



# The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 6 No. 3

April, 1973

## California Rally Round Attracts 120

It looked more like a national reunion than an area get-together February 17 when 120 91st-ers and guests met at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim for the California State Rally Round. It was another "best one yet" affair for the Western Division. Doug Gibson of Long Beach was flight leader.

Special guest of the group was exLuftwaffe fighter pilot Horst Petzschler, who found a most friendly reception and "had a really great time." Petzschler, who lives at Lakewood, Calif., and works for an aviation parts manufacturer, had a B-24, a B-17, and two Mustangs to his credit as a WWII pilot. He was awarded a B-17 tie tack as a memento of the visit.

The newest life member of the 91st was announced at the dinner as Sam Newton, ex-401st sqdn, pilot of "Time's A Wastin" and chief honcho of the 1968 Denver national reunion.

Mugs were awarded to life member David Bramble,

ex-323rd sqdn. pilot, for coming the greatest distance (from Maryland) to attend; to Raymond A. Slominski, ex-401st and POW, for travelling the greatest distance in the state to attend, and to Aubin Pene, ex-401st, for outstanding work managing the bar at the national reunion in July and at the current Rally Round.

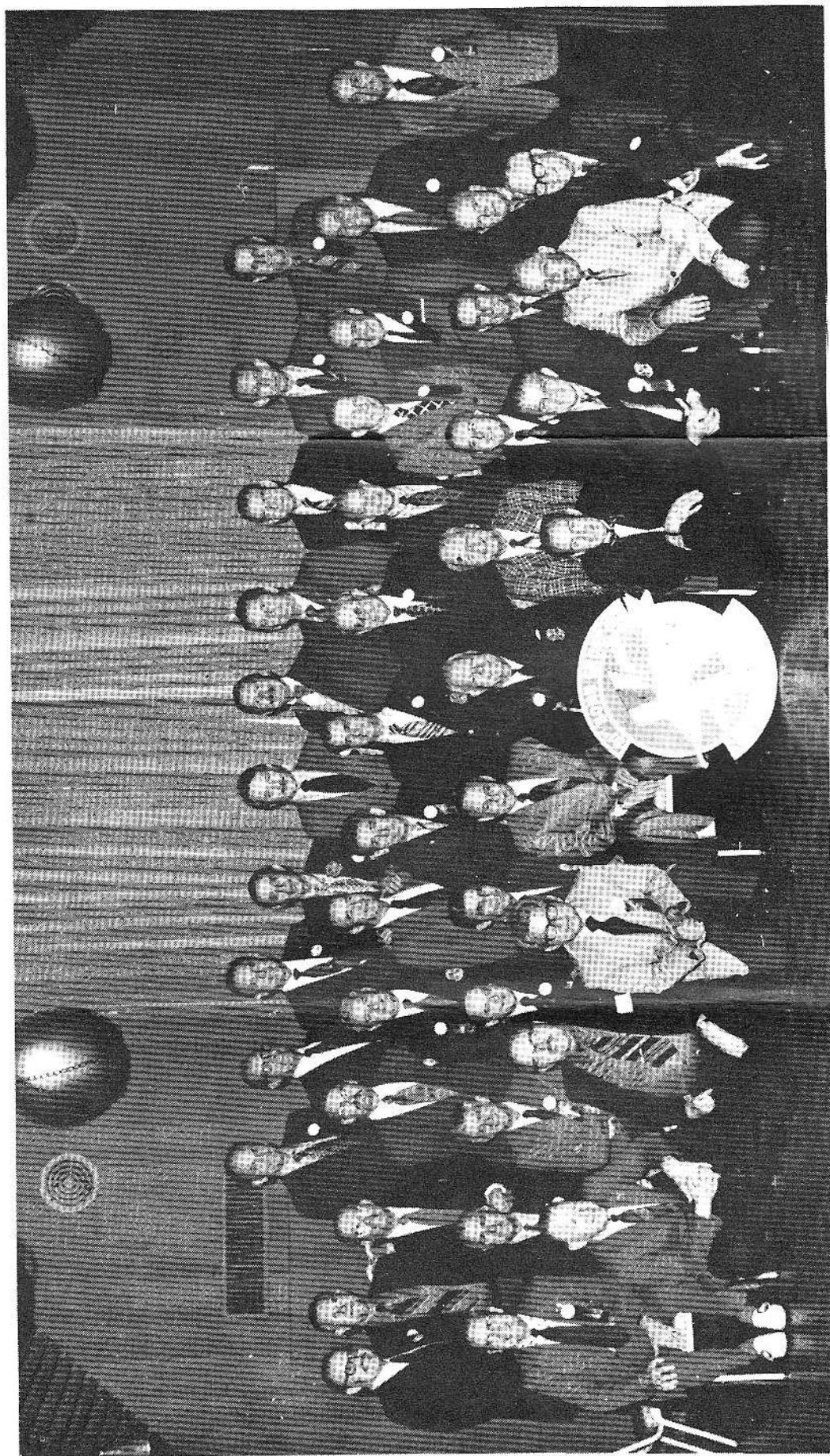
Tony Starcer, whose creations decorated the nose of many of the Group's aircraft, received a model of 401st-324th aircraft "Little Patches." The model was built by associate member S/Sgt. David J. Bokanski.

