



91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 3 No. 3

April, 1970

Far Western Rally Round Smashes All Records

Former 91st-ers from as far away as Tulsa, Okla., and Seattle, Wash., joined the native sons at Anaheim, Calif., February 7 to make the Far Western Rally Round the biggest one yet—79 members, wives, and guests "had a ball" at the Jolly Roger Inn.

Mr. and Mrs. Virgil I. Mott (401st sqdn.) of Tulsa were presented with an engraved pewter beer mug for traveling the greatest distance to attend the event. This was the first 91st get-together the Motts have attended since WWII. Runners-up were Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Newquist (332nd

Sqdn.) and E. R. "Rudy" Steele (332nd), of the Seattle, Wash., area.

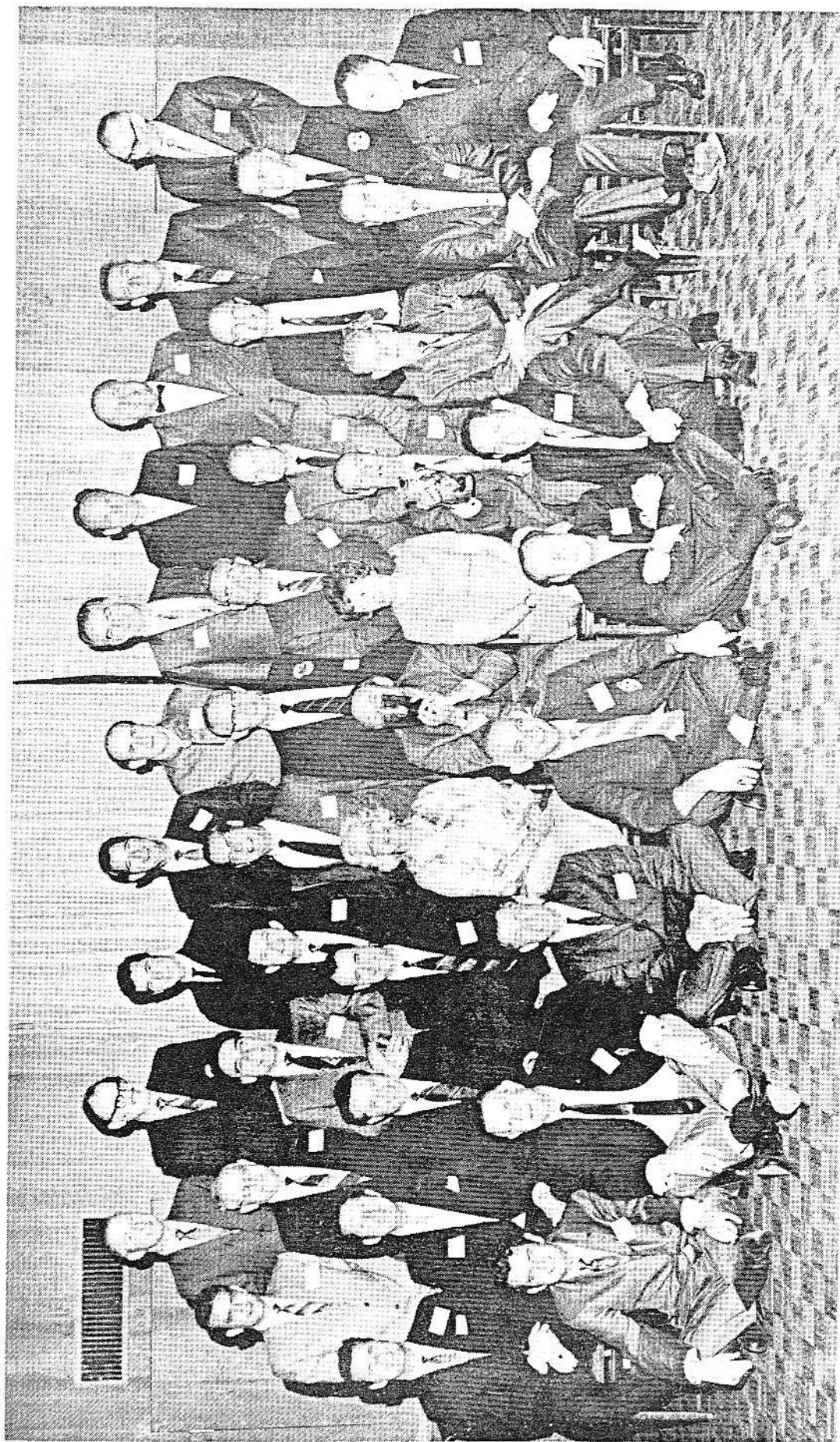
Col. Paul L. Fishburne, former C.C. of the 332nd and leader of the famed Hamm raid for which the 91st was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, became the most recent member of the "Gold Card Club," donating his check for \$100 at the Rally Round dinner to "help keep 'em flying."

