



# The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 4 No. 2

January, 1971

## Western States Rally Round Set Feb. 6

A Western States Rally Round of 91st-ers from California, Washington, Oregon, Nevada and Arizona is set for Saturday, February 6, at the Jolly Roger Motel in Anaheim, Calif. Flight Leader Doug Gibson of Long Beach is heading up the affair.

Memorial Association president Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray will be on hand, as well as all officers from the Western Division.

Activities will get under way with the opening of the "Briefing Room" wet bar at 2 p.m. The official program begins with a Group dinner at 7 p.m. Following dinner will be dancing and a showing of color slides of past Reunions and Rally Rounds.

Tab for the dinner and entertainment has been set at

\$6.50 each.

Special rates for 91st-ers at the Jolly Roger Motel are \$14 for singles, \$16 for doubles, and \$18 for king sized rooms.

Disneyland is just across the street from the Jolly Roger, and Doug urges members to bring the whole family for an exciting week end.

Reservations checks for the Rally Round should be received by February 1. Mail to Doug Gibson, 2740 Knoxville, Long Beach, Calif., 90815. Doug's home phone number is (213) HA 5-6163.

The Jolly Roger is located at 640 West Katella, Anaheim. The phone number is 772-7020.



This shot of Bassingbourn showing a portion of the offices and barracks illustrates why the 91st was the envy of the Eighth. For gosh sakes—flowers and tennis courts yet!

# Northern California Meet Big Success

A Northern California Rally Round at the Hilton Inn, Oakland, September 26 drew 47 members and guests, not only from California but from as far as Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Oklahoma.

Highlighting the Memorial Association dinner was the surprise award of a "Golden Card" lifetime membership to Western Division Secretary-Treasurer George Parks, a birthday gift from his wife Marian. The overwhelmed former flight engineer of "Little Patches" and "Just Nothin'" stated that his life membership was in honor of the crew chiefs and the ground crews in the group who worked the long hours to keep the "birds" flying, and for the 91st-ers who did not return from their missions.

Western Division co-chairman Phillip R. Taylor, who was celebrating his birthday at the Memorial Association "party" also received a surprise gift—a birthday cake baked in the form of a shapely girl's torso, in red and white Bikini. The cake, presented by Association president Maj. Gen. S. T. Wray, had been baked for the occasion by Gen. Wray's daughter-in-law.

Chairman Taylor distributed gifts of his own to the members—banks made in the form of small automobiles so "everybody can start saving now for the 1972 National Reunion in Long Beach."

Winning the engraved beer mug awarded to the member attending from the greatest distance were Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Mott, who flew out from Tulsa, Okla., to attend. This is the second such award to the Motts, so they now have matching "His" and "Hers" mugs as mementoes of 91st Rally Rounds.

Maj. Gen Wray, attending from Alexandria, Va., and Eastern Division co-chairman Paul Chryst, of Pottstown, Pa., were not eligible for the competition, as Association officials.

On Sunday members made a tour of the old aircraft display of Rep-Air-Inc at the Oakland airport. The display included a flyable B-29 and a B-25. Currently the company is negotiating for a flyable B-17 to be added to the museum, perhaps to be painted with 91st colors.

Western Division co-chairman Maury Herman and his bombardier, Norman Williams (401st sqdn.), met for the first time since the War at the Rally Round.

Attending were: Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, (Ret.), Lt. Col. Paul Chryst, Maj. Maurice Herman (Ret.), Capt. and Mrs. Frank S. Ripa (Ret.), SMS and Mrs. Henry Cordes (Ret.), M/Sgt. and Mrs. George W. Parks (Ret.), M/Sgt. Eugene Letalian (Ret.).

Mr. Phillip R. Taylor and guest, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gaffney, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Gillet, Mr. and Mrs. Ammon Powell, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Racicot, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Cochran.

Mr. and Mrs. Doug Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Paulson, Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Mott, Mrs. Molly E. Owen, John J. Lacorazza, Norman Williams, Charles E. Newlin.