Five members attended their first 91st get-together. They were Bob Clapp, ex-322; Dave LaHood, ex-322; Ralph Tomek, ex-401; Ray Slominski, ex-401; and "Ace" Johnson, ex-324.

(continued on page 3)



Ex-Luftwaffe pilot Horst Petzschler, the "Red Baron," and Western Division Sec.-Treas. George "Snoopy" Parks sign a negotiated peace at Anaheim.



Former 91st-ers attending the Rally Round at Anaheim February 17 were: First row, kneeling, l to r, M/Sgt. (Ret.) Red Atterbury, Ralph J. Tomek, Ray A. Slominski, "Hap" Packard, M/Sgt. (Ret.) Gene J. Letalien, SMS (Ret.) Jack R. Paget, SMS (Ret.) Lou Holland.

Second row, seated: Virgil Mott, Ray W. Schroeder, Bob G. Elroy, Maj. (Ret.) Ted Winslow, Bill Thissell, Col. (Ret.) Paul L. Fishburne, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Stanley T. Wray, Judge Earl Riley, Doug Gibson, Phillip Lunt, William Clothier.

Third row, standing: Tony Starcer, M/Sgt. (Ret.) George Parks, Hugh Ham, Asay B. Johnson, Lt. Col. (Ret.) John R. McCombs, Joe Lyons, Aubin Pene, Bob Wright, Chris Christiansen, Bob Paulson, Ray C. Ridings, David Bramble, Jack Gaffney, Louis LaHood.

Fourth row standing (rear): Art E. Thomsen, Walter W. Juehl, Bill Guldner, Lt. (Ret.) Harry House, Frank Ivanovich, David H. Akey, Arvin O. Basnight, Bob Clapp, Aubrey Capps, Kermit M. Burman.

Attending were: M/Gen. Stanley T. Wray; Mr. and Mrs. David H. Akey, Mr. and Mrs. William D. Allen, M/Sgt. (Ret.) and Mrs. "Red" Atterbury, Mrs. Florence Bailee, Mr. and Mrs. Arvin O. Basnight, Mr. and Mrs. David Bramble, C. Carlton Brechler, Mr. and Mrs. Kermit M. Burman, Mrs. Otto W. Cahill, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey H. Capps.

Mr. and Mrs. Chris H. Christiansen, Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Clapp, Mrs. Sciacchio, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Clothier and daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Cochran, Sally Costa, Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Elroy, Col. Paul L. Fishburne (Ret.), Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gaffney, Mr. and Mrs. William E. Guldner, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Gowers.

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh C. Ham, SMS (Ret.) and Mrs. Louis R. Holland, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ivanovich, A. Winfield Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Kuehl, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Correll, Mrs. Ann Gaff, Harry Searer, Judge and Mrs. Earl F. Riley, Mr. and Mrs. Ray W. Schroeder, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Gibson, Louis LaHood, Dave Wolter, Lt. (Ret.) and Mrs. Harry S. House, Jr.

