



James Ralph Simmons

September 29, 1923 - May 24, 2012

James Ralph Simmons, Age 87, formerly of Haleyville,AL. now of Piedmont, MO. passed away May 24, 2012.

Graveside Service will be Tuesday, May 29, 2012 at New Prospect Baptist Church Cemetery, Haleyville,AL. Major James Ralph Simmons USAF (ret) was born September 29, 1923, the 2nd of 9 children of Howard and Erma Leah (Brock) Simmons. He was preceded in death by his wife Dorothy Evelyn (Hess), his parents, two brothers, Haskell and Hewitt Simmons, and his sister Mary Washburn. He is survived by his brothers, Kirby (Helen) Simmons, Jack (Ruth) Simmons and Robert (Virginia) Simmons; two sisters, Brenda Simonds and Betty Papile; four children, Linda Watson, James (Linda) Simmons, Jr., Sheila Young, Dana (Ronald) Buxton; eight grandchildren, Mark Watson, Melissa (Jeremy) Yoches, James (Ramsie) Simmons III, Jerusha (Brad) Hardman, Ron (Audrey) Buxton II, Chris Buxton, Alex (Shannon) Buxton, Andrew Buxton; eight great grandchildren, Noah and Dylan Yoches, Belle and Moya Hardman, Brendon, Sean, Jared and Ericka Buxton. Ralph met Dorothy at New Prospect church and was married August 1943 in Double Springs. He enlisted in the Aviation Cadets in February of 1943 and was commissioned as a 2nd Lt. As a bombardier/navigator he flew 26 missions in the A-20 in North Africa and Italy and 20 missions in the A-26 in Italy. When Mt. Vesuvius erupted for the first time since it buried Pompeii, he was there. Each morning he had to shake the volcanic ash off his pup tent. He was in the first aircraft to land at Villa Franca in North Italy while the airfield was still in dispute, followed

shortly by a German FW-190 whose pilot was quite surprised after realizing that there were now American Aircraft at his airfield. He was awarded the Air Medal for his missions flying through the Brenner pass in northern Italy, where not only did they shoot up at him from the valley floor but also down at him from the mountain tops. After WWII Ralph and his brother Haskell ran a flying school at John Lakeman's airport. Ralph moved to Birmingham to teach flying for Air Service, Inc. In 1951 Ralph was recalled to active duty during the Korean Crisis this time as an officer in the Air Force. He was bombardier on the B-29 while stationed at Shreveport. His next base was at Pinecastle Florida as a navigator/observer on the B47. During the late 50's there was a great debate between the Air Force and the Navy on the role of the Carrier. While on temporary duty in North Africa, he was assigned to find a Carrier task force somewhere in the Mediterranean. Just 30 min after take off he had the Carrier in his Radar crosshairs, the Navy was not pleased. At McConnell AFB he was an instructor for the B-47 and returned to the combat ready crew status in the B-47 at Whiteman AFB. During the Cuban Missile crisis he was one of the crews which were dispersed to the St. Louis airport waiting for orders to retaliate. They had been assigned targets. His next assignment was Lockbourne AFB in the B-47. As the B-47 was being retired he moved to Grand Forks AFB and was a missile combat crew commander at Grand Forks AFB. He returned to flying for his last tour of duty at Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico as the navigator on the KC-135. His tour at Ramey included several deployments to Thailand during the Vietnam War. After his retirement in 1971 he bought a farm in Tuscumbia, Missouri. He went to Lincoln College, Jefferson City, Missouri and received a BS in science and education. He taught High School science at Russellville and Tuscumbia Missouri for 5 years. He helped bring computers to the classroom. Ralph had a way of telling stories. Even the scariest war story came out a humorous tale. Family members were never fully sure if he was telling a true story or a tall tale. He never turned down the opportunity to make a pun. He had a long and interesting life and was ready to return home to Haleyville and rest beside his

wife of 67 years at New Prospect Baptist Church.