Associate members and guests included CMS and Mrs. Charles W. Yaroshak, S/Sgt. and Mrs. David J. Boksanski, Mack K. Wray, Robert Letalian, Mr. and Mrs. Eldred Chance, Mr. and Mrs. James Green, Harry Paris, and Mr. and Mrs. Leonard E. Valladao.



Secretary-Treasurer George Parks is overwhelmed by the Memorial Association. his wife's gift of a \$100 check for a Life Membership in





Completing a matched set of engraved beer mugs, Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Mott of Tulsa, Okla., for the second time take the prize for travelling the greatest distance to attend a West Coast Rally Round.



A portion of the troops enjoying the Group dinner at the Hilton Inn.



# Natvig, Eatinger Revisit Crash Site, POW Camps

Almost every member of the 91st dreams of a return visit to his wartime haunts to view again the old places and to see how things might have changed in the years that have passed. For most this remains just that—a dream, though for some it is a dream that does come true. Two former 324th squadron members, Orlo Natvig and Norman Eatinger, realized their dream this summer by a return visit not only to Bassingbourn but to Holland where their plane "Local Girl" was shot down, and on into Austria to visit the sites of the prison camps where they spent 20 long months.

Here is the story as Orlo relates it:

I had been planning this trip for well over five years, as I felt that I wanted to go back to Austria to visit the remains of Stalag 17B where I had spent twenty months, and drive over some of the roads that I had walked during the time the Germans were moving us from Krems to the banks of the Inn, and Salzach river just north of Brannau.

About two years ago came the information request in the Ragged Irregular from Ab Jansen about our crew and from that a lively correspondence grew. My daughter spent the summer of 1969 in Europe and she visited the old haunts of mine and also stopped to see Ab Jansen and he took her on a tour of the North Sea area where we were shot down. This man is one of the finest persons that it has been my pleasure to know, and I must include his beautiful wife and daughter in this statement.

After striking up the mail acquaintance with Jansen I was determined to try to find some of the crew that were in the midwest. I turned up Norman Eatinger of Lakin, Kansas. I was taking a trip to Tuscon, Ariz., last spring and on the way I stopped to see Norman in Kansas. We persuaded Norman and his wife to make the trip with us.

We flew to Munich where we picked up a VW bus and

(continued on page 5)



Viewing one of the props from "Local Girl" which is mounted in a Dutch rock garden. At left is W. A. van Klaveren, who was the first man Orlo Natvig talked to after he had chuted down at the coastal village of Oterdum. Second from left is M. W. van Dienenhoven, who

smashed the instruments in "Local Girl" so the Germans would not find them intact. Third is ex-radio operator Orlo Natvig of Charles City, Iowa, and fourth is Norman Eatinger, ex-bombardier, of Lakin, Kansas, Photo by Ab Jansen.

## Natvig, Eater Revisit...

proceeded to drive on down through Austria, keeping to the smaller towns off the beaten tourist path.

Stalag 17B has disappeared completely, the old wood barracks have been burned, and all that remains of the German cadre buildings is the concrete and stone that has been bulldozed into windrows and left.

We stopped in the town of Moosburg to find the site of Stalag 7A, where Norman found himself at the end of the war. We toured the old area and much to our delight several of the old concrete barracks were still there and are now being used for old age housing and low rent dwellings.

We passed on through Germany and into Holland to the home of the ambassador of good will Ab Jansen. He spent two days with us, and it was with his language mastery and our determination that we went from place to place until we located Berteld Niebauer, the man that fished Norman from the North Sea. What do you say to a man that has saved your life? Norm's wife Rose gave the old fisherman a good American kiss, and he got red to the tips of his ears. We spent an hour or so in Berteld's home reminiscing about the past. We visited the spots where I landed on the dike and where Norm was brought in when the Germans took him over.

We then visited the Dutch farm family Ritsema, on whose farm our plane crashed with Pegram and Peters aboard. One of the props broke loose and fell into the soft ground, and farmer Ritsema waited until the war was over before he went out and dug it up, and it is now mounted on the wall of a rock garden outside the family home.

We were met there by the press and they took pictures and asked questions for a story. Also two policemen spent the afternoon with us, the one who picked me up when I landed and the other who was the first person to reach the wreckage of the plane when it crashed.