Frank G. Donofrio, Edward Mahoney, Mr. and Mrs. Asay B. Johnson and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Lyons, Col. Milton Frank (Ret.), Al LaChasse, M/Sgt. Eugene J. Letalien (Ret.), Mr. and Mrs. Philip F. Lunt, Lt. Col. John R. McCombs (Ret.), Col. John R. Mitchell (Ret.), Virgil Mott, Harold Packard, SMS (Ret.) and Mrs. John R. Paget, M/Sgt. (Ret.) and Mrs. George W. Parks.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Paulson, Mr. and Mrs. Aubin R. Pene, Mr. and Mrs. Horst D. Petzschler, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Crandell, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond C. Ridings, Mr. and Mrs. George Royse, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond A. Slominski.

Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Starcer, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur E. Thomsen, Roger Williamson, Maj. Edward P. Winslow (Ret.), Miss Meredythe L. Miller, CMS and Mrs. Charles W. Yaroshak, Mr. and Mrs. William Thissell, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph J. Tomek, Mrs. Rosie Ortega, Mr. and Mrs. Rocco J. Maiorca, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Standish, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley T. Wray, Jr., Mack K. Wray, Mrs. Clara Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wright.



Life member David Bramble, ex-323rd sqdn. pilot, gets the mug for coming the greatest distance to attend—all the way to Anaheim from Chestertown, Maryland.



Raymond A. Slominski, ex-401st sqdn., receives a mug for travelling the greatest distance in the state of California to attend. This was Ray's first Rally Round.



Aubin Pene, ex-401st sqdn., receives a mug for his outstanding work at the bar during the Group's 3rd national reunion in July and the February Rally Round.



Anthony "Tony" Starcer, who did the nose artwork on many of the Group's aircraft, receives a model of "Little Patches," an A/C of the 401st and 324th sqdns. The model was built by associate member S/Sgt. David J. Boksanski, of the U.S.A.F. recruiting team in Vallejo.

# Rescued By The French Underground

By E. R. Kelley

Editor's Note: Bob Kelley, of Project City, Calif., is one of our "newly found" members. He had the unique experience of being shot down by the Germans, hidden by the French underground, returned to American forces by AWOL GI's, and making it back to Basingbourn for the 200th mission party. Here is his story:

After training at Rapid City, S. D. in the spring and summer of 1944, along with 55 other crews, we picked up new B-17Gs at Kearney, Neb., and flew to Nutts Corner, Northern Ireland, via Gander Lake. At Nutts Corner the B-17s were taken away and we were sent by boat and rail to Watford, England, to ground school. While there, 6 of us first pilots asked the assignment sergeant to send us to the best bomb group in the ETO.

He told us that was the 91st, and he would put us on their replacement list, and we didn't think much about it until orders were cut a couple of days later and we were all 6 assigned to the 91st. After arriving at Basingbourn we still didn't know that this was the country club; we just assumed that all bases were like the 91st. The pilots were Ray Schroeder, Leroy

Hare, Charles Kirkham, Bill Laws, Hooper Maplesden and myself. The only one I knew after the war was Laws. He stayed in the Air Force and was killed later in a crash at Goose Bay, Lab.

After several flights in the area to learn the Darkie system, etc. (with Karl Thompson in the 322nd sqdn.) I was assigned to fly co-pilot with an experienced crew—their 15th mission, and on September 3 as co-pilot I went to Kiel on my first mission.

On September 5 my crew was set to fly tail-end charlie. It was the crew's first mission and my regular co-pilot was. stood down and Andy Anderson was assigned as co-pilot. I met him for the first time at briefing. After several delays because of doubtful weather and once due to a buzz bomb, the briefing ended and we were taken out to plane dispersal area where an unassigned 322nd B-17 called "My Baby" was waiting. The crew chief told me it was its 58th mission but that it was in mint condition. The only plane with more missions still flying he said was "Lassie Come Home," which was on its 70th or so mission. Also we were to be the incendiary plane, with 4400 pounds of stick incendiary bombs. Takeoff was uneventful even though on instruments into a lot of propwash. Assembly was at 8000 feet and I remember arriving just



Here is a nose shot of "My Baby," the plane Kelley was flying when his crew went down. The "doll" is one of Tony Starcer's well known paintings.

as the group moved out—the last plane off and the last to assemble.

All across the channel and into France the heavy layers of clouds kept thickening, and at the German border it was decided to climb higher and bomb Ludwigshafen (the I. G. Farben chemical plant) from a higher altitude than planned. It was at this point that my number 3 and 4 engines began to throw oil and lose power. Soon I was dropping behind and lower, and increased power only increased the smoking. I had to shut down No. 3 engine and then No. 4 due to low oil pressure. Capt. Tompson, the squadron commander, advised me to turn back and to get as far into France as possible and look for a hole to come down through and to crash land or bail out. He also called for fighter support.

