



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

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Operation: One More Time – Simply Great!

"Operation : One More Time," the 91st overseas and Basingbourn reunion was truly an outstanding and memorable event, more than 70 members, wives, and families who participated agree.

"The East Anglian Aviation Society, Lt. Col. Christopher Piggins, commanding officer of Basingbourn, David Crow, Flt. Lt. E.M.C. Rowe and others did a terrific job of planning and hosting our English activities," Paul

Chryst, Eastern Division chairman, said. "A newly found member, LTC James D. Fletcher, still on active duty with the USAF 48th TFW at Lakenheath, did an outstanding job to help set up the schedule."

In Holland the entire village of Opijnen served as hosts to the group for a moving memorial to the eight former 91st-ers who are buried in the
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Gen. Wray at the control tower railing views a German ME-108 making a low level pass over scattered 91st-ers on

the ramp below. Visible behind Gen. Wray is Col. Frank Kamykowski, who headed the 441st Sub Depot.

village cemetery there.

Activities in England included a service at the American Cemetery at Madingley, a reception at the Royston Town Hall, and a tour of the air museum at Duxford, sponsored by The Imperial War Museum and The East Anglian Aviation Society.

The group then went to Bassingbourn for a crowded afternoon and evening of activities.

Maj. Gen. Wray and Paul Chryst flew from Duxford to Bassingbourn, making their first landing at the airfield since WW II.

The 91st were guests at a reception and luncheon at the base, followed by a tour of the Depot.

The control tower used to direct flight activities during WW II was dedicated as a permanent museum to the 91st.

Gen. Wray and the 91st members were specially honored by a Beating of Retreat by the Band and Drums of Junior Soldiers Company, Depot Queens Division.

In the evening more than 5000 British joined the 91st in Hangar 3 for a concert of Glen Miller music by Syd Johnson and Orchestra.



Gen. Wray presents a commemorative plaque and emblem to Mrs. P. A. Rule, Royston's Town Mayor, at a civic reception held for the Group.

Taking part in Operation: One More Time were: Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, Jarvis Allen, James, Betty, & Linda Bedwell, Harvey and Doris Bonnel, Goldie Cahill, Walter & Addine Carpenter, Paul & Nancy Chryst.

John & Gertrude Conway, George, Margaret, Carolyn & Judy Dowell, Frank Donofrio, Gerrold Ewing, Joseph & Alberta Franke, Dr. Elmer Friedberg, Gail, Clementine & Gaylord Garner.

Charles & Joan Gerstemeier, Robert & Trudie Gerstemeier, William Gerstemeier & Phyllis, Joseph & Mary Jane Giambrone, Theodore Green, Edward & Mary Ruth Haller, William Harris, Terry Hinds, Bernard & Esther Kajewski.

Frank & Anne Kamykowski, Harry & Mamie Knowles, Michael & Helen Kryjak, Robert, Lora, Ray & Jim Lackey, Walter & Irma Limberger, Arvid & Betty Lou Malvik, LTC John Parsons Jr., John Ventura, Col. H.S. & Doris Walker, Agnes Griffin, Sally Park.

Edward Winslow, Bernard & Evelyn Bellettiere, Joseph & Jenny Harlick, Michael & Edna Lalli, Robert P. Hare III, LTC James, Ruth & Patsy Fletcher, Harry & Nora Kline, Edward & Mrs. Edward E. Causey.



Eastern Division chairman Paul Chryst presents a medallion to David Crowe, secretary of the East Anglian Aviation Society.

91st Honors Dead At Opijnen, Holland

By Frank G. Donofrio

Our bus was winding its way on the top of the dykes on this Sunday, June 16, barely missing the oncoming traffic. Lucien, our driver, skillfully handled the vehicle as we sped toward our destination, OPLJNEN, a small farm village of 300 inhabitants, where the tragic event took place on July 30, 1943.

We arrived at the Town Hall one-half hour later than the other bus. We saw the other members of our group standing around just waiting. Because of the solemn occasion, there was not the usual bantering between the two groups that normally would take place. The Mayor was easily recognized by the necklace around his neck, which bore the emblem of his office, and he was sur-

rounded by the town councilmen. As our two groups assembled in a semicircle in front of the Hall, the Mayor began his welcoming speech in clear, concise English...

