



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 9 No. 2

May, 1976

Plan Now--Pike's Peak Or Bust July 7

One mission no 91st-er will want to miss is the upcoming National Reunion in Colorado Springs July 7-10. These national get-togethers are scheduled only every two years, and it is one of the few opportunities you'll have to get together with those old buddies you haven't seen in years--maybe since Basingbourn days.

Early registrations indicate that this may be the biggest Group Reunion ever, with members returning not only from all over the U.S. but several from overseas. A number of crews are going all out to get together for the first time since they were flying missions out of AF Station 121. The relatively central location

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and the terrific Colorado scenery is drawing enthusiastic response from 91st-ers everywhere.

If you have not already sent in your registration form do so at once, or drop a note to Glenn V. Boyce, 1874 S. Hoyt Street, Lakewood, Colo. 80226 letting him know you intend to come. He needs to know how many to expect by June 1 to complete preparations for the event.

Headquarters will be at the Four Seasons Motor Inn, 2886 S. Circle Drive, Colorado Springs, Co. (tel. 303-576-5900). Room reservations must be made with them not later than June 15.

Guests of honor at the Reunion Banquet Saturday night will be Lt. Gen. & Mrs. James R. Allen, and Maj. Gen. John R. Spalding. Gen. Allen is Superintendent of the Air Force Academy and Gen. Spalding is DCS/Logistics, NORAD/ADCOM.

Norad has agreed to make an additional 40 places available for a tour of their facilities over the 40 originally allocated.

In addition to the outstanding program already announced by the Reunion Committee many other Surprises are in the Bomb Bay for all!

Pacific States Rally Round Big Hit

It was another big get-together for West Coast 91st-ers when 77 met at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim for a Pre-Reunion Rally Round February 21.

Winning the mug for coming the greatest distance to attend was ex-322nd pilot Jerry Newquist of Seattle, Wash. Virgil Mott attended from Tulsa, Okla., but was not eligible since he was a previous winner.

As a special surprise George W. Shook (322nd) was presented a \$100 Life Membership by his wife Sue and his children. The Rigid Digit award was presented to Shook by Western Division Sec.-Treas. George Parks.

A door prize donated by Joe Zimmerman (322nd), a fifth of J&B Scotch, was won by Aubin Pene. A second door prize, donated by SMSgt. John R. Paget (Ret), a Travel Bar case, was won by Rocco J. Maiorca (401st).

A plaque was presented to associate member Bob Letalien for his outstanding work on Rally Rounds and Reunions and his service as assistant pub-keeper in Pene's Pub.

Attending a Rally Round for the first time were CMSgt Robert L. Modell and his wife Margi. Bob is still on active duty at Edwards AFB. Also attending for the first time was David L. Hanst (322nd) and his wife Marian. Hanst, who is now a first pilot for United Air Lines, flew 32 combat missions with the group in 72 days in 1944.

Master of ceremonies was Bruce D. Moore. Bruce and his wife Firelei had celebrated

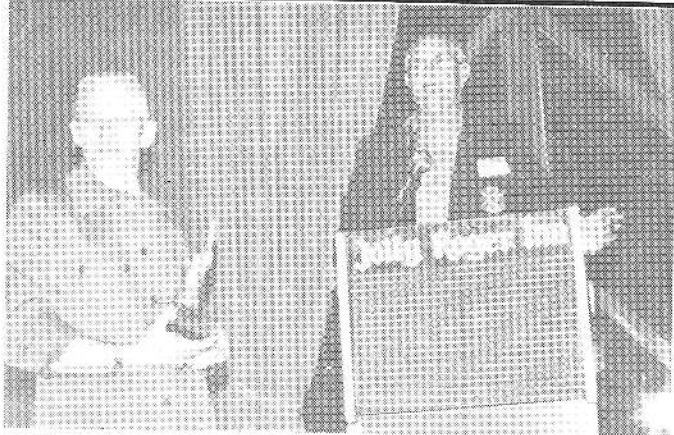
their 33rd wedding anniversary the day before the Rally Round, and were presented with a cake by the Group at the Saturday dinner.

Attending were: MSgt. George W. Parks (Ret), Mr. & Mrs. Ralph J. Tomek, Mrs. Goldie Cahill, Mr. & Mrs. Ken Cochran, Mr. & Mrs. George W. Shook, SMSgt. & Mrs. Lou R. Holland (Ret), Mr. & Mrs. Frank T. Keneley, Mr. & Mrs. Arthur E. Thomsen.