However, as soon as we were out of sight of the formation at least 5 Me109s showed up and attacked the aircraft. On the second or third pass they killed the tail gunner and shot out most of my elevator control.

Finally, with only two engines going, the bombs still aboard, losing altitude and down to 8000 feet and a solid cloud cover, I gave the order to bail out and all eight remaining crew members bailed out. The gunners had no problems, but the bombardier hit hard and thought he'd broken his ankle, and the navigator hit on his head and was stunned for awhile.

I had a beautiful view of a Me109 right after my chute opened as it cut right across in front of me chasing the B-17 and firing. A second lined up and came at me firing just as I went into the cloud cover and then passed directly over my chute. I had seven holes in the chute as a result.

About 500 feet up I broke into the clear and the B-17 passed about a quarter mile away, going directly over a small village and crashing on a flat field, skidding across a creek and breaking up in a small woods. About that time I swung into a small woods, my chute hooking on an oak tree and swinging me gently into a hazelnut bush.

Because of the fight in the air we didn't really know if we were over France, Luxembourg, Belgium, or still in Germany. We had been told to try to find an elderly person or a child and see what language they spoke, the theory being that you could run from them if they spoke German. What really concerned me was a dog barking. I assumed that the Germans were out after us with dogs. As it turned out the bombardier was trying to run on a badly sprained ankle with a farm dog after him.

In order to throw the dog off I ran up a creek, getting my feet wet. Soon I heard someone talking in the woods below me and was overjoyed to hear an old couple and a boy say in French "I know I saw the chute come down in the woods." My mother was born in France and all my relatives have always spoken French and it is a second language to me. I rushed up to them and they told me that they had so far found two others, and the Germans had captured one. (It turned out to be the engineer who spent the next seven months in a stalag and was liberated by the Russians.) He came down in his chute right into the arms of some soldiers who were mining a bridge. He weighed only 108 pounds when released.

The French rushed me further back into the woods and into an underground storehouse that had been part of the Maginot line. In this underground hideout was my navigator, Alton Karoli, and the co-pilot, Andy Anderson. There were also two Russian soldiers who had escaped a year before and who the French had hidden for over 11 months in this underground hideout. They also explained that it was only 10 miles to Germany and the same distance to Luxembourg.

After an hour or so the chief of the local FFI came and asked me to go with him to where they had the bombardier on a stretcher to talk to him and to assure him that everything was all right, as the Germans were out in force looking for us and that they had to be quiet. I hated to leave the safety of the hideout but since I was the first pilot and could talk French I went to where they had the bombardier, George Lancaster, on a blanket between two poles and we brought him to the hideout.

By this time it was raining hard, and dark. To enter the hideout you pushed aside a bush, lifted a fake door covered with leaves, and went 20 feet straight down a narrow shaft lined with logs to a large underground room, which the Russians had lined in one corner for warmth. They showed us further back where there were uniforms and guns left by the French when they fled the Germans in 1939.

The next day the chief of the FFI brought us old clothes to dress in, baggy pants, a blue beret, and we took our uniforms and hid them. They also took me to the village near by that the plane had just missed and showed me the grave in the churchyard where they had buried the tailgunner, S/Sgt. Richard Doyle. They found his body in the wreckage. They also took me to the area where "My Baby" had finally stopped. Despite the rain the bombs had burned all night.

That night we all went to a small town nearby called Baslieux, and we ate with the family of the chief of the underground. He told us that the radio operator and the two waist gunners were safe with the underground in villages nearby. Also, they had planned to attack the small squad holding the engineer, Ira Krammes, but that they had already gone back to Germany, taking Krammes with them. The chief of the underground, Jacob Roland, told us that Gen. Patton was driving the German army through this area and that everything had broken down among the underground, and that it was best to just sit tight until they could move us south or the Americans arrived. So we stayed the 6-7-8-9 hidden in the woods.

Several times reports came of Americans nearby, but before we could go there the Germans would be back in the area. At night we could hear the guns firing not too far away. It turned out later to be at Metz, where the Germans held out for 58 days. Twice German tanks came into Baslieux; once when we were on our way out of town after a visit. Once shells fell near our hideout after German soldiers had been seen in the valley below.