A Toby "mission mug" in the capable hands of Ken
(continued on page 8)



Travelling half-way across the United States to attend their first 91st Rally Round, Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Mott of Tulsa, Okla., receive an engraved pewter beer mug from M/Sgt. George Parks for their epic journey.

Though this was their first get-together, Virgil vows it'll not be the last—they're already planning for the Tampa recall the third week in July.



91st members pose at the Anaheim Rally Round February 7. Shown are: First row, sitting, 1 to r: Robert Finch, M/Sgt. George W. Parks, Argo Giese, Phil Taylor, Harold Packard, Maj. Maury J. Herman.

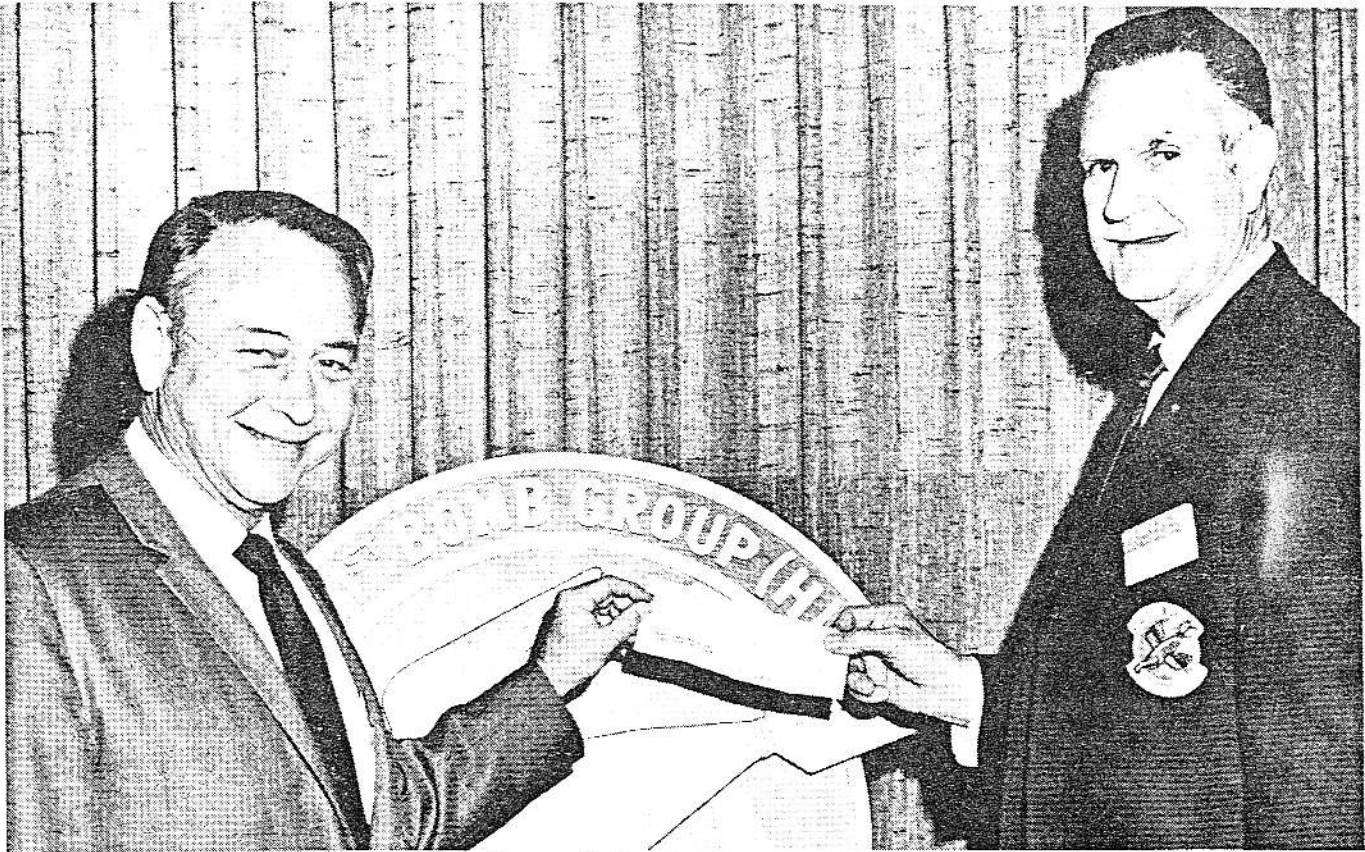
Second row, sitting: M/Sgt. Edward Jackman, David Akey, Frank Ivanovich, Robert Wright, Evelyn Ritcher, Col. Paul L. Fishburne, Joan J. Fewsmith, Ken Cochran, William Clothier, Virgil Mott, A. B. Platt.