"As the Mayor of OPLJNEN, I wish to make you welcome to our village. We have always had a warm heart for the 91st Bomb Group. As you know, we have eight members of your group buried in our church cemetery. It was a tragic event that took place thirty-one years ago. We have here today Henrik deKoch, who, as a young boy, held in his arms the fallen pilot of the plane, just before he died. Many of our village witnessed the event, but were helpless to offer any assistance as the Germans were shooting at anyone who went near



Eastern Division Secretary Bob Gerstemeier, whose right leg was lost on a combat mission, places the Memorial Wreath at Opijnen, in honor of all 91st-

ers who did not return from their missions. Joe Giambrone, crew chief of the "Memphis Belle," assists.

the fallen airmen. We had much sadness in our hearts, but we could do nothing at that time. Later we gathered these airmen and eventually buried them near our church where they now rest in peace.

"Much time has passed, and with time we do not think of the war as we did. We must all work to keep the peace. It was your great country, the United States, who helped the world towards peace, and we must continue to work towards a lasting peace. Again, we wish to thank all of you who made this journey to our village. Those of you who came late may pass through our Town Hall to see the shrine we have erected and also there are photographs of the plane after it crashed. Mr. deKoch will be inside to answer any questions you may have. Afterwards we will go to the cemetery for the services and then to our restaurant for some refreshments. Thank you and may God grant you all a safe return to the United States."

We were awed. A respectable applause

followed the Mayor's speech, but it was like trying to applaud in church after a good sermon.

Upon the completion of the Mayor's welcoming speech, the committee members of the 91st, Paul Chryst, Joe Giambrone, and Bob Gerstemeier, made their presentations. A plaque, suitably inscribed, was presented to Hendrick deKoch in appreciation for his effort in aiding the pilot of the fallen B-17 and for the caring for the eight airmen buried in the church cemetery.

DeKoch could not speak English, but said his thanks in Dutch, which the Mayor translated. The Mayor was presented an enlarged photo print of the 91st Bomb Group squadron insignias, to be hung in the Town Hall. I later gave the Mayor a packet of postal cards with these insignias for him to pass out to the town council and other members of the village.

With these ceremonies completed, we entered the Town Hall. The main room was not large, approximately 12x18 feet,



Services concluded, 91st-ers, led by Walt Carpenter and Howell Loper, file

past the gravesite in solemn tribute.

with the walls painted gray with white trim and a fireplace in one corner. Over the fireplace was a three-part scroll. The center had angels floating on clouds, with an inscription written on a banner below. On the left side was inscribed the rank and name of the 8 fallen airmen. On the right side was written "In honor of these brave men of the 91st Bomb Group."

Slowly, we walked around the room, looking at the photos of the fallen aircraft which was lying on the table. Hendrick deKoch explained in Dutch and the Mayor translated all the events that took place on July 30, 1943. We spent twenty or thirty minutes looking and talking in the Town Hall, but since it was getting late, we were asked to assemble outside for the walk to the Church and cemetery grounds.

We left the building and walked down the steps. There the Mayor, deKoch and all of the town council were in a line, greeting the members of our group. The gravesite was approximately three or four blocks away, and we all walked there.

As we approached the entrance of the cemetery I saw Henrich deKoch coming out of the small church, and immediately afterward the Church bells began to ring. We gathered around, facing the 8 graves, each with its white marble headstone which had engraved the man's name, rank, hometown, date of birth, date of final mission, and the decorations each one had received. The finishing touch to this heart rending scene was the polished pole atop which gently waved the American flag. In the front center of the area was a low wrought-iron pedestal where the three committee members then placed a floral wreath. We all stood solemnly with bowed heads as Paul Chryst gave an extemporaneous prayer for thanksgiving for all of us.

The entire occasion was performed in a manner of the highest tradition, and each of us felt a sense of sadness, but also a sense of pride for being Americans, here in this small village of OPIJNEN, Holland, paying tribute to eight fallen comrades who had paid the fullest price a man can pay for his country.

The church bells were ringing throughout the ceremony. Many of the villagers

stood in the background in silence watching the proceedings. Each of us had his own thoughts as we slowly walked past the well-kept gravesites, surrounded by the neatly trimmed dark green hedge, accented with small pink rosebushes at the foot of each grave. It was something we would never forget.

