



# The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 3 No. 4

July, 1970

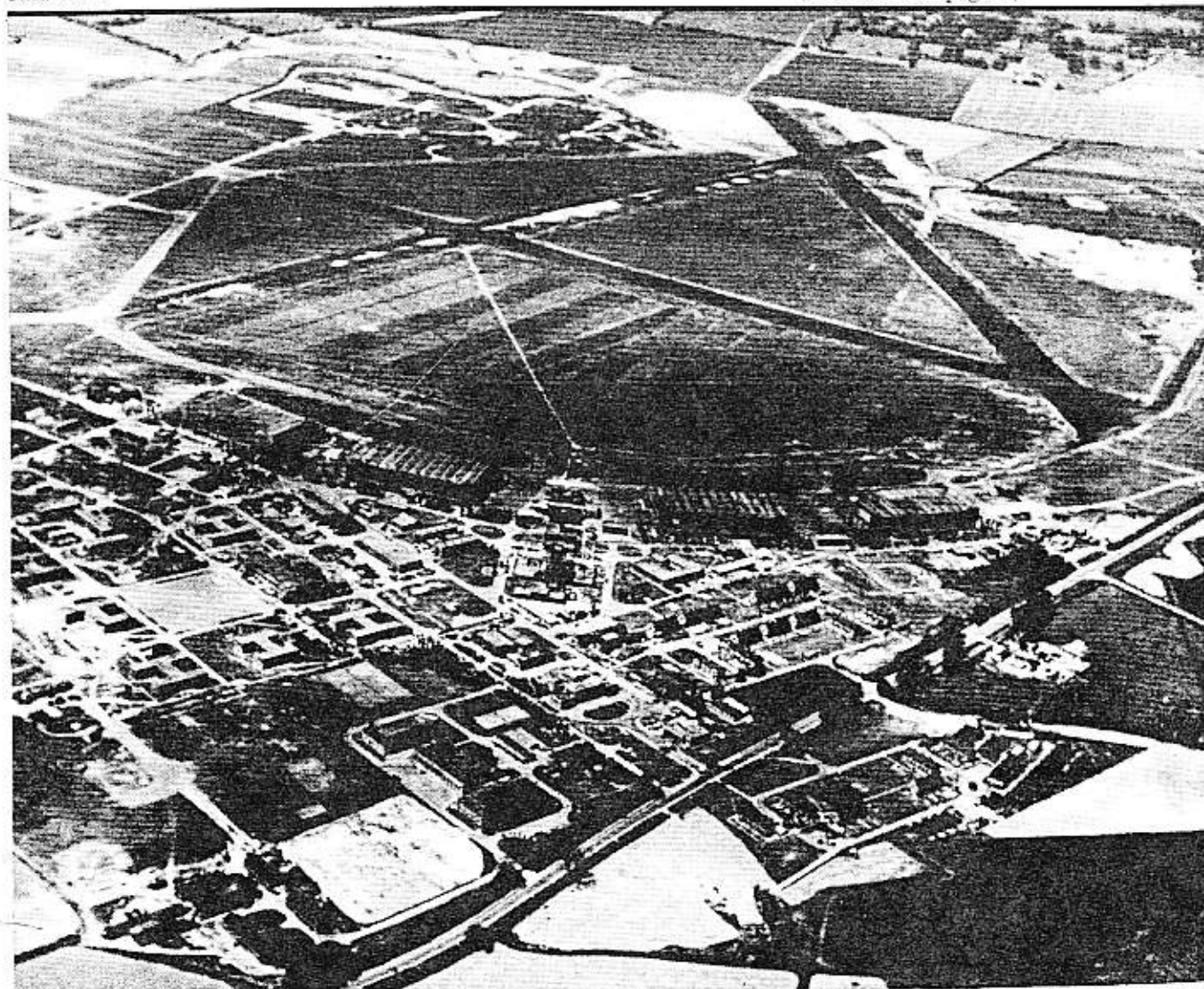
## Super Rally Round At Tampa July 20-23

A Florida Recall and Super Rally Round set for Tampa July 20-23 shows every promise of being the biggest area get-together since the Memorial Association's founding, perhaps approaching the national reunions in the number of former 91st-ers present.

Originally planned as a Florida and Southeastern States affair, attendance from all areas of the Eastern Division is indicated, with a good representation expected from the Western Division, especially Texas and Oklahoma.