Third row, standing: Joseph Fragale, Chris Christen-

sen, Robert Ortega, Mike Fenchak, Walter Kuehl, Charles Newlin, Faber Chripps, Dick Anderson, Rudy Steele, Doug Gibson.

Fourth row: Raymond Ridings, Tony Starcer, James Mounts, Walter Ward, Amnon Powell, Jerry Newquist, Arthur Thomsen, Jack Gaffney, Aubin Pene, M/Sgt. George W. Shook.

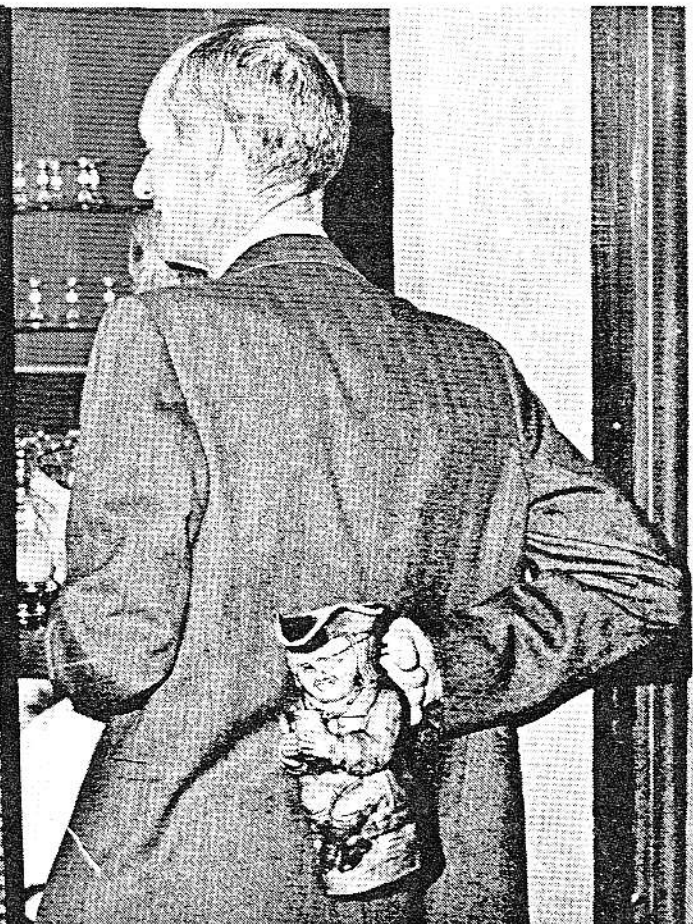
Attending but not pictured were Aubrey Capps and Reino Latva.