Finally, three Americans in a jeep came into Baslieux and agreed to take us to the American lines. It was only after we had said our goodbyes to the brave

(continued on page 6)

French people and put on our uniforms and were down the road a mile or so that the GI's confessed that they were AWOL with a stolen jeep, and had gotten lost and had no idea where they were. They finally spotted some American trucks in a field and left us. Then we found that they were a graves and registration unit and the trucks and trailers held bodies from the Metz battle.

They did, however, take the four of us (along with a load of dead soldiers) to a staging area where a group of GI truck drivers fed us and gave us cognac to drink and new field jackets to wear.

They drove us to Verdun where we took the bombardier to a hospital to get his ankle x-rayed and taped. From there we hitch-hiked to Chazou-sur-Marne and finally caught a ride to Paris, where we turned ourselves in. Our radio operator, Grover Nordman, had gone through a couple of days earlier, as

had the gunners, Zalma Mitchell and Ed Duemmer.

We stayed in Paris a couple of days, and the killing and the blacked-out city with its German deserters, AWOL GI's, and German sympathizers was the most dangerous part of the whole two weeks.

Finally we were flown to London to headquarters (Wide Wing) for interrogation. We were allowed to return to Bassingbourn to reclaim our personal effects. We arrived just in time to take part in a party (about 20 or 22 Sept.) celebrating either 200 missions or two years in the ETO, I can't recall which. In any event it was a whale of a party. I recall Col. Terry had a pair of scissors and was cutting everyone's tie off just below the knot.

As evadees we were all taken off combat flying status, and on Sept. 27 ordered back to the U.S.A. I returned via Prestwick, the Azores, and New York City in a C-54.

## 441st Sub Depot Dope and Fabric Shop Crew



441st Sub Depot members from the Dope and Fabric shop are shown here. Bottom row, l to r, are Cpl. Charles F. Busa, Sgt. Sam Cuthbertson, and T/Sgt. Vernon W. Bryant, department head.

Standing are Sgt. Walter S. Clement, S/Sgt. Edward J. Kelley, Cpl. A. L. Starcer, S/Sgt. Ralph A. Cowles.

## Colorado State Rally Round Set For April 28 At Golden

A Colorado State Rally Round for Golden, Colo., has been set for Saturday, April 28, according to Glen Boyce, area flight leader.

The event will be held at the Holland House Motor Hotel, 1310 Washington Ave., Golden, Colo. 80401. (Phone 279-2536). Reservations should be made not later than April 21.

Cocktails and happy hour are scheduled from 6 to 7 p.m., and dinner at 7. Cost will be \$6 per person. Films of the Anaheim national reunion will be shown, along with other Air Force films.

91st-ers planning to attend should contact Glenn Boyce, 1874 S. Hoyt St., Lakewood, Colo. 80226.

## From The Editor's Desk... Paul C. Burnett Box 909, Auburn, Al. 36830

Plans for a Rally Round in the Washington, D.C. area are incomplete at press time, but the date is firm for Saturday, May 12, under the leadership of Lt. Col. Long John Parsons.

Notices will be mailed to all members within a radius of 300 miles of Washington. Reservations should be sent to: Lt. Col. John Parsons, 2709 Woodley Place, Washington, D.C. 20008.

Had an interesting note from LTC (Ret.) E. M. Gaston, 801 Dixie Drive, Enterprise, Ala. 36330. Lon, who now runs Gepetto's Workshop, had this to say: "Recently I was perusing a copy of The Ragged Irregular and noted with interest the article about John R. Simonson relating a little history about a 'chute story pertaining to his roommate Don Weiss. (Oct. '72) This article brought out a piece of nostalgia in reference to the flight itself. For as the other side of the story goes I was the co-pilot that ended up as the pilot by unfortunate circumstances.

"Most of the crew had bailed out because of our inability to extinguish a fire at the base of the upper ball turret. By sheer misfortune my 'chute hung up on some object in the passageway to the nose door from which I seemed unable to extricate myself. With no one left in the forward part of the ship and believing everyone in the rear had jumped there seemed little choice for me except to continue to pray that the fire would go out with the help of precious little fire extinguisher left. To my amazement and after what seemed an eternity, who should walk forward from the bomb bay but the greatest radio operator ever, Jim Bacon.

