the result of Typhoid Fever. Whether it was before his stint in the Army or afterwards it is unknown. As a result he became known as "Baldy Anderson". Many people who did not know Les Anderson, always knew "Baldy Anderson".

Les met Ruth Ada Gardner in the fall of 1919, while Ruth and her sister Myrtle were running a bakery. They met on a blind date. From then on they corresponded and he came down from Mohrland, every weekend. The day after he met Ruth, he told his fellow workers at the

mine, that he had found the one he was looking for all his life and he didn't mean to ever let her go. Les was engaged at the time. He broke off the engagement, and Les and Ruth starting going steady.

They were married on the 12 November 1920 in Huntington, Emery County, Utah. Les was 31 and Ruth was 25. They became the parents of seven children, Goldie LaRue, Dora Luceal, John Phillip, June Farr, Mary Lou, Cleo and Leila Rae.

Les was well known, liked and respected by one and all. He just had a way with people. It was hard to go anywhere with him, every few steps he had to stop and talk to a friend.

Les worked for a while as a sheep herder in San Rafael at or near the Indian Reservation. He became friendly with the Indians and enjoyed going back to visit them. He also retained from those days, a real fondness for camping and going out in the desert.

In addition to camping and desert exploration, he loved to fish and hunt, especially duck hunting. On one hunting expedition a fellow hunter was accidently shot. For years after that he did not go hunting. When his son, June was sixteen, Les went on his first hunting trip since that accident, but he really was never an avid hunter again.

He was known to be a very good shot and as a souvenir of his army days he owned a Craig rifle. One day he and some of his buddies along with his son, Phillip and a neighbor, Glen Hammond, were looking up at a cliff some distance away. They noticed a hole that looked like it was about 6 or 8 inches in diameter. Les got his rifle out and shot at the hole. To the exclamations of all, it was agreed that the bullet had gone right into the hole!

Another story is told of Les and the annual Thanksgiving turkey shoot in Mohrland. Because of Les' reputation as a great shot, the men would pay their money for a chance and let Les shoot for them. He shot so many turkeys that they passed a rule that each man had to shoot for himself.

Les was a great story teller and loved to reminisce about his days as a sheep herder. He also had some amazing stories of the Robber's Roost Gang. Supper time was always an extended time of relaxation and pleasure as we children listened to our dad tell about his experiences and elaborate on the 'good ole days'.

Les loved to go back to the farm in Cleveland and visit with his mother and father. As Les was a true blue Democrat (I, remember him telling me once," don't ever vote Republican no matter what,") and most, if not all of his family were staunch Republicans, there were many live and heated discussions that took place around his mother's kitchen table.

Les was an extremely good driver... and a good thing it was as he liked to drive very fast and watch the scenery rather than the road. (we know where his sons inherit their driving habits from, don't we?) He enjoyed stimulating everyone's heart from the youngest to the oldest. As

much as he enjoyed driving fast, he was not comfortable when driving with others who drove the same way and then and only then would he try as tactfully as he could to let them know that.

Phillip (his son) tells of a time that he and his wife Laura were coming back from Salt Lake. Les was with them, Phillip saw a deer and pointed it out to his dad and told him to look at it, Les said, "*bleep*, if you slowed down a little, I would but the telephone poles are going by like toothpicks.

Another time, Mary Lou (his daughter) and her husband Hunter were taking Les to Salt Lake. As Hunter drove along Les kept reading the speedometer as though he was reading it to himself ...60 miles an hour, 65 miles an hour and etc. He would also make mention of each speed limit sign as they passed them. Later when talking about this trip Hunter said, "I wasn't going fast, I was doing the speed limit." Les replied "speed limit *bleep*, he passed everything on the road."

Les hated driving on muddy roads, not that it slowed him down at all, he cursed in true Les Anderson style when he had to drive on them. Les owned an old Studabaker with a cut off that made it roar, you could always hear him coming miles away. An Indian woman once told of her concern as she heard Les coming at a break neck speed down the road. A bridge across the wash had been washed away since Les' last visit and she feared due to the speed he was traveling he would not be able to stop in time. Well not to worry, he stopped safely and lived for many years after that.