Col. Paul L. Fishburne presents M/Sgt. George Parks with his check for a "Golden Card" for lifetime membership.



Flight Leader Doug Gibson, who headed up the Anaheim Rally Round, welcomes 91st-ers to the Jolly Roger.



Ken Cochran plans a "mugging" of some unwary 91st-er to help fill the kitty.

Air Mystery - Case Of The Phantom Fortress

Making a perfect landing in a badly shot-up Fort with two engines gone and two sputtering is a tough enough job under the best of conditions, but when it's done on a plowed-up farm field with no pilot or crew aboard—well, that's downright unbelievable! And when the "Look, Maw, no hands!" landing took place right before the astonished eyes of a British anti-aircraft unit near Brussels, Belgium, on November 21, 1944, it provided all the ingredients for a mystery that kept officials puzzled and press wires the world over hot for the better part of a week.

"The Case of the Phantom Fortress" had its beginning early that morning at AF Station 121, Bassingbourn, when the 91st Bomb Group (H) was briefed for a mission to Merseburg, Germany. Lt. Harold R. DeBolt, pilot of "Destiny's Child," was preparing for his 33rd mission. The crew he regularly flew with had completed their tours and been reassigned, and this morning DeBolt was

heading a composite crew made up of four casual officers and the enlisted crew that flew with Capt. Hilary (Bud) Evers.

His crew included Lt. Osburn Stone, co-pilot; Lt. William R. Dominguez, navigator; Flight officer Richard P. Cusson, bombardier; Sgt. Troy C. Young, engineer; Sgt. Granville C. Houchens, ball turret; Sgt. Charles E. Walker Jr., waist gunner; Sgt. Nelson Richardson, tail gunner; and Sgt. John J. Alba, radio operator.

The trip to Merseburg was routine, with only scattered clouds and haze. As the group approached the target the weather thickened and the formation slowed as they entered the clouds. With bomb bay doors open the group began a slow turn toward the target. Then a problem that plagued pilots throughout the war struck—already barely about stalling speed, DeBolt's crew was the inside ship on the turn, and the further loss of speed for a desperate

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Is this the "Phantom of the Air" that offered such a puzzle to officials and newswriters? Pictured here is the original crew of "Destiny's Child," not the crew flying on that memorable occasion, except for pilot Harold R. DeBolt. He is shown sixth from left in this shot. The

crew shown is, 1 to r: S/Sgt. Milligan, waist gunner; 1st Lt. Quattlebaum, bombardier; T/Sgt. Boswell, radio operator; 1st Lt. Kirby, co-pilot; T/Sgt. Ripa, engineer; 1st Lt. DeBolt, pilot; S/Sgt. LeCasse, tail gunner; 1st Lt. Wilson, navigator; S/Sgt. Johnson, ball turret.

The Phantom Fortress...

effort to keep position caused the plane to stall and drop out of formation. Instantly, hovering German fighters pounced on the faltering plane, and German anti-aircraft turned loose with everything they had. Hits from both fighters and flak rattled the plane from nose to tail gun. As the gunners fought desperately against the Nazis the plane regained flying speed and rejoined the formation just in time for the bomb drop. Then disaster hit again!

Due to a malfunction of bomb-release mechanisms the crew could not release the bombs. As they struggled to get rid of the heavy burden they fell behind the formation again. Suddenly there was a tremendous flak burst just underneath the open bomb bay, filling the plane from tail to cockpit with a huge red flash. This time Lady Luck was smiling, though, for instead of further crippling the ship the blast had done a big favor.

"The explosion released our bombs, making the plane easier to fly. But I'll be darned if I know why the bombs didn't explode," DeBolt explains.

