

# **Ray Simpkins**

Ray Simpkins, 95, passed peacefully at the Chillicothe VA Medical Center on March 2, 2019.

He was a good man. During WWII he volunteered for the US Army Air Corps working first as a mechanic and then as a B-24 pilot. He served in Italy where he was twice shot down. The second time he was captured and spent fourteen months in German Stalag Luft 3 and then Nuremberg prisoner of war camps before being liberated by the US Army in May of 1944.

He used his vast problem solving skills during his lengthy career at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant. He never lost his love of flying and spent many hours building and tinkering on airplanes in his workshop.

Ray is survived by his wife of 35 years, Betty, his children Mike, Patti and Jeff, his step-children Karen, Laura and Mathew, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents Elijah and Effie and wife Peggy Joyce.

Viewing will be held at Boyer Funeral Home, 125 West 2nd Street, Waverly, Ohio 45690 on Tuesday, March 5, 2019 from 5-7 PM.

In lieu of flowers a remembrance can be sent to Hospice Chillicothe VA Medical Center, 17273 State Rt 104, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601.

## **POW EXPERIENCE FOR RAY SIMPKINS**

Flew combat missions from Italy in 1944. Shot down on May 29<sup>th</sup> over Agram, Yugoslavia while returning from a target in southern Germany. Picked up by a political party (Chetniks) siding with the Axis. Turned over to German Military. Suffered injuries to right leg and back in parachute jump. Was hospitalized for approximately 2 weeks in Agram, Yugoslavia and then was sent on a stretcher to Prague, Czechoslovakia to a permanent hospital. A cast was placed on my right leg and a metal full body brace from shoulders to hips was fitted to restrain my spine. I was confined to bed for approximately 4 weeks and then was only allowed up for a limited time each day for the next month. At the end of approximately 3 months the cast and brace were removed. Three or 4 weeks later I was sent to

Frankfurt, Germany for interrogation. My injured leg still pained me very much and swelled up so much that I had to wear a flying boot instead of a regular shoe. I left the hospital on crutches. I spent approximately 30 days in solitary confinement during interrogation and then was sent to Stalag Luft #3. Medical facilities there were almost nonexistent. I suffered horribly from some infection which resulted in multiple lesions (called boils) on the back of my neck near the base of the skull. This went on for several months. My neck was rigid; I could not turn my head in the least. About this time, I began to suffer from stomach pains and skin rashes on both legs from knees to ankles. There was no medication for these problems in our dispensary. The person who ran the facility thought the boils were caused by some kind of blood poisoning possibly from small shrapnel wounds I had encountered in the area. He thought the rashes would disappear when we were released and had a better diet. A few days before Christmas (might have been Christmas Eve), we were marched from the camp south to a camp near Mooseburg, Germany. We spent several days on the open road in heavy snows and extreme cold. Several prisoners (British mostly, I heard a figure of 200) froze to death in one particularly cold night. We were given no food by the military and was in a shelter one night of the entire trip. Everyone suffered from frozen feet, noses, ears and hands. My feet were absolutely numb for most of the trip. We did get a short train ride (about 24 - 48 hours) or there would have been more deaths. My feet and ears and hands are still extremely sensitive to cold. I sleep under an electric blanket for 9 months of the year.

Things got a little better at the Mooseburg camp as we sometimes received Red Cross parcels. We were liberated on about April 29, 1944. We returned to the States shortly after and was discharged near VJ Day.