



Elmer Wilson Koonce

July 23, 1916 - July 23, 2012

Lt., Elmer Wilson Koonce (AKA The Falcon, The Sultan of Summerland and Uncle Bud) passed peacefully, on his 96th birthday, at his home in Santa Barbara, surrounded by loved ones.??He was born July 23, 1916 in the farming community of Villa Ridge, IL to Elmer Jacob Koonce and Lora Dell Horrell Koonce. He was the youngest of six children including Clarence Philip (C.P.) Koonce, Harry Ross Koonce, Edward Nicholas Koonce, Vera Ruth Lewis, and Ida Marie Dickerson. As a boy he worked in a lumber mill and as a young man became an accountant. ??He was first married to Marie Copeland, in Rockford, IL in 1944. He remarried on June 17, 1966 to Marian North Hill, the love of his life and best friend for over 46 years. Between them they had 7 children; Lucinda Hill Howe, Linda Koonce Howe, Walter Hubbard Hill, Barbara Hill Holt, Melinda Hill Calbow, Mark North Hill and Nicholas Jacob Koonce. From their children were born twelve grandchildren; William Bartholomew Yarborough, Kevin Patrick Howe, Alysya Cymene Howe, Grace Larson, Stacy Holt Edmonds, Robin Holt Yardi, Heather Holt Burleson, Aaron Russel Calbow, Kevin Michael Calbow, Shawn Phillip Calbow, Miriam Nicolin Hernandez and Christopher Jacob Koonce. From their grandchildren were born ten great-grandchildren; Kimberly Edmonds, Claire Edmonds, Kylie Edmonds, Olivia Edmonds, Ross Edmonds, Brijzha Boyer, Oona Yardi, Lockhart Yardi and Elise Calbow.??Elmer joined the armed forces as a member of the United States Army Reserves before the age of 18, by obfuscating his date of birth on the application form. He would have gone

straight in to the U.S. Army Air Force but learned he could not meet the requirements for flight school. So, while some men were going to Canada to avoid the draft, Elmer joined the Royal Canadian Air Force where he became a pilot. Soon after, he transfers to the U.S. Army Air Force. One of his first major assignments was to aid in the training of Chinese Pilots under the command of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. He was then assigned to Coastal Patrol duty with the Liberator Bomber Combat Crew in Portland, Oregon where he also became an explosives expert. When the war effort shifted to the Pacific Theater, Elmer was reassigned to the 7th Army Air Force, 41st Bomb Group, under the command of Major General Willis H. Hale. This was a ragtag bunch known as "Hale's Handful", cobbled together from remnants of fractured bomb groups from the European Theater and anywhere else they could find. He piloted B-25 bombers through 50 missions in the South Pacific Theater in 1943 and 1944. During this time he was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses for extraordinary achievement in arial flight. Four times he was awarded Air Medals for meritorious achievement in aerial flight, one of which included a Valor Device for acts of heroism. He earned an Army Commendation Medal for meritorious service, a World War II Victory Medal, and an Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with three Bronze Star Devices for participation in bombing campaigns in the Gilbert, Marshall and Mariana Islands. He was involved in what he believed to be the longest air to air battle in aviation history at the time, defending against successive waves of Japanese fighter planes for over 45 minutes. ??After the war he enjoyed much success as a building contractor and real estate investor. Since his retirement he has participated in some other interesting pursuits; growing avocados and macadamia nuts, raising and showing miniature horses, and later raising ostriches. Well in to his sixties he took an interest in computers, teaching himself several programming languages including FORTRAN and COBOL, in an effort to streamline his own business operations. At the age of eighty four he acted as the general contractor on the construction of his son Nicholas' home and was on site every day overseeing every detail. He served

on the Citizen's Advisory Board for Bank of America, the Republican Central Committee, and served as Chairman of the board at the United Boys and Girls Club of Santa Barbara County for about 20 years. In 1990 he was appointed to the Board of Directors for the 19th District Agricultural Association (Earl Warren Show Grounds) by Governor Pete Wilson. All the while he quietly nurtured many young people in need of mentoring.??The family suggests memorial contributions be sent to the United Boys and Girls Club of Santa Barbara County. A private memorial service will be planned with full military honors.