Seconds later No. 2 and 3 engines went out—No. 2 knocked out completely, and 3 windmilling wildly and threatening to shake the Fort apart. The formation pulled away, with no possibility that the crippled plane could rejoin them.

Jettisoning all loose equipment, the crew headed back for England, fighting to keep the plane airborne. When it became apparent they were steadily losing altitude and would never make it to the English coast DeBolt altered course for Brussels, Belgium, hoping to set down behind Allied lines.

"We were down to 2000 feet when the remaining two engines began to sputter, threatening to quit," DeBolt recalls, "So I told the crew to bail out. After the crew was away I set the aircraft on automatic pilot and got out myself. The last I saw of her she was flying all right, but was losing altitude."

The crew was picked up by British infantrymen in a wooded area, unhurt, and escorted to Brussels and quartered in an old schoolhouse.

"The British officer we were taken to had a bottle of Black and White, so after a couple of belts we were pretty well over the shakes," DeBolt remembers.

The plane had flown steadily onward, losing altitude at a rate just right for a perfect landing approach. An amazed British anti-aircraft unit watched the plane approach the plowed field, touch down perfectly for a landing run, but ground looping at the end of the field and coming to a halt with the engines still running. The AA gunners rushed up to congratulate the lucky crew and to praise the consummate skill of the pilot who had handled the landing so successfully.

Finding only an empty aircraft, the British were dumfounded. Stacked neatly inside were parachutes for the crew, fleece-lined flying jackets beside them, half-eaten candy bars, and not a living soul! The bewildered anti-aircraft unit notified their command, who investigated

and came away just as bewildered. AA headquarters contacted the 83rd Tactical Air Force near Evenburg. Another investigation, and the mystery remained. Eventually they contacted the Eight Air Force Service Command at Brussels, who sent out an inspection crew to investigate. All over the world the press services carried stories of the "phantom Fortress."

The thing that was most puzzling to the investigators, the fact that everyone was missing though the 'chutes were in the plane, could have been easily answered by almost any 91st-er of the day. Many, many crews habitually carried spare 'chutes in case heavy flak tore holes in some of the silken "return tickets."

Back in Brussels, the crew, unaware of the flurry that their unmanned aircraft was causing, celebrated Thanksgiving dinner. They were told that there was a damaged B-17 on hand they could fly back to England if they were in a hurry to return.

"The '17 had the No. 3 engine completely removed and the ball turret was gone, a gunner having been killed in it, but the ship looked good to us and the other three engines worked great, so off we started, only to be at the end of the 4000-ft. runway by a hold order," DeBolt relates. "We waited, only to have a truck approach us with six fighter pilots who had decided to risk a ride back to England with us."

The plane was scheduled for the repair depot at Burtonwood, but once in the air over the channel it became "lost", and using radio navigation got a heading for Basingbourn. "Sgt. John Alba did a great job on the radio," DeBolt recalls. "He brought us in to Basingbourn right on the nose. We didn't even mind the chewing out we got from Col. Terry for not going to Burtonwood as ordered, we were so glad to be home."

One mystery of the flight still remains—what 91st plane really made that hands-off touchdown in the plowed field in Belgium? Twenty-five years later the memories of the crew have dimmed on this point, and none of the press stories of the day recorded this information. DeBolt's regular plane was the well-known "Destiny's Child," and Crew Chief Jack Gaffney is sure this is the plane that was flown that day. Pilot DeBolt admits he has forgotten, but has the "feeling" it was another plane, and a passing reference in one of our collected data sheets mentions "Destiny's Child" being lost on a later mission. Somewhere tucked away in Eighth Air Force records is the info—but right now, who knows for sure?

DON'T

forget that 1970 dues must be paid to keep

The Ragged Irregular coming to you

Dayton Rally Round To Feature Air Force Museum Visit

Setting as their primary target the blasting of the record set by the recent Western Division Rally Round in Anaheim, the Dayton, Ohio 91st-ers under the leadership of flight leaders Dick Dempsey and Bob Iiams have plotted a Saturday, May 7 mission they expect to be the biggest one yet!

