

RALPH E. SIMESTER



Ralph Edward Simester was born in Foochow, China, October 23, 1899, of missionary parents James and Winifred Simester. He departed from this life March 26, 1973 (age 73 years) as a result of injuries sustained when he was struck by a car while crossing U.S. Route 90 near Panama City, Florida. His body was given to the Vanderbilt Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee, as he had requested. Memorial Services were held in the McKendree United Methodist Church, Nashville with the Rev. Wallace Chappell and the Rev. H. T. Tipps conducting the service.

He graduated from Rockford High School, Rockford, Ill., received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio Wesleyan University, his Bachelor of Sacred Theology from Boston University. He was ordained elder in 1928. Previous to this ordination he had served as Minister of Youth in Center Methodist Church, Malden, Mass. and in Central Methodist Church, Columbus, Ohio. He married the former Agnes Cullis of Stratford, Ontario in 1927. He served in pastorates in the Ohio Conference in Briggsdale, Trinity-Xenia, Wayne Ave.-Cincinnati, Westerville, interim pastorate in King Ave. Columbus, Madisonville-Cincinnati, Fairborn, and Urbana. During World War II he was chaplain with the Eighth Air Force stationed in England.

Because of his great interest in missions, his messages and ministry years in the ministry he retired in 1965, moving to Nashville, Tenn. He is highlighted the missionary projects in each church he served. After forty survived by this wife Agnes, two daughters Mrs. Thomas (Helen) Long,

Chaplain Simester looks At Early Morning Duty

The telephone bell is ringing out in the hall! I reach for my flashlight ("Torch" in England, pull out of bed. Before I get to the phone it has rung again. I hate to have it keep on ringing, because I am the only one in this barracks who gets up for briefing. [Capt. Ralph E. Simester was a Protestant Chaplain and a Methodist minister from Ohio. He died 26 Mar 1973.]

"This is Sgt Mallory. It is now 3:35, and briefing is at 4:30."

"Thank you" I reply and get up.

Fifty-five minutes. I sometimes wish they would wait to call me so that only 15 minutes would intervene before briefing time. Then I could dress in a hurry and get there on time. As it is, I am dressed and ready long before time. I dare not go back to sleep because I would never waken on time.

This morning I stirred the fire in the lounge room, set a pot of water on the stove, and dressed while it boiled. Then I made some tea. I had a bit of a headache and I thought tea might set me up.

Then out into the slow, warm rain. The planes were having engines warmed up. The ground crews were already out on the line. Ordnance and Chemical Warfare were no doubt helping load the planes with bombs. Armament men were just finishing breakfast. They would be out to set the fuses and to check up on the armament. The gas trucks would be ready to make last minute refilling so that each plane would have a full tank of gas for takeoff.

The night is pitch black. No moon. Low clouds make it darker than usual. Yet, all over the field is activity. Hundreds of men are already busy. The KPs in the mess halls, the CQs in every site waking men. The operations clerks, the intelligence staff radio and radar men, MPs and guards, the transportation men— Drivers of many trucks, the weather staff, the men in equipment and clothing drying rooms, the duty officer And men in the dispensary, and the communications staff. Of course, the combat officers and men form the bulk of the early morning group. Say 350 combat men, with at least one man working on the ground for every one flying.

As I walk through the dark I can see planes are being readied. Here and there is a sudden glow of light as the head lamps are tested. A roar goes up from all over the field. On the road are bicycles with their flickering lamps.

The other morning I was at the briefing room way too early. So I went to one of the Squadron combat rooms. The only one there was Major James McKinney, the 369th Squadron C.O. He had been up all night. Now he was making a fire in one of those crazy little English stoves. He is a big boy, and is a West Point graduate.

But this morning I went directly into the briefing room. Most of the men were already present. The officer from the Control Tower is passing out the directions for taxiing to their proper positions for take-off. This is an important detail in getting all planes off without confusion. When he finishes the briefing proper will follow.

The Group Operations Officer, Maj. Billy Casseday, makes a preliminary statement. Our group is the first in the [40th] Combat Wing, and the Wing is third in the First Air Division. There are three divisions bombing in this area this morning.

Then Intelligence takes over. Month after month Maj. John Bairnsfather has stood before the Group. He rarely misses. He rolls up the screen from the map. The men all rise to their feet because the target is low down on the map. A long haul!. The murmur is pretty loud this morning because the course seems

unusually long. Many take their seats again. A crowded room; not much smoke, because cigarets are not supposed to be lighted before the briefing is over—after a short description of the general course on the big map. The screen goes down again and pictures are thrown against the screen to show details.