Tampa's McDill Air Base was the first real home of the 91st, though the group was organized (on paper) in Louisiana. It was at McDill that many of the original members first joined the group. When the 91st was transferred for combat training to Walla Walla, Wash., in the spring of 1942, Lt. Col. Stanley T. Wray, commanding, promised the troops that they would meet again in Tampa after the war was over. This promise has materialized after 28 years with the upcoming Rally Round, and Maj-

(continued on page 2)



This aerial view of Bassingbourn made during 1943 shows all of the old base except for some of the plane

dispersal areas. This was a mighty sweet sight after a rough ride to Germany or wherever.

## Tampa Rally Round - Florida Recall Set For July 20-23

Gen. Wray will be on hand to welcome the troops back.

Directing the event are flight leaders Paul G. McDuffee, Howell Loper, and Bob Foster. They have worked out a program that will make the meeting a vacation to remember in addition to the opportunity for old 91st-ers to get together again in fellowship.

Registration will get under way at Rally Round headquarters, the International Inn, on Kennedy Blvd. at Westshore, Monday morning, July 20. An informal cocktail get-together is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. On Tuesday the group will tour the world-famous Busch Gardens, Florida's No. 1 tourist attraction. 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 Rally Round end with business and committee meetings.

Enclosed with this Ragged Irregular is a flyer with details of the event, a tally card, and hotel reservation applications. Those persons planning to attend are urged to return the tally slip so that the committee will be able to plan for the various events more accurately. Hotel reservations should be made directly with the International Inn.

## Next Fall's Television Movie To Feature 91st Plane

A television movie about the 91st plane "Memphis Belle" is in production for next season's national television release.

It will include information about some of the raids the plane made, including the original movie made by William Wyler in 1943 which is well-known to 91st alumni, and an updating of the story, including the refurbishing of the plane as a Memphis war memorial in 1966-67, and a look at the crew members today.

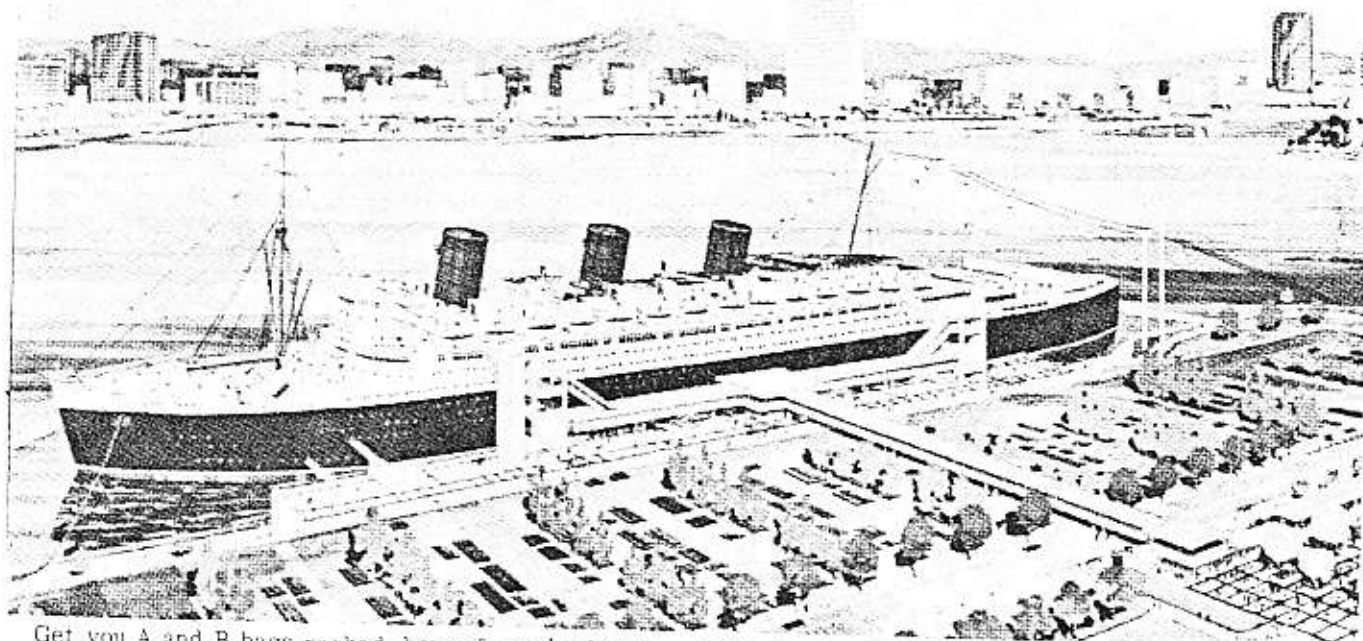
The film is being produced by Patrick Curtis of Curt-

well Productions.