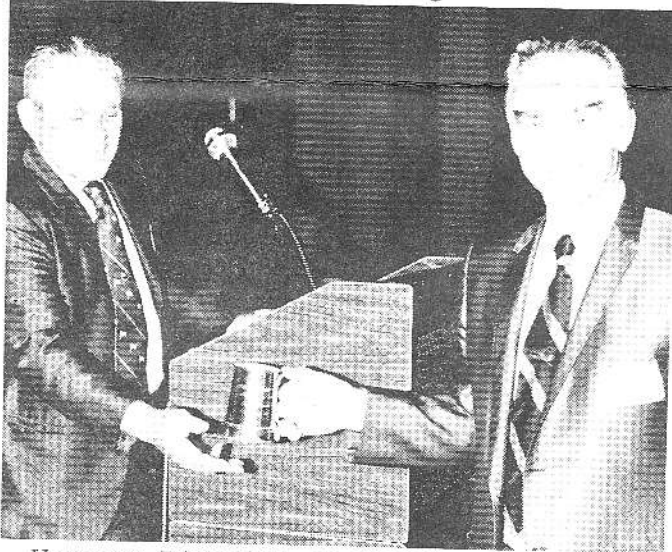
Mr. & Mrs. Ammon Powell, CMSgt & Mrs. Charles W. Yaroshak, Mrs. Rosie Ortega, Miss Debbie Ortega, MSgt Eugene J. Letalien (Ret), Mr. Robert Letalien, Mr. & Mrs. Aubin Pene, Mr. Anthony L. Starcer, Mr. & Mrs. Robert H. Clapp, Mr. & Mrs. Bruce D. Moore, Miss Cindy Marshall & guest, Mr. & Mrs. Robert S. Puls and father, Mr. & Mrs. Rocco J. Maiorca.

SMSgt & Mrs. John R. Paget (Ret), CMSgt & Mrs. Robert L. Modell, Mr. Barney Fuller, Miss Kay Saaverda, Mr. Jerry Newquist, Mr. Kermit M. Burman, Mr. & Mrs. William D. Allen, Mr. & Mrs. Cecil Smith, Mr. & Mrs. Robie Robertson, Mr. John Hurd, Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Sullivan, Mr. William Connally, Mr. Paul Sink & guest, Mr. & Mrs. A. Winfield Jones.

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Gaffney, Mr. & Mrs. David L. Hanst, Mr. Virgil Mott, Maj. & Mrs. John W. Ryan (Ret), Maj. & Mrs. Robert E. O'Bannon (Ret), Mrs. Marian M. Hohler, Mr. David Hohler, Jr., Mr. Paul Bostick, Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Gibson, Mr. Glen F. Lunde, Mr. Jim Brennan, Mr. & Mrs. George Vender, Mr. Paul J. Allison.



New Life Member George W. Shook (322nd) is presented the "Order of the Rigid Digit" by Sec.-Treas. George Parks.



Western Division co-chairman Gene Letalien presents mug to Jerry Newquist for coming the greatest distance to attend, from Seattle, Wash.



Associate member Bob Letalien receives plaque for outstanding service from Aubin Pene.



91st-ers enjoying their dinner in the ballroom of the Jolly Roger Inn.



Master of Ceremonies Bruce D. Moore welcomes 91st-ers to Anaheim.



Rosie Ortega and daughter Debbie in the hospitality room.

Some Highlights of 324th Sqdn. History

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have from time to time run excerpts from the official squadron history of the 324th Sqdn. This is not from bias toward the 324th, but because it is the only squadron history that the editor has in his files. If any members have copies of other squadron histories, we would appreciate copies, so we may run all of them. This excerpt deals with the commanding officers of the squadron and some of the outstanding personalities. It was written in November, 1944.

Commanding Officers

The morale, fighting spirit, and efficiency of a combat bombardment squadron is due more to the "Old Man" than to any other individual. The 324th has been fortunate in having as its commanding officers men of exceptional character and outstanding abilities. Each of these men has left his mark upon the squadron which has taken strength from the personalities of its commanding officers. The members of the 324th Bombardment Squadron are proud of its record and proud to be part of it. We know that we have the finest squadron and the finest commanding officer in the world and we're ready to fight the man who doubts it. That's the kind of spirit our commanding officers have left with us.

