

A TALE OF TWO DAUGHTERS

Written by Paul Limm

FROM "A TALE OF TWO DAUGHTERS" TO THE AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY

Psychologists have a term, "need," usually divided into primary need and secondary, or social, need. The latter is flexible enough to describe almost all psychological and emotional requisites. Included are the "need" to remember departed loved ones and the "need" to seek or know our roots.

Three years ago (2001), Mrs. Brooks Rhinehart wrote a letter to Bob Friedman, then- President of our association, seeking information about her father, Lt. Glenn u. Brooks, a pilot in the 92nd Bomb Group, who, with his crew, was training for combat with the 91st Bomb Group. This poignant letter mentioned that she was born on the very day that her father was missing in action, March 22, 1943. Her family's oral history also emphasized the fact that the instructor pilot of the B-17 on which her father was lost, Captain Haskell McClellan, 324th BS, 91st BG, had become a father of a daughter a few months prior to this fateful mission. Plaintively, Mrs. Rhinehart asked if anyone in the 91st BGMA remembered her father, and if there was any way she could contact Captain McClellan's daughter

The 91st BG was the premier bomb group in the Eighth Air Force, and with the 303rd, 305th, and 306th Bomb Groups, collectively known as the "Four Horsemen," carried the air war to the enemy in the desperate early months of 1943. The price of freedom has always been high, and the 91st BG suffered the highest aircraft losses in the Eighth Air Force. The group's gain, experience, and combat excellence, forged in battle, explain why it was chosen to train aircrews from other groups, including Lt Glenn Brooks' 92nd BG. This excellence continues even unto this day in the 91st BG.

Mrs. Rhinehart had obtained President Bob Friedman's address from the award-winning 91st Bomb Group Web Site, run by Jim and Suzi Shepherd. Dr Friedman then contacted Mike Banta, the Ring Master of the celebrated "Banta's Ring," which has about a hundred 91st BGMA members who engage in a continuous open forum on the internet, answering questions technical, military, and arcane, questions from all over the world" Poland the Netherlands, France, and Germany. The Ring is successful because it is able to call on many experts. When Mike posted Mrs. Rhinehart's letter on the Ring, Lowell Getz, Professor Emeritus, using his Holmesian techniques, honed in scientific research, scanned census data, Social Security information, even high school year books and other open sources, and found Captain NcClellan's daughter, now Mrs. Clarette Rook. Dr Getz took cautious, deliberate steps to introduce Mrs. Rhinehart to Mrs. Hook. He needed not have worried: the women were pleased with this bittersweet coda to a tragic event that happened more than half a century ago.

Philip Mack, then-Editor of the Ragged Irregular, wrote a sensitive, heart-warming story, "Tale of Two Daughters," describing the mission to Wilhelmshaven, German) the air battle, and the loss of the 324th "Liberty Belle" and her crew, including the fathers of infant girls. Phil Mack related in detail the search for Mrs. Hook, and how the magical contact was made. "A Tale of Two Daughters" deserves a greater audience, and may, one day, be in anthologies.

Ace Johnson, our Secretary-Treasurer, has long been an advocate of sending the Ragged Irregular to institutions and organizations as a public relations policy. One of the recipients is the American Military Cemetery in Madingley, Cambridge, England. Mr. Michael Heath, a staff member at the Cemetery, read the story of the "two daughters," and was so moved that he decided to send Mrs. Hook and Mrs. Rhinehart information that the Cemetery had about their fathers. Mr. Heath consulted Vince Hemmings, the 91st BGMA liaison with the Cemetery, who agreed warmly. Vince Hemmings was aware that whatever information the Cemetery had would be limited, usually name, rank, serial number, date of death, and grave location. Vince realized that to preserve the history of the 91st Bomb Group airmen buried at Madingley, and listed on the Wall of the Missing, would require considerable research into 91st Bomb Group history. He decided to write an unique book.

There are thirty-eight 91st Bomb Group members buried at Madingley, and on the Wall of the Missing are the names of one hundred and eleven 91st airmen. In his book, Vince has included photographs of all the gravestones, and every 91st name on the Wall of the Missing. From the Missing Air Crew Reports (MACRs), Vince has described how each heroic battle was fought. He added the Eighth Air Force Mission Reports which give the overall picture of the strategy of the combat mission. Vince even includes the names of the cherished, but doomed, aircraft that carried these warriors to battle; names that are saucy, defiant, and irreverent.

There is a "need" to remember our loved ones. There is a "need" to seek and know our roots. The 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association is, by definition, dedicated to remembering and honoring our fallen brothers; our Association has its roots in the 91st Bomb Group. Thanks to the 91st Bomb Group Web Site, Banta's Ring, the Ragged Irregular, and now, Vince Hemming's book, Members of the 91st BG (H) Who Are Buried or Listed On the Wall of the Missing at Madingley, Cambridge, England, these "needs" or requisites, are more easily fulfilled, for us and for those who follow after us.

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