A note from Associate Member David Pitts, the Pleasant Grove, Ala., youth who prodded the City of Memphis into restoring the Belle, indicates that the producer has located all of the crew but one—Harold P. Loch, flight engineer. Our records show his address as 1541 Russell, Green Bay, Wisc., 54304, and we have not had an Irregular returned from this address, but apparently Curtis did not find him here. If any member knows Loch's current address please pass it on to the editor.

**If You've Overlooked Your 1970 Dues- Now Is The Time!**

## '42 Troop Class - '72 First Class



Get you A and B bags packed, boys, for we're boarding the Queen Mary again! The 91st Memorial Association has definitely decided that the next national reunion will be held in 1972 aboardship at its berth in

Long Beach, Calif. The Queen Mary, which carried most 91st-ers to Scotland in the fall of '42, is being converted to a convention center at a permanent berth in Long Beach.



# Dayton Rally Round May 7 Sets Record

Dayton's "maximum-effort" Rally Round May 7 turned out to be just that—a whopping 88 members and guests spent Saturday night reminiscing and relaxing at Imperial House North and Sunday touring the Air Force Museum.

Under the leadership of Dick Dempsey, life member Bob Iiams, and Miss June Bryant, this one set a new high in 91st attendance at an area get-together.

Following a rendezvous cocktail hour and dinner of prime ribs with all the trimmings, the group viewed color slides of last summer's "Operation Return" to Basingstoun and a sound video tape replay of BBC interviews with some of the members who revisited their former duty station then. Later, there was dancing to the music of the '40s.

During the tour of the Air Force Museum Sunday a large painted plaque of the Group insignia and the four Squadron insignias was accepted by Col. Joseph Hornsby for the museum. It is hoped that the 91st Bomb Group

will have its own corner of space in the new building which will be completed next spring.

The Group accepted an invitation by the Museum to return to Dayton in May, '71 for another Rally Round.

John C. Bishop, attending from Queenstown, Md., one of the original 91st-ers and former 323 Squadron C.O., became the eleventh "life member" of the Association with a donation of \$100 for his Gold Membership card.

John Fearheller, of Ocean City, N.J., won the engraved beer mug for having traveled the greatest distance to attend. Mr. and Mrs. Evan Zillmer, of Woodruff, Wis., placed second.

Attending were: Jack Armstrong, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Bader, Mr. and Mrs. James Baird, Donald Beal, Mr. and Mrs. John C. Bishop, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Bowles, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Breckenridge, June Bryant and Forrest, Joseph Camelleri, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Chryst.

Mr. and Mrs. Civins, Mr. and Mrs. Connors, Mr. and

(continued on page 4)

## Newest Life Member Is John C. Bishop



The Memorial Association's newest lifetime Gold Card member from the Dayton Rally Round is John C. Bishop, shown here third from the left in this group of 323rd squadron officers celebrating his and Capt. John Gladstone's completion of 25 missions.

Shown are, l to r: Capt. Alex Bright, intelligence officer; Capt. Reynolds, bombardier; Maj. John C. Bishop, squadron C.O.; Capt. John Gladstone, pilot; Capt. Fred Larsen, engineering officer, and Maj. E.J. Butler, executive officer. In front is Capt. Weldon Ross, flight surgeon.

## Finding A Buddy - The Long Way 'Round

Back "before THE WAR" three boys graduated from the same high school in suburban Philadelphia, Pa., and went their separate ways. Came the war, and curious fate brought the three together for the first time—all members of the 8th Air Force, all assigned to the same unit, 91st Bomb Group (H), AAF Station 121, Bassingbourn, England.

The three, Bob Gerstemeier, B-17 crew member, Jack Fearheller, 324th squadron photographer, and Al Finnesey, a 91st medic: 3,000 miles from home and together again for the first time since high school days.