From Major Harold C. Smelser, our first C.O., came much of our fighting spirit. He came to us with a background of fighting Japs in the East Indies. He had the difficult task of hammering out a combat unit from a bunch of green rookies and he did it without tools, equipment, and sufficient time. Major Smelser brought the squadron overseas, and led it into combat. On 23 November, 1942, our eighth mission, Major Smelser failed to return from an attack on the Nazi submarine pens at St. Nazaire. He and his crew were the first fatal battle casualties suffered by the 324th. The squadron mourned the loss of a fine leader and into its spirit went some of the dash, the daring, the courage, and military smartness of Major Harold Smelser.

Our next permanent C.O. was Major Claude F. Putnam whose executive ability, attention to detail and talent for organization gave our squadron an outstanding efficiency rating. So well did he direct the activities of the squadron that he was soon called upon to go to the 306th Bomb Group (H) as commanding officer. Eventually, he returned to the 91st Bomb Group (H), a full colonel, to become commanding officer of the group.

Capt. Haley W. Aycock succeeded Major Putnam as C.O. of the 324th. On 8 November, 1942, in an attack on Abbeville, France, our second mission, Capt. Aycock was shot in the foot to become with 4 others the first battle casualties of the 91st Bomb Group. At that time he was on loan to the 401st Squadron acting as commanding officer. Capt. Aycock was perhaps closer to the combat men of the squadron than any other commanding officer in that he shared their fun as well as their work. He was always with them at the parties or on the athletic field, even when his foot was in a brace while he was recuperating from his wound.

When Major Aycock was transferred to 1st Bomb Division as Ass't Operations Officer, Capt. Richard W. Weitzenfeld took over the command of the squadron. Arriving with us as a Captain and leaving as a Lt. Colonel, Commanding Officer Weitzenfeld probably had more influence on the squadron than any other one man. His tour of duty with us far exceeded that of any previous C.O., as his assignment with us reached just beyond one full year. This had a stabilizing influence on the squadron during which we built up a reputation for dependability both on the ground and in the air. So good was our combat and maintenance record that our squadron was selected as the PFF unit for the field. Lt. Colonel Weitzenfeld was particularly close to his ground personnel and the result was that there was a good feeling of cooperation within the squadron. The combat record was outstanding, with record low abortive averages and casualty rates.

When Lt. Col. Weitzenfeld left on 14 July, 1944 to accept a position at 1st Bomb Division as Air Inspector, the command of the squadron was taken over by Capt. Immanuel J. Klette. Capt. Klette in coming to the 324th was once again associated with his old boss, Colonel Henry W. Terry, 91st Bomb Group Commander. Capt. Klette and the "Tige" had been through some of the rough ones together with the 306th. Still new as this account is being

written, Major Klette promises to become one of the 324th's most outstanding commanders. He is the kind of leader who flies almost every time his squadron puts its crews into the air. At briefing he studies the combat orders and target information far more carefully than other group leaders, and in the air he has already won the confidence and respect of the men who fly with him. He has a habit of getting his group through to the target despite the accuracy of the enemy defenses and getting them back again.

That the combat record of the 324th is a proud one is a tribute both to the quality of the officers and men who make it up and to the leadership of the officers who commanded them.

324th HEROES

The list of brave fighting lads of the 324th who lost their lives in combat for their country is a long and impressive one. They were all heroes, these men. The sacrifices they made and the deeds they performed defy description. Words can no more describe these sacrifices or these deeds than they can express the feeling of pride that the squadron has for these men or the keenness with which they are missed.

There was Gene "Tex" Davis, from Menard, Texas, a likeable roughneck with the stout heart and a contempt for danger which characterizes so many combat officers. "Tex" couldn't pass as a fashion plate officer with his unpressed trousers and beat up old hat. Nor would anyone ever mistake him for a West Pointer with his loose-jointed, unmilitary step, but when it came to guts and fighting spirit "Tex" had it to give away. He was bombardier for Corman on that ill-fated 23 Nov. 1942 attack on St. Nazaire when five lone Fortresses went in to bomb and two got back. Corman, unable to find the field, with wounded men aboard, with a crippled ship short of gasoline, made a crash landing which killed "Tex" and several other members of the crew. It was on this mission that "Tex," with a mouth full of tobacco juice, leaned forward over his bomb sight just as a piece of flak ripped through the nose at the exact spot where his head had been only the moment before. This experience didn't trouble "Tex" at all, as he calmly leaned over and squirted a spurt of tobacco juice through the hole with the remark, "I was just looking for a place to spit this tobacco."

