



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 8 No. 2

May, 1975

California Rally Round Super Success

It was another super turnout for the California State Rally Round in Anaheim February 8, with 154 present for dinner at the Jolly Roger Inn. The 91st was joined by guests from the Long Beach chapter of the Air Force Association. Doug Gibson, who honchoed the Rally Round, is president of the Long Beach Air Force Association.

Guest speaker for the affair was Hans J. Langer, German Me-262 pilot, who showed his own gun camera films of fighter attacks on Allied aircraft on the Eastern and Western fronts.

Two division members were presented the Life Membership "Finger" for their donations of \$100 to the Memorial Association. They were Bruce D. Moore of Fresno and Harry S. House of Redondo.

Receiving the mug for having travelled the greatest distance to attend was Anthony A. Russo, ex-322nd sqdn., of Virginia, Minn. This was Russo's first get-together with former group members.

Mrs. Goldie Cahill was awarded a plaque for having travelled the greatest distance to attend the National Reunion in Valley Forge last summer.



Members and associate members attending the California State Rally Round at Anaheim are shown here. They are: front row, 1 to r, William D. Allen, Ralph Tomek, George Vender, Del Kaech, Ray Slominski, Harry House, M/Gen. Stanley T. Wray, Hans J. Langer, Doug Gibson, Tony Starcer, John Paget, Jack Gaffney.

Second row; George W. Parks, Bob Standish, Louis D. Sharkady, Virgil Mott, Rocco Maiorca, Robert H. Clapp, Ammon Powell, Aubun Pene, James Robertson, William Guldner, Robert E. O'Bannon, Arthur Thomsen,

Bruce D. Moore, Paul L. Fishburne, Robert "Bob" Stevens, Charles Hudson, Robert Puls, Charles Newlin, Clive Woodbury, Fred M. Glenn, Ray Ridings, Phil Taylor, William Clothier.

Back row; Robert Elroy, Edward Maloney, William Thissell, H.S. "Ray" Walker, Dick Carboneau, Anthony Russo, Robert Wright, Chris Christensen, Henry McFadden, Frank Keneley, Eugene J. Letalien, John R. McCombs.

Attending but not shown were Ben Lyon and Ray Blauch.



Wives attending the California State Rally Round were: Front row: Mrs. William Clothier, Mrs. Tony Starcer, Mrs. Robert O'Bannon, Mrs. Rocco Maiorca, Mrs. Otto Cahill, Mrs. Harry House, Mrs. Stanley T. Wray, Mrs. Robert Ortego, Mrs. Robert Clapp, Mrs. Robert Puls and Mrs. Doug Gibson.

Second row: Mrs. Bruce Moore, Mrs. John Paget, Mrs. Phillip Taylor, Mrs. Del Kaech, Mrs. Frederick Glenn, Mrs. Robert Elroy, Mrs. Clive Woodbury, Mrs. Robert Wright,

Mrs. Raymond Ridings., Mrs. Chris Christiansen, Mrs. Ammon Powell, Mrs. William Thissell, Mrs. William Allen, Mrs. Raymond Slominski, Mrs. Ralph Tomek, Mrs. James Robertson.

Third row: Mrs. Aubin Pene, Mrs. William Guldner, Mrs. John McCombs, and Mrs. Jack Gaffney.

Attending but not in photo were Mrs. Ben Lyon and Mrs. Ray Balich.



Former German fighter pilot Hans J. Langner, who flew Me-262s, was guest speaker for the event.

