

**National Archives & Records Administration
War Department Files**

2LT Elmer F. Kern, Jr.

Class 94-44

ID: O539994

Branch of Service: U.S. Army

Hometown: Pottawatomie County, KS

Status: KIA April 10, 1945



**Killed in action serving as a liaison pilot with the 365th Field Artillery Battalion,
97th Infantry Division near Aachen, Germany**



Sister's love creates legacy to honor brother

Elmer F. Kern Jr. earned a degree in mechanical engineering from Purdue University, and then he went to war and never returned.



A member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at Purdue, Second Lieutenant Kern joined the United States Army Air Corps after graduation. He attended flight school in 1944 in Pittsburg, Kansas, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Kern was shipped off to fight in World War II during March 1945. He was shot down just a few weeks later.

Kern flew a Piper L4-J "Grasshopper" over France, Belgium, and Germany but was killed in action on April 10, 1945. Devastated, the mother, father and sister who survived him packed up all of his belongings, including his posthumous Purple Heart, and sealed them in a trunk that they never opened again.

That trunk is now part of the College of Engineering's archives. It came to the University on Veterans Day 2010 through the estate of Elmer's sister, Ruth Kern. It contains a fascinating and sentimental collection that shows off Kern's interests and activities during his college years and reveals ways that things have changed at Purdue. (A ticket to a 1942 Indiana University versus Purdue football game cost Kern just \$3).

That time capsule is just part of Elmer Kern's Purdue legacy. Ruth Kern felt strongly that every student with ambition should be given a chance to earn a degree and that economics should not be an impediment to an education. After her 1984 retirement, she volunteered her time to local organizations that matched scholarship money to students in need.

That work was an offshoot of a promise that Ruth had made decades previously. Immediately after Elmer's death, Ruth had vowed to set up a scholarship in honor of her brother's sacrifice to his country. And so a letter showed up at Purdue 65 years later, establishing the Elmer F. Kern Jr. BSME 1943 Memorial Scholarship.

For most of her adult life, Ruth Kern worked at AT&T in San Diego. She never earned more than \$45,000 per year, nor did she marry or have children. She saved diligently and invested well so that she could memorialize her brother and help students who couldn't afford a college education.

Ruth saved more than \$2 million.

She bequeathed half of that impressive total to the School of Mechanical Engineering and the other to San Diego State University.

Shortly after details of Ruth's gift were revealed, the trunk that the Kern family had packed away after Elmer's death was opened. Within it were his student ID, ticket stubs from musicals and football games at Purdue, Elmer's military jacket, his pilot's log and maps, letters to and from his family, and a photograph of Elmer and his sister on the Purdue campus in 1943.



Buried in Greenwood Memorial Park, San Diego, California