The ceremonies were completed at the graveyard next to the little church in Opijnen, Holland. We had come these thousands of miles, from all over the United States, to pay our respects to the eight buried airmen of the 323rd squadron, 91st Bomb Group, and to extend our thanks and appreciation to the people of this small Dutch village. Looking back, it was the highlight of our trip.

The sincerity of these people could not be disguised in any manner. Their hospitality was wonderful; it reminded me of the old south, when people did things for people, from out of their hearts. The care of the graves was outstanding; after all, they did not have to do it. Like many others, they could have requested the removal of the bodies and had them interred in an American Military Cemetery.

But because of the circumstances, they asked that the eight fallen airmen, who were so brutally murdered as they parachuted from their plane, remain close to their bosom in order that they never forget the fearful event that took place in their village over thirty years ago.

(Editor's Note: The eight 91st-ers buried at Opijnen are 1st Lt. Robert U. Duggan, 2nd Lt. Daniel V. Ohman, T/Sgt. Douglas V. Blackwood, T/Sgt. Americo Cianfichi, S/Sgt. George R. Krueger, S/Sgt. Mike A. Perrotta, S/Sgt. Herman D. Poling, and S/Sgt. H. Royce Sparks.

**The 1974 National Reunion will be covered
in the October Ragged Irregular.**

**Operation: One More Time and the Reunion
was too big for one issue.**

Colorado Rally Round Another Success

A second successful Colorado Rally Round was held at the Holland House in Golden April 27.

The Holland House get-together was directed by Flight Leader Glenn Boyce.

The coveted engraved mug awarded to the member attending from the greatest distance went to Aubin Pene, of Brea, California. The trophy was awarded by LTC (Ret.) Charles H. Silvernail.

Western Division Secretary-Treasurer George Parks and Long Beach Area Flight Leader Doug Gibson called by long distance phone to talk to members attending.

After dinner the members and guests enjoyed viewing the new "Memphis Belle" and "Shoo Shoo Baby" films.

Colorado members attending were: LTC (Ret.) and Mrs. Charles H. Silvernail, LTC and Mrs. Garland H. Spicer, Mr. and Mrs.

Lewis Simpson, Mr. Charles H. Bonner, and Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Boyce and guest Donald Derovitsch.

Wyoming members attending were Mr. and Mrs. Aulden N. Dunn.

California members attending were Mr. and Mrs. Aubin Pene.



91st wives attending were: Mrs. Glenn Boyce, Mrs. Aulden Dunn, Mrs. Aubin Pene, Mrs. Charles Silvernail, Mrs. Lewis Simpson, and Mrs. Garland Spicer.



91st-ers attending the Colorado Rally Round were: First row, (seated, 1 to r) Aulden N. Dunn, Glenn Boyce, Aubin Pene.

Second row: LTC (Ret.) Charles H. Silvernail, Lewis Simpson, LTC Garland H. Spicer, and Charles H. Bonner.



CLARENCE HOUSE
S.W.1

I remember so well The King and I visiting Bassingbourn in 1943, and how proud we were to meet those members of the United States Air Force who flew with the famous 91st Bombardment Group on many gallant wartime missions.

I send to you all gathered together at Bassingbourn my warmest good wishes for a very happy and successful reunion.

ELIZABETH R
Queen Mother

20th June, 1974

Western Area Rally Round At Fresno

A Western Division Rally Round, especially planned to give those unable to make the national reunion a chance to meet old buddies, is set for Fresno, Cal., September 6,7,8. Group Headquarters will be the Tradewinds Motor Hotel, 2141 North Parkway Drive, Fresno.

Life Member Clive M. "Woody" Woodbury is heading up the event, assisted by 91st-ers Bruce D. Moore, Leland E. Forsblad, and associate members Chris "Ace" DeGuitaut, Fred Mazzie, Henry J. McFadden and Bill Parks.

The Rally Round coincides with the third annual "Gathering of War Birds," with dozens of WW II aircraft on display. The 91st film "Memphis Belle" will be shown to audiences attending the Gathering of War Birds.

The Hospitality and Briefing Room will open Friday afternoon, Sept. 6. The pilots and crews of the Warbirds will be arriving on this date and they will be shown "The Memphis Belle" in the hospitality room that night.

On Saturday and Sunday 91st-ers will attend the Gathering of War Birds Air Show at Chandler Field. Transportation to the field will be provided by the "Roaring 20's Automobile Club of Fresno, an outstanding antique automobile club.