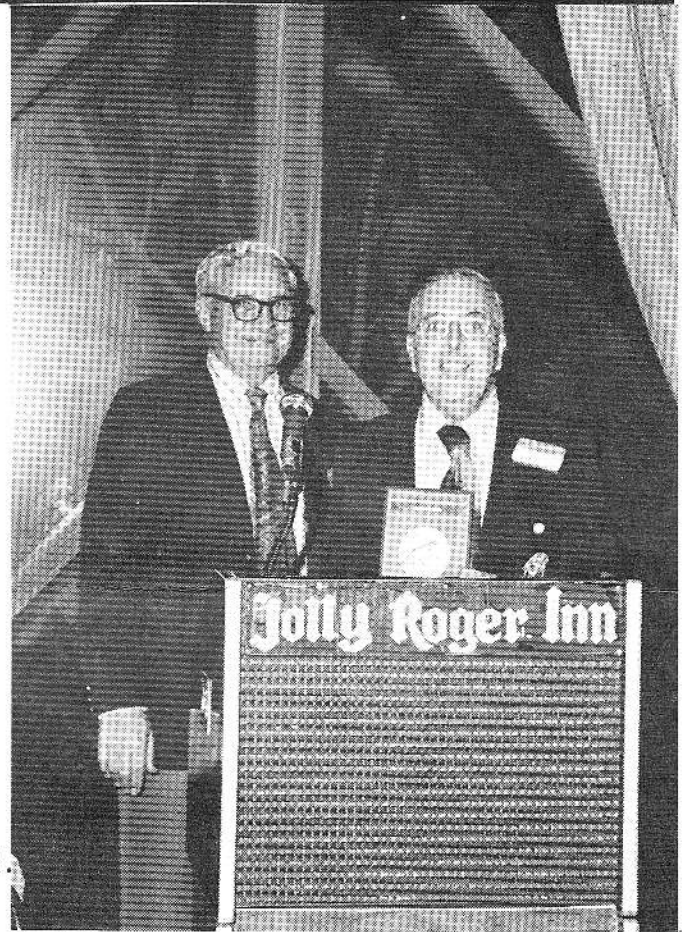


Harry S. House and Bruce D. Moore are presented "Life Membership" trophies by Chairman John McCombs. The Rigid Digit recognizes their \$100 contributions.



Anthony Russo (right) receives the mug from McCombs for having travelled the greatest distance to attend the Rally Round.

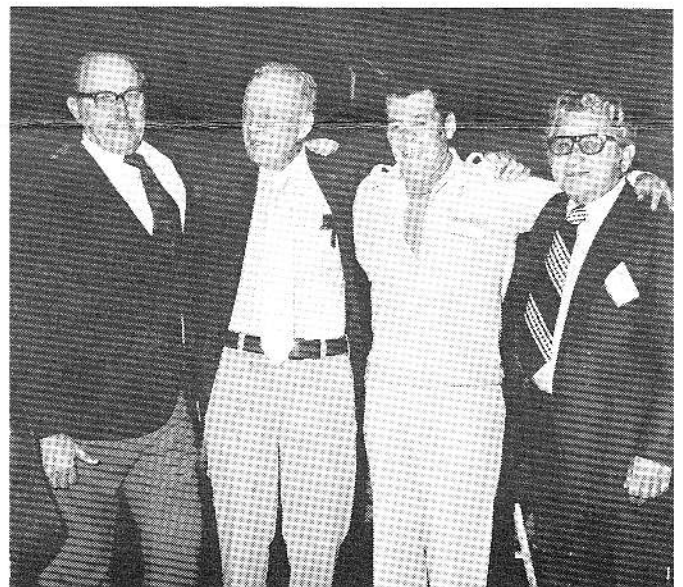
Russo, from Virginia, Minn., was attending his first Rally Round or reunion.



Former Flight-Leader Doug Gibson of the Long Beach-Los Angeles area is presented a plaque by Western Division Chairman John McCombs for his fine work for the Group from April, 1966 to February, 1975. Doug now heads up the Long Beach chapter of the Air Force Association.



Mrs. Goldie Cahill is presented a plaque from the Eastern Division for having travelled the greatest distance to attend the 1974 National Reunion. Western Division secretary-treasurer George Parks makes the award.



Four ex-POW meet after a long time: Ralph Tomek, Del Kaech, George Vender, and Ray Slominski.

Birdsong Saga-B-17 To Managing Hotels

Col. George Birdsong, who was one of the original 91st-ers and the pilot of Delta Rebel II, recently spoke at a Rotary Club meeting at his old home town of Clarksdale, Miss. So far as our records go, George is the only 91st-er to fly combat missions in three wars -- WWII, Korea, and Vietnam.

Here is a write-up following his speech that many old 91st-ers will find interesting:

After 27 years of record-breaking flying in Air Force bombers, a career in hotel, restaurant, and institutional management may seem tame, but Col. George Birdsong believes differently.

"This offers interesting opportunities to a pilot. He not only can manage a resort area but fly groups to it," he said during a visit last week with family and friends here and at his hometown, Clarksdale, Miss.

He is working on his master's degree in hotel-restaurant-institutional management at Michigan State University, which he entered last year after receiving a bachelor's degree at the University of Nebraska.