First the pictures of yesterday's successful mission. Many German planes had been destroyed on the ground. It was a good show. That helps the men. Many hate to discover that their effort was a miss.

Then aerial pictures of the target for today. Roads, identification marks such as rivers, roads, lakes, quarries, woods and towns. There are many places in Germany I know pretty well from maps and pictures.

"Here is your "I.P." [The spot where the planes begin their bombing run. "The wind is so strong and the distance is not far. It will take you 14 minutes."

While the screen is still lowered the weather officer reports. The general weather situation: cloud conditions at takeoff, Weather along the route, Clear over the target, Visibility on return will be one to three miles, Light icing at 9000 feet, Temperature at 22000 feet is -34 degrees.

Then comes the battle order: You can expect many flak batteries at thee target. Watch out as you go over the German lines. You can expect some enemy fighter opposition, but you will have so many friendly fighters in support. Remember, fly good formation. They pick out ragged groups to attack. Here are your radio instructions.

"Any questions?"

"Good luck—light 'em up."

There is a general movement. Everyone except the pilots leave for their individual preparations: The gunners to get equipment, to get the gun barrels into the planes, cameras loaded, parachutes, oxygen masks, electric suits, etc. Navigators go to a special briefing for exact information on the route. The pilots stay for last instructions and advice. The pilot is in command. He has keep check on every man in hia crew.

CHAPLAIN SIMESTER reads during a Chapel service at Thurleigh.

2712 Westwood Ave.,
Nashville, Tn. 37212
October 24, 1978

Mr. Russell Strong,
Rte. 1,
Laurinburg,
N. Carolina 28352

Dear Mr. Strong,-

After your telephone call of Oct. 15th, I got in touch with my daughters regarding your inquiry about my husband Ralph's journal. We did not think it wise to send it through the mail because we have had the experience of losing a precious keepsake in the mail, which never was found, although the Postal Service paid the declaration of the value of the article. Naturally the money meant nothing, we wanted the article found, and returned.

I have had Ralph's journal xeroxed, and I think the "Copies Unlimited" did an excellent job. I was glad to do this because now we have two copies of the journal, one for each of our daughters.

If you would like me to mail you this xeroxed edition I shall be glad to do it. Will you please return it to me though, when you have finished reading and noting it, so I can assemble it in book form for one of my daughters. I will send it to you unassembled, and you will notice there are pages inserted that are not numbered. These were programs, or services held for the 306th Bomb Group which I wanted to include in the xeroxed edition.

As I reread the journal there is only one reference to weddings I noted, and the explanation of weddings performed by Chaplains is on page 3 with a picture of Ralph and two friends Frank Berg and "Flash" Gerry at the top of the page.

I will send the xeroxed copy to you when I hear from you.

Sincerely,

Agnes Simester

C
O
P
Y

30 October 1978

Mrs. Agnes Simester
2712 Westwood Av
Nashville, TN 37212

Dear Mrs. Simester:

The night before receiving your letter I had written one to you, but then did not mail it, as I got your directions.

I will be delighted to receive the xerox copy of the journal, and will return it to you within 24 hours.

I also commend you for having the copy made so that both daughters will have it. And it will be an important family item for grandchildren.

I shall be looking forward to receiving the journal.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong

6 November 1978

Dear Mrs. Simester:

I am so pleased that you made a copy of Chaplain Simester's journal available to me. While I do not find an abundance of "hard" information, there is important material for me in setting the mood of the times, and also of giving me impressions of an important ground officer for the group.

I have copied a portion of it that covers the period in which I am primarily interested, and am returning all of your copy.

Thank you again for the trouble you went to, and I am pleased that you are making copies available for both of your daughters. I suspect, also, that grandchildren will over the years find it most interesting.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong

2712 Westwood Ave.,
Nashville, Tn. 37212
November 15, 1978

Dear Mr. Strong,-

I received the copy of Ralph's journal in excellent condition, and thank you for your prompt returning of it. I am glad to have helped with your work in preparing the history.

My older daughter said, when I talked with her about sending you the copy, "I feel an author often needs material to give him an idea of the emotional setting at a time in particular." I was interested you felt the "climate" of that period in some of Ralph's recording.

I am sure your history will be most interesting and much appreciated. If copies are for sale to folks in general I would like to buy one.

Most sincerely,

Agnes M. Simester