

A treasured elder...

Hampton Wade Hays

A lifetime of service to his country

Hampton Hays, who last month celebrated his 85th birthday, has enjoyed a long, productive and remarkable life. Born in Arkansas and raised in Missouri, today he lives in Springfield, Florida at Clifford Simms State Veterans Home, Florida's newest VA nursing home.

Hays graduated from high school in St. Louis in 1937. He studied electrical engineering at night school for six months while maintaining a full-time job as a motor tester in an electrical parts factory. At the outbreak of World War II, Hays had a wife and one-month-old son, but like so many men of his generation, he answered his nation's call to duty and enlisted, Hays in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Soon he was in air cadet training after scoring highest in his class on the aptitude test.

"A few months later they wanted to put me behind a desk doing office work, Hays chuckled. "I told them I didn't join the Air Force to sit behind no desk — I want to fly."

Combat ace

Hays definitely got his wish and soon was stationed overseas with the Ninth Air Force, 368th Fighter Group, 395th Fighter Squadron. He flew 74 combat missions over Germany and Belgium, first as P-40 fighter pilot, later flying the P-47 Thunderbolt, a fighter-bomber that could out-dive anything in the Luftwaffe.

"Those P-47s weighed seven-and-a-half-tons fully loaded. We had eight fifty-caliber machine guns with fifteen hundred rounds each, or we could carry three five hundred pound bombs," Hays readily recalled. "It was a one-man crew, me."

Hays flew missions in support of the famous Fourth Armored Division at the Battle of the Bulge, just six months after D-Day. He earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for taking out three hangars and 38 enemy aircraft on the ground during a daring raid. On later missions he was Squadron Leader, and returned every man home safely from every single mission. A landing crack-up and wound late in the war earned him a Purple Heart and an early trip home. Three months later, he was discharged from both the hospital and the armed forces as the

nation demobilized for peacetime. Back in St. Louis, Hays was finally home with his wife and now almost three-year-old son.

Revenue agent

Hays went back to school on the G.I. Bill and earned an accounting degree in just six months. A friend encouraged him to take the federal government aptitude test, which he did, and again scored high. ("I've always been good at taking tests. I still am.") A 30-year career with the Internal Revenue Service followed, all of which he served in St. Louis. Hays retired as a Revenue Agent (GS 13) only after a stroke and series of heart ailments and surgeries kept him sidelined. "I'm still living off the heart bypass surgery I had in 1970," he said proudly, pointing to the now almost invisible vertical scar above his sternum.

Hays and his wife raised three boys, two of whom later went on to military careers of their own. He moved to Florida to be near his son who was stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base. He remains active in the American Legion and has attended several unit reunions over the years.



Hampton Hays recently sat for an extended interview as part of FHCA's participation in the U.S. Library of Congress Veteran's History Project.

"I like it here — the food's okay and the people do a pretty good job, Hays said, looking out over the spacious dining area at Clifford Sims State Veterans Home.

FHCA honors Hampton Wade Hays and treasures his many contributions to our nation.

(FHCA Pulse will be profiling one of our state's treasures each month in subsequent issues of FHCA Pulse. To suggest a patient you think worthy, contact Ed Towey & Associates, Inc., at (850) 224-6242, or via e-mail, etowey@fhca.org.)

Quality, Compassionate Home Health Care

Brandon
877-541-4642

Kissimmee
800-830-4642

Lakeland
800-807-4642

North Palm Beach
888-288-4642

Melbourne
800-517-1408

Port St. Lucie
800-809-4642

Winter Park
800-822-2059

Home Health Services

- Skilled Nursing
- Home Health Aide
- Medical Social Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech Language Pathology



*The Best Care, By the Best People,
in the Best Place... Home!*