His college education was interrupted in April, 1942, when he left Southwest Junior College at Summit, Miss., to join the Air

Force.

He was pilot of the Delta Rebel, the first B17 in Europe to finish 25 missions, during which it downed 14 German fighters.

After serving as operations officer of an air photo unit at Operations Crossroads, the Bikini atomic bomb test in 1946, he flew B29's in an atomic bomb group, the 509th, of Strategic Air Command.

In 1953, he set the B47 trans-Atlantic record in a flight of less than five hours from Maine to England.

The first SAC pilot to check out in B52's, he flew the jet bomber in operational suitability tests in 1954, then served three years as chief of tactics at SAC headquarters at Omaha, Neb., where he helped develop techniques of toss bombing and air refueling.

In 1968-69, he was commander of the 633rd Special Operations Wing at Pleiku Air Base in South Vietnam, and flew 189 missions, including 104 in the A1 attack fighter-bomber.

After retiring from the Air Force in 1970, he received his airline transport pilot rating and flew for two years as a charter pilot at Monterrey Peninsula Airport, but felt the work lacked challenge.



Standing before Delta Rebel II is George Birdsong. From l to r are Lt. Bob Abb, Lt. Ernest Birdsong (right) with others of the crew. Miller, Lt. Leders and Lt. Birdsong.



Shown immediately after the first Hamm raid are Birdsong and Miller. Bob Abb's flight log describes their flight this way:

"Birdsong crash landed with 'Pappy' Rand's plane 'Stormy Weather.' The hydraulics were out and the plane was on fire. Radio man shot in leg, co-pilot (95th man) had right side of face shot off, Birdsong hit in eye. Ernie Miller hit in back of head."

Combat Crewmen Seek Memorial Help

Ralph J. Tomek, ex-91st-er and a squadron C.O. of the B-17 Combat Crewmen and Wingmen, passes along a request for help from members of the Memorial Association.

The B-17 Combat Crewmen are working to preserve as a war memorial a B-17 mural painted during W.W.II by S/Sgt. George C. Waldschmidt, 92nd Bomb Group.

A news release from the 6950th Security Group, RAF Chicksands, England relates the story:

...The old airfield is not far from Chicksands and was once the home base for numerous Flying Fortresses of the 92nd Bomb Group. Now it is part of a large private farm. The building, once a sergeants mess, now serves as a storage shed for crops.

It all started when Mr. Kenneth Cothliff, an Englishman from Burscough, Lancashire, heard about the mural while pursuing his interesting hobby of WW II air war memorabilia. Seeing that the mural was still in excellent shape, he immediately contacted the air attache's office at the American Embassy, London, who through Third Air Force, asked the Chicksands Information



This Queen's Division Plaque was presented to the Group during Operation: One More Time. Custody of the plaque will float between the Eastern and Western Divisions of the Group so members may see it at future Rally Rounds.

Office to photograph the mural for posterity.

It's beautiful! Flying through a yellow-orange sky, the old Flying Fortress looks resplendent with its bombs dropping and guns a-blazing at it dodges heavy flak. In the bottom right hand corner of the mural, which covers the whole brick wall, is the artist's inscription, "The Big Picture by S/Sgt. Waldschmidt."

Armed with the serial number clearly visible on the tail and the help of Mr. Cothliff and Roger Freeman's book "The Mighty Eighth," we learned that this grand old lady, serial no. 338877, was indeed assigned to the 92nd Bomb Group, manufactured by Boeing, and delivered to the Army Air Corps during fiscal year 1943.

S/Sgt. Waldschmidt was shot down on a mission over Europe.

The Imperial War Museum has offered to remove intact the entire wall and mural to a museum at a cost of 3,000 pounds.

The B-17 Crewmen & Wingmen are attempting to raise the funds needed to save this memento of WW II. Donations should be made to: B-17 Combat Crewmen & Wingmen P.O. Box 482 South Gate, Calif. 90280

All of the Flying Wasn't in Planes

Not all the "flying" done by the 91st was aboard B17s, as many of you can testify. But one of the really unique jobs was turned in by Lt. Paul R. McDowell—who usually piloted the well-known "Little Miss Mischief," the half-silver, half-olive drab composite plane so often pictured-- on the cover of Steve Birdsall's "B-17s in Action" and in Roger Freeman's "The Mighty Eighth" and Stephen W. Sears' "Air War Against Hitler's Germany."