Farmer Ritsema Sr. had passed away the first of the year and his son and daughter-in-law live with the mother and work the farm. The son gave Norm and me each an oxygen regulator from our old plane.

The trip was a great and unique experience, one that we all recall with mixed emotions—humor, sadness, solemnity, and the realization that we had travelled historic paths.

Here is the story as it was published in a Dutch newspaper.

Yesterday some American flyers returned to the hamlet of Geefswear near Delfzijl: the place where in September 1943 they came down with their Flying Fortress. They were Mr. Orlo Natvig and Mr. Norman Eater, who were accompanied by their wives and a befriended couple, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Eggert.

Mr. Natvig was the radio-operator, Mr. Eater the bombardier of the B-17F, named "Local Girl," of the 324th Squadron of the famous 91st Bomb Group of the Eight US Air Force, at the time stationed in England. On the morning of the 27th September 1943 they took off with another 300 four-engined bombers to make the first radar-guided raid of the Americans on a German target. Therefore Emden was chosen, that being situated on the

coast, in case of overcast could be more clearly distinguished on the radar-sets of the Pathfinder aircraft than a target more inland.

After they had dropped their bombs on the target their aircraft was attacked by some Messerschmitts Me 109's. Due to the fact that the ball turret was inoperative owing to lack of oxygen of the gunner, and the two guns of the ball turret were pointing straight down, they were attacked from below. Soon they were a victim of the German fighters, which made pass after pass. It did not last long before the no. 2 (port inner) engine burned like a torch. One of the shells exploded in the radio compartment where its splinters missed Sgt. Natvig by the narrowest margin. Also the "interphone"—the communication-system aboard the aircraft—fell out. When it became clear that they would not return from this trip, they decided to abandon aircraft.

Eight crew-members bailed out of the doomed bomber over the coast of the Eems. For some of them it was a near thing. Mr. Natvig: "I can remember that Hutchinson and I were back down by the ball turret and we scrambled back up to the door by using the ribs of the ship as a ladder to get to the door and out. I jerked on the coveralls of Belvin Peters to get him to go with us, but he made no effort to follow us, and we did not have time to force him, as he was still hanging on to his waist gun."

### IN THE WATER

Three of the men descended into the water. Of these three two were drowned: the navigator and the engineer, because the cords of their chutes became entangled in the so-called "botschuttings" or "Flounder-fences," a device of twigs and branches to catch fish, and in their heavy clothing they could not do a thing.