Les was known to stand straight and tall. Even in a group of men he was very recognizable. His wife Ruth, said "his posture was straight as a string. Any of the family could recognize him as far as they could see him because he held himself so straight and walked so nimble." He used to tell us children "stand straight, pull your shoulders back, throw out your chest, pull in your chin, be proud, you have nothing to be ashamed of." And indeed we did not. In the evenings he would teach us children how to do calisthenics. He had a very sensitive spine and all his children had to do to get his attention was to run their finger up his spine and he would nearly jump out of his chair!

Les, was truly a loving, caring and in many respects a patient father. His daughters, remember that he always saved something out of his lunch bucket as a special treat for them. When the older children were young, most likely on paydays, he would come home with little wrapped packages of candy and gifts, the kids called them snatch-grabs. They would speak for one and they would get what was inside.

Les' father's brand was a capital V and a capital L lying on its side in the middle of the capital V. When his father died, Les got the brand and soon everything in the yard, house, garage and granary was branded with that brand. Whenever he found an old horseshoe he would place it on a limb of the nearest tree and the limb would grow around it. One of the most interesting stories regarding the brand happened at the Anderson family reunion in 1999. Les'

daughter Mary Lou, was in her camper washing dishes looking out her window at the quakie trees, when suddenly she realized that she was looking at the Anderson brand burned into a tree. The next year Mary Lou took a picture of it and it was a good thing she did because a year or so later she went to show it to someone and the tree had been cut down.

Les made his living as a coal miner, working at the Storrs, Morhland and Hiawatha mines. In 1940 Les was injured in the mine. His left leg was broken in four places, the ankle crushed and the bone slivered.

During the years 1945 through 1947 Les and Ruth built their new home, a cinder block house 32 x 30. Part of that time was during World War II when material and carpenters were almost impossible to get. It was built just in front of the old house at 90 West 200 North in Huntington, Utah. The house was built with a full basement, four rooms, (kitchen, living room, dining room and master bedroom,) bath and hallway on the main floor with three bedrooms upstairs. The living room and dining room, was just one big room without even an arch or colinade between them, the living room area had a good sized bookcase. Les was working in the mine and would come home tired so his help was very limited. The story is told of a time Les was in the basement as the house was being built. He proceeded to get his hammer and nails and began putting a nail in a floor joyst of the main floor over his head. As he really got going hammering the nail he misjudged his swing missing the nail and hitting his finger. That was the day it was known that his mother's admonishments had been in vain for the "OTHER" Les Anderson was heard from! Cuss he could and cuss, he did!

Les was a member of the United Mine Workers Union, a proud member of the American Legion and a member of the Last Squad Club. The Last Squad Club met once a year, Les was one of the first ones to die. Back in (approx.) 1991 there were only 3 members still alive, when there were only two, those two would open a bottle of wine and then and only then will the Last Squad Club be disbanded. In 2004, I, Leila a daughter of Les' and a granddaughter, Kathryn Hansen made a trip to Helper, Utah to visit the museum there, were they have memorabilia of the Last Squad Club. We were told that J. Bracken Lee was the last surviving member of the Last Squad Club and that he too, is now gone.

Les was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the 7th day of May 1950 by Oliver Marian Roper in Castle Dale, Emery County, Utah.

On June 12th, 1952 John Leslie Anderson and Ruth Ada (Gardner) Anderson received their endowments and were sealed for time and all eternity in the Salt Lake Temple.

Les had health problems for many years before his death. He was in the Veteran's Hospital when I was a baby. He was in the Veteran's Hospital again in Dec. 1949 with breathing problems. What is interesting about this hospitalization is that June, his son was also in the Veteran's hospital with pneumonia. Les was in a ward in the basement and June was in a ward on the top floor.

Les was a natural blood builder. His blood would become so thick that his breathing would be labored and his speech slurred. He would then have to go to the Dr. and have a pint of blood drawn and a pint of plasma put in to thin his blood.

John Leslie Anderson died 28th day of July 1953 at the Dragerton Hospital in Dragerton, Carbon County, Utah. The cause of his death was a duodenal ulcer. They also found that he had black lung disease from all the years he was a miner. I remember “ he had the largest funeral I had ever witnessed. People were back in the cultural hall, it was like a Stake Conference.” He is buried in Huntington, Emery County, Utah.

John Leslie Anderson has been gone since 1953, but remains alive today as he ever was in the hearts of those who love him. We miss you dad.