"Little Miss Mischief" was nearly blown in two at the ball turret section on a mission Oct. 15, 1944 to Cologne, Germany. When she returned to Bassingbourn Col. Frank Kamykowski and the 441st sub-depot crew grafted the rear section of another damaged plane to the front half of Little Miss Mischief and the plane lived to fly more missions.

McDowell (now Lt. Col. P.R. McDowell (ret.), 910 Edgemoor Road, Cherry Hill, N.J. 08034) tells of another exciting mission this way:

I may be the only former B17 pilot to have piloted a steam locomotive train from Royston into the outskirts of London.

In the autumn of 1944, in the middle of my tour at Bassingbourn, three of my friends and I were headed for leave in London. They were Lt. Herman Balaban, Lt. William Royal, and Lt. Ralph Barrett.

We had not yet boarded the train in Royston when one of the train crewmen on the engine invited me to ride up front with them on the engine. I accepted gratefully, although I was somewhat surprised, and found myself in the cab of the engine of the passenger train heading for London.

It was reasonably cold, and as I recall the cab had curtains or light doors so that it was not readily obvious that an American airman was aboard. The crew, engineer and fireman, seemed eager to talk about the war and flying, and pointed out a couple of places along the way where bombers, presumably American, had crashed within sight of the railroad right-of-way.

It was apparent that these Englishmen appreciated the American presence in England. At one of the first stops the engineer invited me to operate the starting lever, which was a big device resembling the American "Johnson Bar." I was not al-

(continued on page 7)



Here is the crew of Little Miss Mischief. Kneeling, l to r: Lt. Herm Balaban, co-pilot; Lt. Ralph Barret, bombardier; Lt. Paul McDowell, pilot; Lt. William Royle, navigator.

Standing: Sgt. Ed Abdo, ball turret; Sgt. Ken Bush, radio operator; Sgt. Glenn Slaughter, waist gunner; Sgt. Jim Hobbs, flight engineer; Sgt. Howell Thomas, tail gunner.

lowed to brake the train, which was probably just as well.

One of the crew members, the engineer, I believe, would take a big swig of white looking water every few miles. I rather thought it was for stomach trouble and not snake bite, and he didn't offer me any. Otherwise the trip seemed very routine, neither train crew or passenger reacting out of the ordinary.

Toward the end of the trip I attempted to obtain the crew's permission to exchange my position in the engine with some of the others in our party, but probably due to the nearness to London and that this was "a bit of the unusual" the crew declined.

This was not my first locomotive ride, as I spent a week as a college student in 1941 learning to become a brakeman on the Rock Island Railroad in Nebraska and Kansas. The American locomotives were more massive and harder riding, and I was never offered a chance to take the controls.

At any rate, it was a real change from riding the left hand seat in "Little Miss Mischief."



Pilot Paul McDowell (front) and flight engineer Jim Hobbs examine the damage that caused "Little Miss Mischief" to become a hybrid silver and olive drab plane--two different planes contributing halves so the ship could fly again.

1975 Directory Being Mailed

Distribution of the 1975 Membership Directory of the Memorial Association is underway, and all dues-paying members will be receiving a copy.

The book was compiled and printed by the Western Division this year. The membership rolls were computer set by Bob DeGeorge.

The directory sports a unique cartoon cover by associate member Bob Stevens, whose "There I Was..." cartoons are internationally known. The format is more compact and handier to mail than earlier editions.

If you haven't sent in your dues yet, the directory alone is worth the price.

Col. Fletcher Seeking Info

Lt. Col. Jim Fletcher, currently Chief of the Intelligence Division with the 48 Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath, was one of those who did such a terrific job of making Operation: One More Time such a great success. Now Col. Fletcher is looking for a little help from other members of the 91st.

He writes: "Chris Piggins (C.O. at Bassingbourn now) has been attempting to verify a statement General Milton made during his visit to Bassingbourn last summer. He hasn't had any luck to date through his channels; so thought we might check ours.

"The General told us that he had served as project officer for a special visit by General Eisenhower to Bassingbourn--just prior to the invasion. He indicated that Ike had presented a briefing on the forthcoming invasion to staff personnel in the lounge-reading room at the club. It was during my tour, but I can't recall the occasion (however, as a peon, I wouldn't have.)