One day, following a rough mission, flyer Bob Gerstemeier lands at Bassingbourn, leg almost severed by an 88 mm shell. Medic Al Finnesey helps remove the wounded flyer to the ambulance, and photographer Jack Fearheller records the dramatic scene for world newspapers. End of Act I.

On May 7, 1970, at Dayton, Ohio, two of the three, Gerstemeier and Fearheller, reminiscing about the event, mention Al Finnesey, wondering whatever happened to him after the war. The name rings a bell with another 91st couple there, Evan and Doris Zillmer, who have come down to Dayton from Woodruff, Wisc. Doris, a war bride and a native of Cambridge, immediately spoke up. "I know them," she replied. "Al Finnesey's wife is also from Cambridge, and I know her very well."

### Dayton Rally Round...

Mrs. Cooper, Mr. and Mrs. William Corson, Mr. and Mrs. James Daley, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dempsey, Frank Donofrio, Mr. and Mrs. Ferrell Evans, Jack Fearheller, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Guzek, Mr. and Mrs. James Harrison and guest, Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Holtman.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hovermill, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hughes, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Iiams and son, George Kemnitz, Dr. Immanuel Klette, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Miller, Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Painter, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Perlman, C. O. Pierce, Jerry Pope, Mr. and Mrs. John Powers, Mr. and Mrs. George Rentz, Mr. and Mrs. Steve Resko, Thomas Sharp.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Simmers, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Smith and guest, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sponsel, Mr. and Mrs. William Thissel, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Waddell, Mrs. Velda Vranick, Mr. and Mrs. Smiley Wagner, Col. and Mrs. Joe Walter, Gen. and Mrs. Stanley T. Wray, Mr. and Mrs. Evan Zillmer.

### Association Life Members

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

Dorothy Burnage. When my father, my sister Eve, and my niece came over to the States to visit us for 3 months in 1957 we all visited the Al Finnesey's in New Jersey when we met my folks off the Queen Mary, and had a second visit when we returned the folks to New York."

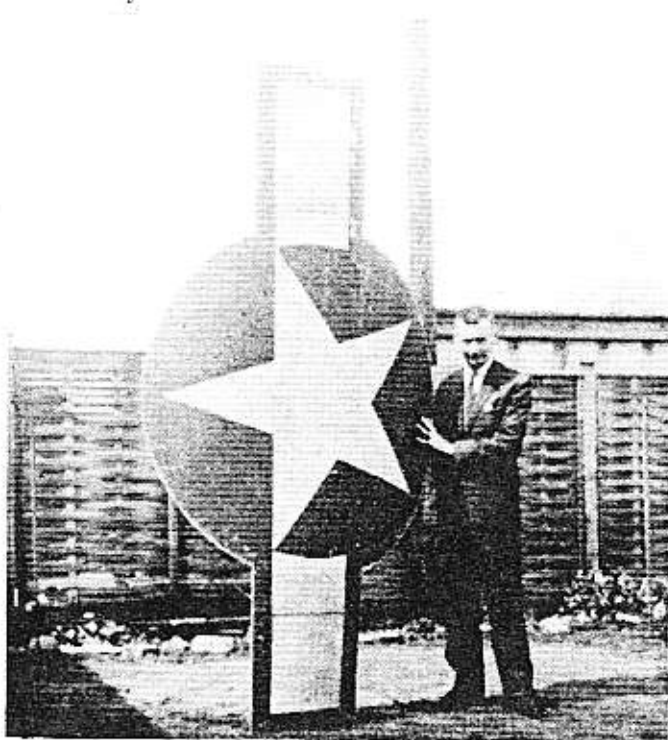
An immediate telephone call to the old address in New Jersey drew a blank. The Finnesey's had moved and no one knew their whereabouts.

Undaunted, persistent Jack Fearheller suggested a far-out solution—a phone call to England and a start at tracking Al down from there.

Completely overwhelmed by the suggestion, Doris Zillmer was soon on the phone calling Cambridge, Cambridge 2518, talking to her sister Evelyn, asking her to look in the Cambridge telephone directory for the number of Dorothy Burnage's mother (Al's mother-in-law). Evelyn relayed the number, and a second call to England reached Mrs. Burnage, who passed along the Finnesey's address, in Whittier, Calif.

Still a third call reached Al at Whittier, and after 11,000 miles of telephone calls the 91st had located another "lost" son.