"Finally extinguishing the fire, Jim became my co-pilot and we returned to Bassingbourn. The real pitch in this story was that two K.P.'s had ridden along that day but hadn't jumped when the bell was rung. Jim had not jumped because he was unsure as to why the ship was holding course and altitude (good auto-pilot) and had decided to investigate."

J. N. "Norman" Mansfield, of 1018 Robin's Crest Drive, Chattanooga, Tenn. 37415, ex-322 and a member of the crew of "Lassie Come Home" from December, 1943 to June, 1944, has an interesting suggestion. Norman operates an amateur radio station, K4MLO, and feels that there may be a number of ex-91st-ers who are also ham operators. He would like to get their names and addresses with the possibility of getting together on one of the ham bands, or possibly to form a network to handle messages for other members.

Norman also recalls that there were three planes in the 322nd named "Lassie Come Home." Two were rendered unflyable after being hit by flak and fighters; the last flew 76 missions before going down.

Steve Resko, ex-401st, helps to clear up some details of our January story about Hell's Belle. We ran a picture of the plane with a crew in front, but we didn't know who the crew members were or whether they were aboard when the plane went down. According to Steve, the crew shown was the crew of the "Wramblin' Wreck" of which he was a member. He identifies them thus: Front row, kneeling, l to r, Bombardier (?); Lt. J. Peacock, navigator; Lt. Willard Jewett, pilot, Lt. Anderson, co-pilot.

Standing, Sgt. S. P. Resko, waist gunner; Sgt. E. Weaver, waist gunner; Sgt. W. King, radio operator; Sgt. Lemke, tail gunner; ball turret gunner (?); Sgt. Neal, top turret.

Steve also sent along some pictures which will be used in future issues of the R/I. His address is S. P. Resko, 2502 Pennsylvania Ave., West Mifflin, Pa. 15122.

A note from aviation historian Roger Freeman, author of "The Mighty Eighth," in regard to the story on Hell's Belle. Says Roger: "I have just read the interesting item on 'Hell's Belle' down in Germany. According to my records she was missing in action on a raid to Solingen on a December, 1943. Incidentally, the 323rd had a B-17F called 'Hell's Bells' which crash landed near Bassingbourn on 28 July, 1943. I have a photo of the machine lined up to run in a future book."

David C. Crow, Honorable Secretary of the East Anglian Aviation Society, sends the information that in July the Queen Mother will be visiting Bassingbourn for her first visit there since she and Princess Elizabeth accompanied the King when he reviewed the 91st. In June they will celebrate Army Open Day there. Any 91st-ers visiting England who would like to see some pageantry should try to visit Bassingbourn during these times.

Former Western Division chairman Maury Herman and Betty and their son Steve stopped by Auburn for a brief visit recently. Maury and family moved from California to Mississippi last spring to join Litton Industries ship building enterprises. His current address is: Maj. Maurice J. Herman (Ret), 104 White Ave., Ocean Springs, Miss. 39564.

## From The Editor's Desk...

Bob Abb, bombardier on Delta Rebel and a charter member of the 91st, has sent a letter and a snapshot to The R/I. Bob, who heads up Bob Abb Sales Company, 301 Arapaho East, Sherman, Texas 75090, attended the 3rd national reunion in Anaheim in July. He had also attended the Memphis and Denver reunions.

"The enclosed snapshot was taken by me at Christmas time, 1942. It was Neill Oakley posing in a comic get-up after a few drinks of "photographic elixir" up at the 91st BG Photo Labs where he worked and also lived. Very many of the pictures he took are in the books and histories of our group and the 8th AF. Neill was assigned to the 323rd Sqdn. but was a member of HQ as official 91st photographer-officer.

