

## Ralph Thraen, 79

*Oct. 20, 1921 – May 28, 2001*

**NEW PROVIDENCE, NJ** – Ralph J. Thraen of New Providence, NJ, was born to Henry and Mary Thraen on a farm outside of Portsmouth, Oct. 20, 1921. He and 11 siblings lived on the farm until he was five years old. A week after his birth, Ralph was taken by horse and wagon for his baptism at St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth. In 1927, his parents decided to rent the land to Ralph's older brothers and they moved to Harlan. There he attended Laurel Grade and Harlan High Schools and was a daily altar boy at St. Michael's. A gifted speller, he was the town and county spelling champion, valedictorian of his class and graduated with honors in 1940. After graduation, he worked briefly in Omaha, NE. He enlisted in the Army in early 1942, trained in Colorado, Indiana and Alabama. As a member of the 8th Tank Destroyers, he sailed to Scotland in 1944 as part of an advanced unit. His European tour of duty included landing on Omaha Beach after the D-Day landings and battled across France with Patton's Third Army. Master Sergeant Thraen was discharged at Camp Bowie, TX in October, 1945. Upon his discharge, he enrolled under the GI Bill at Creighton University in Omaha, majoring in accounting and finance. While washing dishes for room and board at a local rooming house, he met Estrid Landstrom.

Ralph and Estrid married Aug. 31, 1946. Ralph graduated from Creighton with honors, passing the CPA examination and accepted an offer from the Ford Motor Company. He served the Company in Nebraska, Illinois, Michigan, California, back to Michigan and finally settled in New Providence, NJ, in 1967. In 1986, he retired as Controller, Ford Export, after 36 years of service. He then embarked upon voluntary service to New Providence. He served as the School Board president, Red Cross, Community Services, United Way, Knights of Columbus, American Legion, the Senior Citizens Housing and the Friends of the Library. In 1997, he was recognized by the United Way with the Volunteer Service Award. At the time of his death he was taking part in the Library's annual fund-raiser. He was a member of the Nocturnal Adoration Society, a daily communicant at Our Lady of Peace Church and a stand-in altar boy until just weeks prior to his death. Ralph and Estrid together raised seven children. After 54 years of marriage, Estrid died in February of this year. During her long and painful illness, Ralph cared for her at home. He died May 28, 2001, at age 79 years.

He is survived by his daughters, Pamela Hefmer, Deborah Simmers, Lisa Hoglund; sons, Kurt, Joseph, Eric and Drew; sisters, Magdalene Talley of Chandler, OK; Clara Inman of Atlantic; Irene Tank of Columbus, NE; Mary Ryterske of Racine, WI; and Evelyn Kenkel of Council Bluffs; ten grandchildren and other relatives.