In anticipation of the "max-effort" mission, flyers have been mailed to 91st-ers in a 400-mile radius of Dayton, with the welcome mat out for members in every corner of the country.

Rendezvous is scheduled for Imperial House North, on Interstate 75 and Needmore Road, Dayton, with circuits over the splasher beacon (COD bar) set for 7 p.m. Saturday. Following "refueling" ceremonies the group will assemble for a dinner of prime ribs of beef au jus with all the trimmings, strawberry shortcake, and other assorted goodies. Tab will be \$7.50 each.

After dinner the group will view the BBC telecast of

last summer's "Operation Return," followed by dancing to music of the '40s.

On Sunday morning a tour of the Air Force Museum will be made, highlighted by the presentation of a large, hand-painted 91st Bomb Group plaque to the museum. Chief of Research of the museum, Royal D. Frey, is arranging a "91st corner" in the museum.

Attending the get-together will be Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, Association president, and Eastern Division officials Paul Chryst, Joe Camelleri, Bob Gerstemeier, and Joe Giambrone.

Reservations should be made directly with the Imperial House (Phone area code 513-278-5711). On arrival be sure to identify yourself as a 91st-er—there will be Dayton folk on hand to greet you, top your tanks, refuel, and bomb up!

Be sure to bring your albums and mementoes!

Southeastern States Rally Round Set For Tampa

When the 91st left McDill Field, Tampa, Fla., in 1942 for combat training at Walla Walla, Wash., Group C. O. Lt. Col. Stanley T. Wray promised the unit a get-together at Tampa sometime after the war. Somehow the promised return never quite materialized until now—with a Florida Recall scheduled for July 20-23.

Under the direction of flight leaders Paul G. McDuffee, Howell Loper, and Bob Foster, the Super Rally Round promises to draw members not only from Florida and the Southeast but from the entire Eastern Division, as many plan to combine the three-day event with a regular Florida vacation.

Activities will center at the International Inn, Kennedy Blvd. at Westshore. Registration begins Monday morning, with an informal cocktail get-together for hanger flying set for 6:30 p.m.

On Tuesday the group will tour Busch Gardens, Florida's number one tourist attraction. This is a tour worth

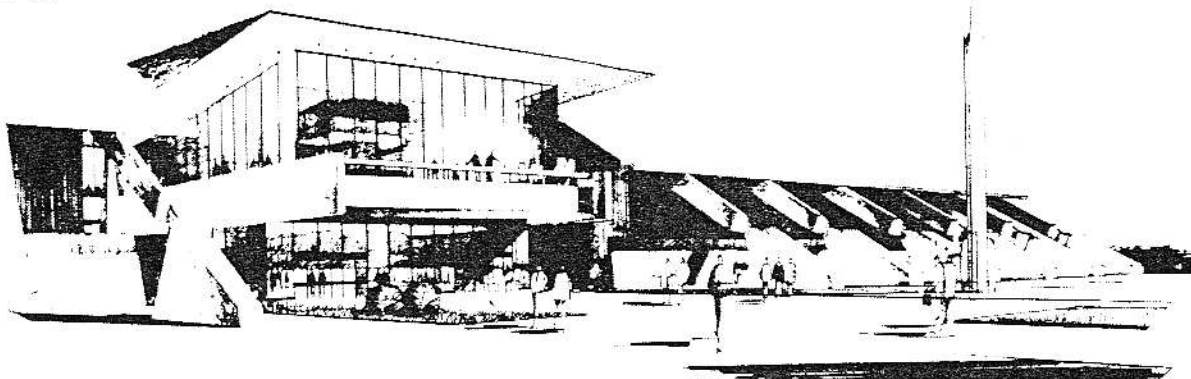
a Florida trip itself. A poolside Luau and 91st films are planned for Tuesday night.

On Wednesday the group will go to McDill Air Force Base for luncheon at the Officers Club and a guided tour of the Strike Command. A Recall Banquet-Dinner with dancing afterward is set for that night.