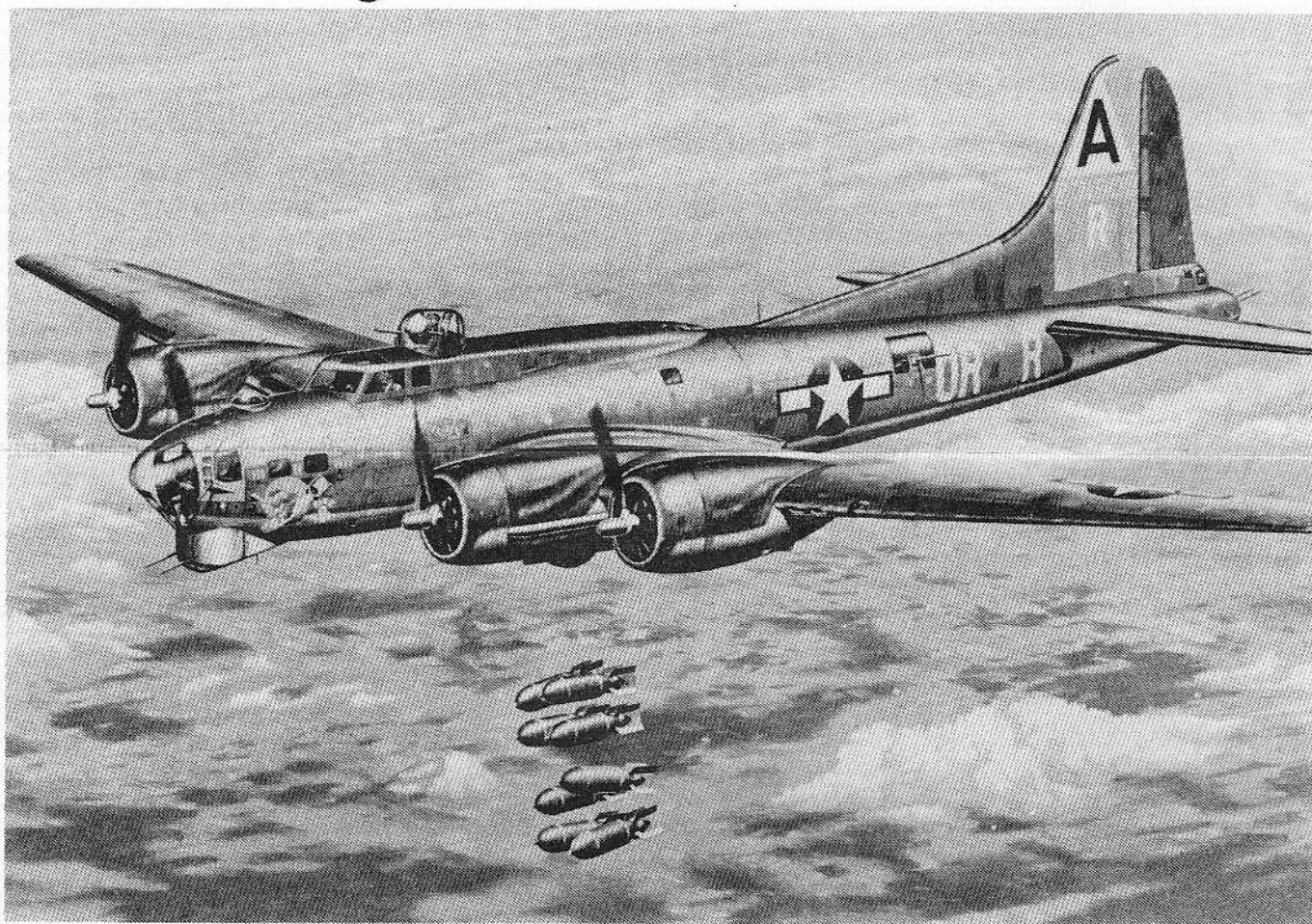
The third was more fortunate and could be rescued by a fisherman who at that moment was fishing on the Dollart and rushed to the scene. He was bombardier Norman Eater, who was yesterday gazing with wondering eyes at Fiemel. Sergeant Orlo Natvig, the radioman, barely touched firm ground, namely on the "kwelder" behind the dike at Oterdum, one of the places that was visited yesterday. He remembers that among the Dutchmen who had collected there was a teen-age boy who could speak some English. According to eye-witnesses he was the son of farmer Elema (now an engineer). After Natvig had been brought to the cafe of Jan van der Laan, which was pulled down last year, he was made POW by the Germans who lost no time to get to the scene.

The aircraft crashed at Geefswear, just south of Delfzijl, on the land of Mr. E. K. Ritsema. True to his word that in case of an emergency he would give his crew sufficient time to bail out, Pilot Pegram stuck to his post. It cost him his life. His lifeless body was found near the aircraft wreckage, as well as that of Sergeant Peters, who kept firing at the German fighters to the end.

The group Americans were conducted by Mr. A.A. Jansen, a Groninger who has made a profound study of the air war over the province, and a few months ago moved to Oudorp near Alkmaar. Mr. Jansen has written a more detailed story of Local Girl's last flight for a book he hopes to be able to publish within a few years.



# '909' - Eighth's Most Durable Fortress



Shown "delivering the goods" in this action painting by artist Jerry Groh, who illustrated Steve Birdsall's famous history of the B-17, is "909," OR R 231909, the 323rd squadron plane that was Number One not only for the 91st but for the entire Eighth Air Force in total missions flown without a turnback—140 flown in a period of 13 months.

The gallant plane served four complete crews through their entire tours of duty, and not one crew member was ever killed or wounded. It underwent 27 engine changes to keep the "fans" turning smoothly.

The plane was delivered to the 91st on February 25, 1944, with 37 hours total time on it. It made its first combat mission on March 2, 1944.