Next time they reminisce it won't be by telephone—they're getting together in person at the Tampa Rally Round July 20-23!



Associate member John W. Archer, of Earsham, Suffolk, England, who as a schoolboy used to ride his bicycle down to Bassingbourn to watch the 91st return from missions, is shown with a B-17 insignia panel he recently found stored in a farmer's barn near the airfield. Stored there since WWII, it is believed to have come from a 91st plane.

# Bassingbourn's 'Airborne' Infantry - The 156th

By Jack Holman

Editor's Note: In response to the Editor's repeated pleas for former 91st-ers to pass along stories, etc., to share with readers of The Ragged Irregular, member Jack Holman, 8 Beechcroft Lane, Ringwood, Hampshire, England, sent along this letter. Dealing with the activities of an infantry unit attached to Bassingbourn, it shows an entirely different facet of life on AF Station 121 from that of the bomber crews and the Air Force personnel.

Dear Editor,

Per your request for odds and ends of information, I am enclosing a few "non operational" memories from the early days at Bassingbourn. Before getting down to that, however, may I observe the similarity between the hand and finger of the Rigid Digit (right hand palm out) and the CEFA identification of the Eighth Air Force NCO Academy (palm in) graduates. Is there any connection? (Maybe an ex 91st man being on the original faculty?)

Now to October 1942 (dates may be one to two days off as my personal papers were lost in North Africa in 1943 and these obtained from correspondence later.) On 28 October '42 a detachment of 90-odd men and five officers from Hq. Co. and Co. F of the 2nd Bn, 156th Infantry Regiment arrived at Bassingbourn to perform guard and police duty. The regiment had arrived in Bristol on 12 October, was split up temporarily with the 2nd Bn being loaned to VIII Bomber Command. (Co. F, less one platoon sent to Bassingbourn, was at Thurlough, where where Curtis LeMay was a Sqdn. Comdr.)

The officer personnel sent to AAF Station 121 were led by Capt. Richard W. Thomson, Jr., Adjutant of the 2nd Battalion, who was given a chair in the Administration Building and title of Provost Marshal; Capt. Roy E. Moon, 2nd Bn Surgeon, who quickly found work to do in the Base Dispensary (he was a gynecologist by trade and Col. Wray once remarked he was a damned skilled surgeon); 1st Lt. William P. James, 2nd Bn S-4, who went to work with the 91st A-4 section; 1st Lt. Daniel J. Hunt (Father Dan) 2nd Bn Chaplain, who found a niche with Chaplain Biggs, and as the 91st had no Catholic chaplain stayed on at Bass when the rest of us left; and yours truly, a very green shavetail, who moved into the guardhouse by the main gate. Shortly after our arrival, the RAF Reg't guards departed leaving four RAF policemen with us for about two months.

Needless to say there were many amusing incidents while the infantry troops were absorbed into the 91st way of life. The 156th had been in the field (stateside) two years, and being billeted under a roof in bunks was an unexpected luxury. We were housed in the building that had lost one wing due to a German air raid, and shared the building with a signal company attached to the 91st. The infantry organized itself into three guard

reliefs (two on duty each night in the dispersal areas, and a ten-man base police and town patrol squad).

Originally there was a bit of confusion prior to a mission when the armament crews arrived in the dispersal areas before the Sgt. of the Guard had been advised to expect them. This was soon ironed out, however, and no lives lost. Indeed, my men gained quite a bit of knowledge from the bomb dump men, and a feeling of mutual respect ensued.

At that time AAF station 121 was technically under RAF command, with the RAF represented by a portly, fatherly figure, Squadron Leader Ellard, who could barely squeeze into his little Austin auto. We were not aware of this, and the Sqdn. Leader was removed from his car at pistol point before dawn one morning and marched into the guardhouse by two infantry corporals when he did not halt at their signal upon entering the main gate. The RAF police identified him, and the 91st Adjutant, Capt. McClintic, gave me a belated briefing on the base command structure a couple of hours later. Sqdn. Leader Ellard gave me a cup of tea in his office, and we did not make that mistake again.

One rainy November afternoon one of the Main Gate guards reported "some colonel trying to pass himself off as a general." I hotfooted to investigate and found a staff car being held at gun point by the other gate guard. Inside were Maj. Gen. Ira Eaker and Brig. Gen. Longfellow wearing eagles on his topcoat. Col. Wray arrived right behind me and made appropriate apologies to the generals. Upon departure they complimented the two gate guards for being suspicious.