91st President Maj. Gen. and Mrs. Stanley T. Wray will attend.

Well-known movie star Ben Lyon, who flew several missions with the 91st while an 8th AF public relations officer, and Mrs. Lyon are also scheduled to attend.

Saturday night dinner will be a chuckwagon buffet at poolside.

The \$9.50 per person registration fee includes the dinner and entry fee to the two-day Warbirds Air Show.

Rooms should be reserved directly from the Tradewinds Motor Hotel, 2141 North Parkway Drive, Fresno, Calif. 93728. Be sure to let the motel know you are a 91st-er when reservations are made. Rates are \$15 for rooms with singlebeds; \$18 for rooms with two beds.

Flt. Lt. E.M.C. Rowe, who is writing a comprehensive history of the 91st, has changed stations recently. He asks that all 91st-ers who might help with information contact him at his new address: 31 The Coppice

Gaterby
Northallerton
N. Yorkshire
DL7 9PF
England

Lt. Rowe joined the group for its reunion at Bassingbourn, and was most active in helping to plan and coordinate the events.

If you've been puzzled by recent irregularity in publication dates of The Ragged Irregular here's the poop. Several factors occurring almost simultaneously have upset the schedule. First and foremost, the editor has been overwhelmed with his other duties (the kind that bring in the paycheck) and

has been forced to play catch-as-catch-can at putting together the R/I. Hopefully this will lighten in a few more months.

The very severe paper shortage upset plans for some weeks, and a new mailing system added to delays. We're trying hard to get everything back in first class order as soon as possible, but as we explained at our first reunion in Memphis--"It'll be ragged, I know, and very often irregular!"

Just at press time we learned that our Association President, Gen. Wray, has suffered a very slight stroke recently. Mrs. Wray and the doctors are pleased with the General's steady progress, and every 91st-er sends his most sincere wish for a speedy and complete return to good health.

The Story From British Newspapers

(This account of the ceremonies at Bassingbourn was carried in the Cambridge Evening News)

The 91st Bombardment Group of the United States Air Force hit Bassingbourn yesterday. In brilliant sunshine about 70 men from the 91st, their wives and families, took part in a historic reunion.

Headed by a former commander, Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, the group -- one of the most outstanding bomber units during the Second World War -- revisited Bassingbourn barracks, their former base, for a nostalgic day of remembrance.

On arrival they were welcomed by the commanding officer at Bassingbourn, Lieut. Col. Christopher Piggins, who presented Maj. Gen. Wray with a framed message of welcome from Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who visited the 91st at Bassingbourn in 1943.

Later Maj. Gen. Wray unveiled a plaque on a converted control tower, which has been turned into a museum of the 91st group by the Imperial War Museum and the East Anglian Aviation Society.

Seconds after Maj. Gen. Wray officially unlocked the door to the museum, two Phantom bombers from USAF 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, Lakenheath, which had been diverted from a NATO military exercise to pay tribute to the 91st veterans, flew past with a deafening roar.

Single-engine fighter planes used during the Second World War gave an impressive display before the 91sters were taken on tours round the depot. Later the band and drums of the Junior Soldiers Company, Queen's division, beat the retreat.

In the evening, about 5,000 people packed into one of the aircraft hangers to hear Syd Lawrence play Glen Miller-style music -- in the same hangar where Glen Miller played himself during the war.

Maj. Gen. Wray, who has returned to Bassingbourn many times since the end of the war, said he was flying home to Florida today.

"I shall be sorry to go. I wanted a lot more time here," he said. "This museum is a wonderful and lasting memory to the 91st group. We have a lot more photographs and information back home that we shall have copied and sent out to the museum."

The 91sters earlier attended a civic reception in Royston, when Maj. Gen. Wray presented a commemorative plaque to Royston Town Mayor, Mrs. Pat Rule. They also attended a memorial service at the American cemetery at Madingley.



Press stand at Control Tower dedication. Shown at rail are Gen. Wray, Lt. Col. Christopher Piggins, R. C. Freeman, Dr. Rhoads, Flt. Lt. E.M. Rowe.



Gen. Wray and Lt. Col. Piggins are presented with the Reunion Concert Program. In the background are: 1st row, Ventura, Garner, Conway, Knowles. 2nd row, Klein, Dowell, Causey (dark glasses), Limberger, Bedwell, Kryjak.