909 was turned over to Crew Chief M/Sgt. Rollin L. Davis, who was assisted by Emil M. Yezdimer, Robert M. Waddell, Edward J. Lincoln, Jr., Charles H. Huffman, and Albert McLaughlin in keeping the bird always in top condition. Davis was awarded the Bronze Star with cluster for outstanding service.

The ship reached the 100 missions mark on January 15, 1944, and racked up 140 on April 25, 1945, two weeks before VE day. She made 18 trips to Berlin.

After the war in Europe ended "909" was flown back to the States, landing at Dow Field, the same base at which the 91st had done combat training prior to departure to England in 1942.

Aboard were: Lt. John D. Oliver, Lt. Harry A. Dooley, Capt. Robert M. Hoffman, Capt. Joseph M. McPhie, Major William E. Reid, Lt. Col. Willis J. Taylor, Lt. Leslie S. Thompson, Lt. Edwin D. Pitts, Capt. Joseph S. Sulli, Capt. Burton Brager, Capt. Laurence E. Baird, S/Sgt. Martin Carter, S/Sgt. David E. Calvert, M/Sgt. Rollin L. Davis, T/Sgt. Charles H. Baucom, S-Sgt. Henry J. Fagan, S/Sgt. John Scott, T/Sgt. Bruce J. Johnson, and T/Sgt. Donald H. Carmichael.

Unfortunately, like so many of the great old planes from the Eighth, 909 ended her days in the Arizona boneyard, ultimately sold for scrap.

## Help Keep US Flying - Send Your Dues!

## 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...

Eagle-eyed readers may notice a slight change in the plane flying at the top of page one, thanks to associate member Harold F. Lightbrown. A former radio operator with the 306th BG at Thurleigh in '42-'43, now the head of Lightbrown Press, Inc., of Boston, Harold noticed that the radio op's gun was missing and that there were twin guns at the waist. As he notes in a letter "the temptation was great to stow the swivel mount, lock the blister in position and try to crawl behind the transmitter, but we were working and sweating."

How that came about was this—the artist copied a picture of a YB-40, the heavily modified B-17, which had a turret there as well as twin fifties in the waist. We took off the turret but forgot to move out a waist gun and put in a radio gun. But the 91st **did** have some early B-17F's with jury-rigged twin fifties at the waist in the early months.

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Just as the Irregular was going to press we received the news that Col. W. R. Middleton had died several months ago at England Air Force Base Hospital, Alexandria, La., after a long illness. Col. Middleton was an enthusiastic member of the Memorial Association and attended our first National Reunion in Memphis in 1967. He had retired from the Air Force in 1960, and since that time had been director of student services at Louisiana State University—Alexandria until he retired last March from that position. Students and former students at LSU—Alexandria have established the W.R. Middleton Award fund as a perpetual memorial.

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91st-ers travelling U.S. Interstate 20 between South Carolina and Atlanta might drop in and see an old ex-buddy, M/Sgt. James F. Brigman. He has recently become manager of the Crest Motel at Covington, Ga.

\* \* \* \* \*

Please, you fellows that move—send us your new address! Every month we "lose" members whose Irregulars are returned. Since the newsletter is mailed third class they are not forwarded. We also get lots of letters from fellows who haven't been receiving their Irregulars, and when we check it is usually because they've moved and forgotten to send us a notice.

\* \* \* \* \*

A new directory is under way and should be available before too long. We'll keep you posted on it. Also, don't give up, the book on "The Ragged Irregulars" is still progressing, though very slowly at the moment, and we'll have it done one of these days. Slow work on the pictures is the hang-up at the moment. And the fact that the editor's duties outside the Memorial Association have multiplied vastly since the undertaking began, leaving only rare odd moments to work on it.

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Not all of Basingbourn was a luxury establishment. Here some of the troops from "Consumption Junction," the folks back home. Unfortunately our files do not identify this crew.  
the Nissen hut annex, pose for Christmas greetings to

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## IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN!

February is the month 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association dues should be paid.

Send your \$3 (or more) to:

### Eastern Division

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Glenside, Pa. 19038

### Western Division

George W. Parks

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