You may recall that the 4x4 ambulances had been withdrawn from UK units and sent to Africa for duty in sand and mud. They were replaced with British "cheeseboxes" 4x2, which were equipped with very good interior heaters. Col. Wray was getting perturbed about the number of military vehicles being wrecked off-base between sundown and sunrise and ordered us to clamp down hard on mis-use of government transport. Came one of the quite welcome ENSA shows to Bassingbourn, and after the performance refreshments were served in the Airmen's Mess Hall and the Officers Mess to the east.

At approximately 2330 on this foggy night I was summoned to the Main Gate where the guards were detaining two staff cars. Six or seven other military vehicles were lined up behind them, blackout lamps glowing faintly. Col. Wray and Lt. Col. Lawrence were in the lead vehicles crammed with ENSA people, and the other jeeps and half tons were likewise loaded. As I recall, Col. Wray said to me, "Holman, why can't I get out?" I replied, "Group Commander's orders, Sir."

The colonel looked at me and said, "I'm the group commander. Do those orders apply to me, too?" I said "Yes, Sir." The colonel then said "These people have to catch a train. I'm recinding the orders." "Yes, Sir," I said, and waved the procession through, which had



## Bassingbourn's 'Airborne' Infantry...

now grown to about ten vehicles, including a couple of "cheseboxes."

Next morning, Capt. McClintic phoned me to say "you're in trouble, another ambulance was wrecked last night. Get over here and report to Col. Wray." I did. The Colonel inquired as to why his orders to vehicles joy riding off base had not been observed. I replied that the Colonel had rescinded such orders at approximately 2330 the previous day. He glowered for a moment, then said "So I did. I'm sorry. Put 'em back on." This I think was a typical example of why STW was a good leader, and fine commander—he was not too obsessed with position to admit a mistake. That incident when relayed through 156th ranks put us solidly behind him.

Another amusing Main Gate anecdote. The 91st sent liberty trucks to Cambridge each evening as there was no public transportation. Taxis were expensive and could only legally operate a distance of ten miles due to British government order. Bassingbourn was about 12 miles from Cambridge, and the County Constabulary frequently operated road checks on civilian vehicles to insure compliance with the government restrictions on travel, petrol, etc.

One of these checkpoints was at the village of Arrington, about ten and a quarter miles from Cambridge on the route to Bassingbourn. One night about 0100 I was summoned to the Guardhouse to find a couple of Cambridgeshire Constables, two aircraft mechanics, and a small British car. The airmen belonged to the 91st, ownership of the car was in doubt, the airman apprehended driving had no British driver's license, no proof of insurance coverage, and was saying nothing.

Petrol tank of the car contained green gasoline. Civilian petrol was white, official gas was red. The constables had a case, but didn't quite know how to process it. You guessed right—the gasoline was aviation fuel drained from B-17 tanks prior to hangar repairs. The driver produced a Pennsylvania driving license which the Constables agreed to honor after a telephone conversation with their Sergeant at Melbourn, and agreed to defer proceedings until they could interview the registered owner of the vehicle. By the time this had been effected the squadron commander concerned had administered "company punishment" for the record, the British authorities so informed, and Col Wray had issued stern warning to all troops re acquisition and use of civilian motor vehicles.

(To Be Concluded In October)



War wasn't always Hell, as these shots of some of the lighter moments show—a 91st party of 1944. Unfortunately our files don't identify the bashful beauties shown above, who put on a special show of their own at the affair. For the benefit of jealous wives, our records do show that the picture at left was strictly posed for the photographer. The natives were usually friendly, but not generally this affectionate.

## 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...

By Paul C. Burnett

Box 909, Auburn, Ala. 36830

One affair we really hated to miss was the Second Annual Seminar on WWII Combat Aviation put on by the Confederate Air Force at their headquarters at Harlingen, Texas, June 25-29. The CAF maintains the largest group of flyable WWII aircraft in the world, with examples of almost every type of combat plane maintained in top condition. Persons attending were given a chance to fill their old crew positions in flights of B-17s and B-24s demonstration flights of everything from PT17, P-51, P-38-Hellcat to Messerschmitt to Spitfire were part of the activities. Any 91st-er interested in becoming a part of this great organization may write to Confederate Air Force, Rebel Field, Harlingen, Texas 78550.