Chris is interested from a historical point of view. If such an event did, in fact, take place, he would like to have some of the background and, perhaps, install a plaque near the fireplace in that room. I trust that this was not connected in any way with Ike's visit to christen "General Ike," which took place in April 1944. Certainly he would not have discussed the pending invasion plans that early."

If any of you recall the incident please drop a note to:

LTC James D. Fletcher
Box 913 48th TFW
APO New York 09179

From the Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett
Box 909 Auburn, Al. 36830

Former members of the 324th sqdn. Lee L. Clem, Leedey, Okla., and Gunder V. Berg, Valley City North Dakota, staged a mini "rally round" when The Lee L. Clem No. 1, a 12,500 foot deep oil well, was spudded in at the Clem Ranch March 28. Clem is married to the former Betty Mae Shurey of Royston, England.

For those of you who have been interested in getting one of those beautiful sterling Eighth Air Force beakers, we learn that the time is now or never! Beaker no.1 was presented to Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, and Western Division Secretary-treasurer George Parks has beaker no. 2. Only a few are still available, and no more will be made. Contact Historial Heirlooms, 2 Deansgate, Bolton BL1 1BT England.

Many of the original 91st-ers will be interested to know that Joe Yuravich, who was critically injured early in 1943 on a mission and never returned to the group, is a member of the Association and living in Houston, Texas. Joe was very badly injured when a 20 mm cannon shell exploded in the cockpit just beside his head. His co-pilot, Bob Shaw, was injured but managed to bring the plane home. Joe has changed his name to Yurri, and his address is: Joseph A. Yurri, 1807½ S. Shephard, Houston, Texas 77019.

Col. Frank N. Halm (Ret.), 433 N.W. 33rd St., Corvallis, Oregon 97330, who was with the 94th Bomb Group, has presented the 91st with a 16mm. combat film taken by a 91st gunner. It was shown at the February 8 Western Division Rally Round.

The film was made 2 November '44 on a raid against the oil refineries at Merseberg, Germany, by S/Sgt. R. Filipovsky, a ball turret gunner with the 91st, with a N-I G.S.A.P. camera harmonized with gunners sight. Col. Halm found the film in a desk drawer in his office when he was asst. operations officer for the 94th Bomb Group when the war ended in Europe.

Col. Halm is attempting to get former members of that group together in a memorial association. If any of you know former members of that group please pass that information along to him.

He is also much interested in details of an accident involving a 91st plane. On 1

or 2 January, 1945, a B17 from Bassingbourn crashed just after take-off onto the 355th Fighter Group base at Steeple Morden. The crew was killed and the B17 hit a parked P51 that was being run-up by S/Sgt. Robert L. Marzo.

Sgt. Marzo leaped from the P51 and ran, but the explosion knocked him down. The secondary explosion of bombs went off just as he got up to run again. He suffered about 150 shrapnel wounds and nearly lost a leg. Any information about the B17 and crew would be much appreciated by Robert L. Marzo, 310 W. Broadway, Long Beach, Ca. 90802. His phone number is (213) 436-6045.

Bob Abb, who was bombardier on George Birdsong's crew of Delta Rebel II, has been ill for over a year. He underwent back surgery in December, 1973, and afterward suffered an infection that hit his spinal column. He has also suffered a heart attack and is making a slow recovery from that. Bob has been a most enthusiastic member of the Memorial Association, and a note from some of his old buddies would be welcome. His address is 301 Arapaho East, Sherman, Texas 75090.

George Odenwaller has passed along the news that E.J. "Joe" Harvey, pilot of "Outhouse Mouse," died of a massive heart attack March 15.

Bert J. Pierce, ex-Flt/Chief, 401st sqdn., now living in White City, Oregon, has had a recent heart attack but is now back at work, wearing a pace-maker.

Edward J. Butler, formerly a major with the 324th sqdn and later with headquarters sqdn., passed away in August following a long illness. Ed was one of the most widely known members of the group and had a good collection of pictures which he donated to the Memorial Association. His mother, Mrs. Thomas B. Butler, lives at 7552 Wellington Way, St/ Louis, Mo., 63105.

New York Rally Round Set

Oscar Dino and Bill Harris have joined forces to hold the second Rally Round in New York State.

The event will be held at the Holiday Inn, Middletown, N.Y., Saturday, May 31.

The show includes an afternoon of nostalgia, cocktail hour, Surf and Turf dinner and a wonderful opportunity to remeet friends of the group.