Thursday morning will see the Recall end with business and committee meetings.

Tampa is in the heart of many of Florida's finest attractions, with the splendid beaches at Clearwater and the Holiday Isles only a short drive away.

The International Inn is offering the 91st special rates for the Recall, and for those desiring to stay on in Tampa for a vacation the special rates will continue for the duration of their stay. Room reservations should be made directly with the Inn. Be sure to identify yourself as a 91st-er.



Construction of a new \$6,000,000 home for the Air Force Museum will get under way in April. The Museum, begun in 1923, is today Ohio's number one tourist attraction, with 643,000 visitors in 1969. The new structure will be 240 feet wide and 800 feet long, large enough to house up to 100 aircraft inside, twice the number displayed in the current museum. A theatre seating 500 and a restaurant seating 200 will be included in the structure, as well as a technical research library.

The Ragged Irregular

These news letters are published quarterly in October, January, April, and July, in an effort to keep alive the spirit of the 91st Bombardment Group (H) and to maintain the fellowship of those who fought together in World War II from AF Station 121, Bassingbourne, England, 1942-1945.

Material for publication should be sent to the editor, Paul C. Burnett, Box 909, Auburn, Alabama 36830, not later than two weeks before the first day of the month of publication.

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Dues are \$3 per year, payable to the Division Treasurer. Get Your Buddies Back With Us. Send current addresses of former 91st-ers to the proper Division Secretary.

Membership Data Forms

We need data forms on ALL former 91st-ers. If you haven't sent

one in, please do so today. If you need the data form,

contact your division secretary.

NOTICE NOTICE NOTICE

From The Editor's Desk...

A note from Matt Pettera regarding the write-up of "Lackin' Shackin'" in the January issue. Matt relates that he was assistant crew chief of the plane, with Edward Pinkowski as crew chief. Says Matt, "It would make a more interesting article on any plane to include the names of any ground crew with it, if known." We agree 100 per cent, but the catch comes in those last two words . . . if known. Our records don't have this information, and if any of you ground crew members have such info on any planes, pass it along. Matt has sent a list of a number of 401st planes and their crew chiefs. For the same reason our pictures run heavily to flying crews—we've got stacks of those photos, but hardly any of ground crew personnel. Come on, fellows, send us some data!

We also had a fine letter from Edward J. Huntzinger, secretary of the 388th Bombardment Group Association, challenging our statement in the Irregular that the 91st was "the largest and most vigorous Association around." He points out that they have been organized since 1949, and have 1700 members. They have held a reunion every year since 1950, with the 1969 reunion in Kenettishall last August. In membership I'll confess we're only No. 2 (We try harder!). On vigor I'll make no concessions.

Pictures of the Anaheim Rally Round can be obtained from the photographer, George Royse, 3661 Condar Ave., Long Beach, Calif. 90808 for \$1.50 each plus 50 cents shipping costs per order. The group shot is No. D-2 in his files.

The East Anglia Aviation Society, the Bassingbourn group that presented the fine plaque to the 91st during Operation last summer, recently showed the 91st combat film, "Memphis Belle" for their program. More than 300 persons attended the showing. The Society is currently searching for a B-17 to house in their museum.

The "new look" of the address stickers on the Irregular envelopes this issue is courtesy of member Bob DeGeorge. Our heartfelt thanks for his mechanizing the tedious job of addressing these many hundreds of envelopes!

British aviation historian Roger Freeman has authored a recently published Profile of the B-17G, put out by Profile Publications Limited. Center spread of the book is a series of color drawings of the 91st plane "General Ike," and drawings of the 401st squadron insignia and the group insignia. Also shown in the book are the 91st planes "Pistol Packing Mama," "Just Plain Lonesome," and a crashed 91st plane (42-37767 LL-D) at the Cambridge airport. (Pettera's list shows Arthur Hele as crew chief). Copies of the Profile No. 205 can be obtained for 60 cents or five shillings from Profile Publications Limited, Coburg House, Sheet Street, Windsor, Berkshire, England.