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Bit by bit we are solving the mystery of the "Phantom Fortress" we reported on in the April Irregular. Aviation historian Steve Birdsall, working in Australia on a book about the 91st, discovered in microfilms of Air Force records of that Nov. 21 raid to Merseburg that DeBolt was flying plane LL-J 43-38545, not Destiny's Child, which had gone down in an earlier raid. Unfortunately, unromantic AF records don't list the names of planes, just serial numbers. So if any of you know the NAME of 43-38545 please send it along to the editor.

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Also, Steve is trying to help out a fellow writer who is doing a book on the Me 163 rocket plane. A 91st plane, "Outhouse Mouse," OR-N 231636, was the first US craft attacked by a Me 163 (unsuccessfully, the fighter was shot down by two P-51s). The author wants to use a picture of Outhouse Mouse dropping bombs for the cover photo. It is a beautiful picture, but unfortunately no one seems able to come up with a copy at the moment. If any of you have this picture pass it along. We'll return it promptly as soon as a copy can be made.

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The story of Jack Fearheller, Bob Gerstemeier, and Al Finnesey all from the same high school in Pennsylvania, winding up in the 91st together, strikes a note close to home. Robert Campbell, former 322nd squadron C.O. and I once lived next door to each other in Marshall, Texas, and attended grammar and high school together. In 1936 my folks moved to Louisiana. The next time I saw Bob was the day in 1942 I was assigned to the 322nd at Walla Walla-Bob was flight operations officer. Another 322nd member, pilot Ed Brodnax, had lived across the street from my wife, and 322nd pilot Ed Baxley's sister and my sister lived on plantations just across Red River from each other.

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A letter from Donald C. Stairs, RD #1, Box 166, Mt. Pleasant, 15666, brings up a question that many of you who were shot down may be interested in. Don says: "I was shot down on my 17th mission as a Radio Op.

(continued on page 8)

# Northern California Rally Round Set Sept. 26

A Northern California Rally Round has been scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 26, at Oakland, Calif. Rendezvous will be at the Hilton Inn near the Oakland International Airport.

Under the guidance of West Coast Division leaders Phil Taylor, Maury Herman, and George Parks, the event bids to be a memorable occasion. Refueling starts

at 2 p.m. Saturday. Dinner will be at 7:30 p.m. and a full program is planned. After dinner there will be dancing to the music of Glen Miller and other Big Bands of the '40s.

Here is a great opportunity for you California members to renew old acquaintances, especially if you haven't made a Rally Round yet. Come on and join the troops!

## INCOME AND EXPENSES January 1, 1969 - December 31, 1969

### INCOME

Balance: January 1, 1969, Eastern Division	\$ 308.09	
Balance: January 1, 1969, Western Division	<u>311.02</u>	\$ 619.11
Dues - Directory - Gifts, Eastern Division	\$ 1,522.17	
Dues - Directory - Gifts, Western Division	<u>1,064.88</u>	
		2,587.05
Reunion in England: 250 Passengers (Members & Families)		<u>59,098.50</u>
Total Income:		\$ 62,304.66

### EXPENSES

Eastern Division: Printing - Stationery - Postage	\$ 1,540.93	
Western Division: Printing - Stationery - Postage	<u>1,209.67</u>	\$ 2,750.60
		58,844.35
Reunion Expenses: Air Passage & Land Arrangements		
Retained Earnings Unappropriated:		
Eastern Division - (Cash Balance)	\$ 543.48	
Western Division - (Cash Balance)	<u>166.23</u>	
		709.71
Total Expenses:		\$ 62,304.66

### STATEMENT OF ASSETS

Bank Balance:- Eastern Division	\$ 543.48
Bank Balance:- Western Division	<u>166.23</u>
Total Assets:	\$ <u>709.71</u>

*Joseph M. Giambrone*

Joseph M. Giambrone, Treasurer

## From The Editor's Desk...

About one-half of them were with my own crew and half with other crews because Radio Ops were short. Other bomb groups turned these men in for the Order of the Winged Boot and the Caterpillar Club, but the 91st did not for me. Do you know why?"

Somebody may know the answer to that--the editor doesn't.

# DON'T

forget that 1970 dues must be paid to keep

The Ragged Irregular coming to you