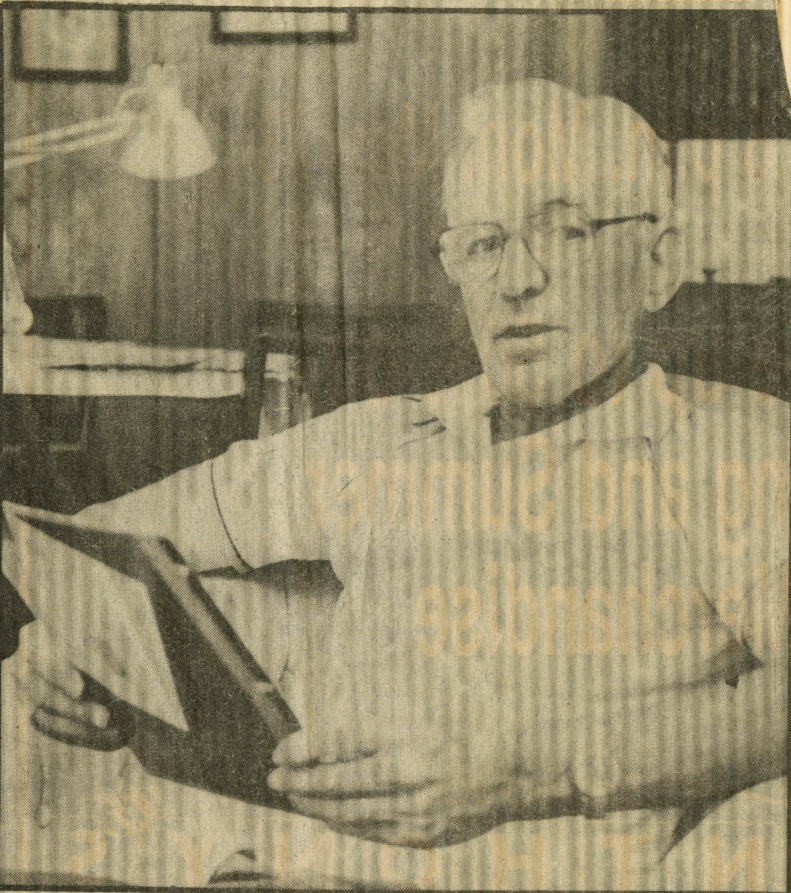


Surprise brings back WWII memories



SIMONS GETS SURPRISING LETTER FROM GERMANY

... farm boy he met writes after nearly 40 years.

By Mark Jones

Some things are just never forgotten, and that was reaffirmed for a local World War II veteran who had a surprise land in his mailbox recently.

On Oct. 9, 1945, Capen Simons of Kingsville was in the belly of a B-17 returning from a bombing mission in Anklam, Germany.

Flying at only 15,000 feet, the aircraft was shot down by Nazi fighter planes and ground anti-aircraft artillery and plummeted into a field.

Simons, who was a replacement bombardier navigator flying his first mission over Germany, had parachuted out with nine other crewmen and landed in a plowed field about 300 yards from a farmhouse.

After gathering his parachute and throwing some dirt over it, Simons hid in some brush by a fence.

"I looked up and saw a farmer coming," he said. "The old man

had two kids with him, a boy about 8 and a girl about 12. He wanted me to follow him."

Young and scared, Simons accompanied the farmer to a huge concrete barn, where he joined two other Americans, gunners who also had been shot down.

The farmer gave the soldiers some water and left. Then, about an hour later, he returned with three Nazi soldiers.

Simons spent the next 19 months as a prisoner of war, and the nearly 40 years that followed all but erased memories of that farm until two weeks ago, when he found a letter in his mailbox.

The letter read, in part: "For-

ty years ago, I was an 8-years-old boy, then I had an experience I was not able to forget until today. On October 9th, 1943, a B-17, Flying Fortress, crashed on my parents premises. Nine crew members were captured...I think that you were one of these persons, dear Mr. Simons."

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Simons said he was shocked that the boy even remembered him, let alone was able to locate him after so many years.

The "boy," now a 48-year-old schoolteacher, wrote that he had been searching for the crewmembers of that plane for four to five years and had successfully contacted five of them,

along with the sister of a gunner who died in the crash after taking a .50-caliber bullet through the chest.

Simons said he has no idea how the man, Uwe Carstens of West Germany, managed to find him, but that he intends to answer the letter right away to find out.

In the 19 months after the crash, Simons became one of thousands of men who were shipped and marched throughout German prison camps.

He was confined until January 1945 in Stalag Luft III, a camp in Sagan about halfway between Berlin and Breslau.

On January 28, when the Russian front had moved to within 20 miles of Sagan, the prisoners, subsisting on a diet of bread, margarine and water, were mar-

ched 30 miles per day in sub-zero weather to Spremberg, then taken by train to a prison camp in Moosberg.

The men were liberated in April 1945 and Simons returned to Kingsville, where he worked for Exxon until his retirement in 1981.

He suspects that Carstens had been able to begin his search using the serial number off the wrecked bomber, but he still has no idea how he managed to find the men after so many years.

Carstens asked in his letter that Simons write back and relate the details of the crash and his captivity.

Simons said he not only intends to do that, but may try to go to Germany for a visit with Carstens.