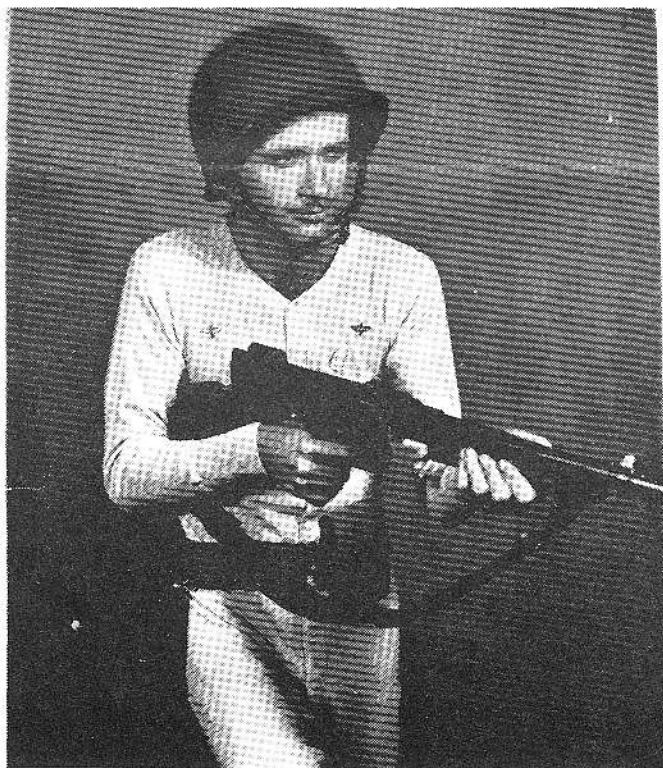
"In addition to his work in the photo lab where they processed bomb result pictures, etc., he also made several flights with the crews over enemy territory taking pictures of the targets and many aerial fights. During one of these unauthorized excursions, on Thursday, May 13, 1943 he was over Meaulte, France in Lt. Jack Evan's plane. They were hit over the target and went down. He was never heard of again.

"Many of us from the original group have extensive photo collections because of Neill and his work and his friendship. He was a 1st. Lt. at the time of his death. He was also one of my best friends."

Bob also sends two recent changes of address:

Col. George P. Birdson, Jr.  
501 Ocean Ave., Apt. #9  
Monterrey, Calif. 93940

Lt. Col. (Ret) Tom E. Ashinhurst  
5709 N.W. 36th St.  
Oklahoma City, Okla.



M/Sgt. (Ret.) Malcolm Coubrough has joined the host of other 91st-ers who have settled in Florida. Malcolm's new address is 4885 1st St., N.E., Apt. 310, St. Petersburg, Fla. 33703.

He also passes along the information that Lt. Col. William M. Cornell, who was the air inspector at Basingbourn, passed away in San Antonio last summer.

Lt. Col. John R. McCombs (Ret.), Western Division chairman, is heading up a Northern California Rally Round tentatively set for September. Date, time, location and program will be carried in the July issue.

One of our faithful members, William D. "Bill" Raatz, a sergeant with the 324th from March, 1942 until September, 1945, passed away December 13 from a sudden heart attack. Bill was the chief of police of Beardsley, Minn., for seven years, and a deputy sheriff of Big Stone county. His wife Lillian is continuing as an associate member of the 91st. Her address is Beardsley, Minn.

E. Lee Nichols, who was in the 324th engineering office from activation until deactivation of the group, sends along a copy of special orders No. 1 from MacDill Field, May 16, 1942. Lee is Director of Physical Plant and Housing at Panhandle State College, Goodwell, Okla. 73829. My wife and I and our son had lunch with Lee and his son at the Denver reunion in '68.

Eastern Division secretary Bob Gerstemeier passes along the information that one of the Eastern Division 91st-ers, Michael Swerko, died after a short illness at the New Britain, Conn. General Hospital early in January. Michael had retired in May, 1972, after 42 years employment with the Emhart Corp.

A unique organization for former B-17 combat crewmen is forging ahead in the California area. William D. (Bill) Allen heads up the group, which currently is engaged in two principal missions. 1. To get as many individual personal stories from combat crewmen as possible, with the expectation that a book relating the experiences be published. 2. To build a scaled-down, flying, two-place B-17. Northrup Institute of Aeronautical Engineering has agreed to do the complete plans, and ample support from businessmen and the experimental Aircraft Association has been assured.

There will be no costs or "requests for donations" from any person joining the group, Allen says. Interested 91st-ers should contact:

B-17 Combat Crewmen  
P. O. Box 482  
South Gate, Cal. 90280

### It's Dues Time Again!

1973 dues of \$5 should be sent to the treasurer.

Eastern Division:

Joe Giambrone 303 Brookdale Ave., Glenside, Pa. 19038

Western Division:

George Parks 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, Cal. 94590