From the Editor's Desk...

The Rally Round business is really flourishing these days, with the recently completed Anaheim event and the upcoming Dayton and Tampa affairs! Both should be outstanding. The Air Museum trip at Dayton will be a real sight to see, and the three-day program at Tampa will be great. Western Division Sec.-Treas. George Parks also advises that three more western area rally rounds are upcoming soon, though specific dates have not been set.

The list of life members continues to grow steadily. Newest additions are David A. Bramble, Vincent B. Evans, and Col. Paul L. Fishburne. The "Gold Card Group" are really helping to keep 'em flying!

Some of the newer additions to our membership have suggested that we print up a complete directory of members. As you "old timers" know, we have published directories in both '68 and '69. If you need a copy send along a buck to George Parks or Joe Giambrone. And don't overlook our blazer patches—\$3 to the same gentlemen will dress you in style.

Blazer Patch Available

The latest in styles for the well-dressed 91st-er is this blazer patch, a project of the Western Division. To be fashionable for that upcoming Rally Round or reunion order yours for \$3 from either George Parks, 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, Calif. 94590 if you are in the Western Division, or from Paul Chryst, 1494 North Adams St., Pottstown, Pa., 19464 for the Eastern Division.



Far Western Rally Round...

Cochran (Hdqs. Sqdn.) brought in \$51 in contributions to the "kitty," and Secretary-Treasurer George Parks reported that 91st Blazer patches went "like 3-day passes to London."

Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, Association president, had planned to fly in from Alexandria, Va., to formally open the Rally Round, but a bout with 'flu made this impossible. He opened the affair and addressed the "troops" by long distance telephone. A monster high-ball glass, engraved "S.T.W.—Baron of Bassingbourn," was to be presented to the General, but will be given to him at a visit to California late in March.

Top squadron represented was the 322nd, with 13 members. Others were: 401st, 11; 323rd, 7; 324th, 3; Hdqts., 2; 441st Sub-Depot, 1, and Red Cross, 2. Five associate members were present, and three guests of members.

Attending were: M/Sgt. and Mrs. George W. Parks, Maj. and Mrs. Maurice J. Herman, Mt. and Mrs. Ken Cochran, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Mott, Mr. and Mrs. Ammon Powell, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gaffney, Mr. E. R. "Rudy" Steele, Mr. Robert E. Finch, Mr. and Mrs. Faber H. Cripps, Mr. Phillip R. Taylor, Mr. Charles Newlin, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Newquist, Mr. and Mrs. Argo C. Giese, M/Sgt. and Mrs. George W. Shook and Pam and Steve; Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Platt, Mr. Harold A. Packard.

Mr. and Mrs. Reino O. Latva, Mr. and Mrs. Tony Starcer, Mr. and Mrs. Walter M. Ward, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Clothier, Col. Paul L. Fishburne, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kuehl, Mr. James M. Mounts, Mr. Raymond C. Ridings, Mr. and Mrs. Chris Christiansen, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ivanovich, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Mike Fenchak, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur E. Thomsen.

M/Sgt. and Mrs. Edward F. Jackman, Mr. and Mrs. David H. Akey, Mr. Joseph Fragale, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Ortega, Mr. and Mrs. Dick Anderson, Mrs. Joan Johnson Fewsmith, Miss Evelyn Ritcher, Mr. and Mrs. Aubin R. Pene, Mr. Aubery H. Capps.

Associate members included Mr. and Mrs. David L. Hohler, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Gowers, Mr. and Mrs. William Bailie, Mrs. Clara Mae Smith, and Miss Mary Marker. Guests were Mr. and Mrs. Jack Foelle and Miss Moira Foster.

Association Life Members

Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray (Ret)
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John L. Dowrick
Lt. Col. Willis C. Stinson (Ret)
John A. Fearheller
Harry A. Dooley
Robert D. Iiams
David A. Bramble
Vincent B. Evans
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