On the 4th of March, 1943, our group made the historic attack on Hamm which was perhaps one of the finest individual jobs ever done by the 91st. Our small formation of planes, without escort and without the briefed support of other groups, battled the Luftwaffe in to the target and out, dropping their loads squarely on the M.P.I. and making a chaotic mess of the Nazi marshalling yards. Pilot Allen Brill and co-pilot Allan Lowry nursed their fast falling bomber back over the North Sea in a courageous attempt to get the ship and crew home. In the ditching, Brill, Lowry, and Sgt. James B. Morgan Jr. were drowned. The rest of the crew was picked up by air sea rescue. Posthumous awards of DSC for Brill and Lowry and a Soldiers Medal for T/Sgt. Dickson for his part in helping to save the lives of the rest of the crew were given.

On 14 October, 1943, Lt. Harold R. Christensen of Eagle Grove, Iowa lost his life on his 20th mission. Returning from Scgweinfurt with a crippled A/C, Lt. Christensen received a painfully severe flak wound in the arm but refused to relinquish control of his A/C until he had personally flown it beyond the danger of the A/A guns. The ship made a forced landing at a south coast airdrome when Christensen laughed and joked despite his pain. His death the next day was a sad blow to the squadron which had come to love this tall blond officer for his friendly personality and to admire him for his flying skill and coolness under fire. For Pilot Christensen a posthumous DFC for the squadron pride in another hero and another heart ache.

The posthumous DSC also went to Lt. Marco DeMara for one of the most outstandingly heroic deeds performed by any member of the group when with his legs on fire and flames making an inferno of the cockpit he flew his blazing bomber over England until most of his crew had bailed out, and then remained conscious long enough to avoid crashing his blazing A/C into a small English village. Civilians in the town expressed their gratitude and admiration for Lt. DeMara's action in the touching letters which they wrote to the squadron commander and in the flowers which they sent to the pilot's funeral.

Not all of the 324th heroes lost their lives in the performance of their duties. All of them faced death frequently, some had narrow escapes, some survived wounds, and others finished their tours without injuries.

T/Sgt. John M. Webb, with his chute smoldering, was pushed out of the blazing bomber piloted by Lt. DeMara and landed on a horse grazing in the field below. He is probably the only man in the world ever to accomplish this feat. "I yelled at him," said Webb, "but he didn't move and I landed right on his back. Startled, he shied and reared, and I tumbled off. At least that's one horse that knows there's a war on, and I bet he won't be any good for Spring plowing."

When S/Sgt. Clement D. Dowler and S/Sgt. Regis R. Carney took off with Lt. Cater on 28 April, 1944 to bomb the airfield at Avord, France, they didn't think they would find themselves fighting Germans on the battle fields of France before they got back. Forced to bail out over France, they were assisted in evading the Germans by friendly French partisans. Later they joined the FFI and fought several engagements with the Germans besides doing special sabotage duty. When the invasion came in the south of France, Carney and Dowler joined an American paratrooper unit of 15 men which harassed the German 19th Army as it retreated up the Rhone Valley. Four thousand Germans surrendered to the two flying sergeants and the 15 paratroopers. In September, Carney and Dowler found their way back to England. Now they are back in the States with a letter of praise from the officer commanding the paratroopers and ratings of T/Sgt. for the exceptional job they performed.

OUTSTANDING MISSIONS

Schweinfurt, Oschersleben, Hamm, Anklam, Erkner, Big "B". These names spell big missions, historic attacks. They all were outstanding as were many others, but perhaps none were more outstanding than the 23 November, 1942 attack on St. Nazaire and the 8 September, 1944 attack on Ludwigshafen.

At St. Nazaire on 23 November, 1942, our group suffered its first losses. It was our 8th mission and the 91st Group put up 5 A/C to attack the German sub pens. Three of the bombers were 324th ships piloted by Capt. Jones (with Major Smelser, Squadron C.O.), Lt. Red Cliburn, and Lt. Corman. These 5 A/C made the attack all alone and were engaged in battle by a group of FW-190s. Major Smelser and his crew were last seen on the deck off the Brest Peninsula with the life raft hanging from the horizontal stabilizer and the ball turret dripping blood. Major Smelser waved the rest of the formation on. Major Zinowitz, 322nd C.O., was last seen with enemy fighters on his tail, and Lt. Corman managed to nurse his damaged ship back to England with a badly damaged A/C and a wounded crew. The only bomber to return to base was brought in by "Red" Cliburn with so much battle damage that Engineering Officers were unable to understand how the ship was able to fly. Cliburn and his co-pilot were both wounded, yet the old Red Head brought her home. The score for the day in the 324th Squadron--11 missing, 5 killed, 8 wounded, 7 o.k.

On 8th September, 1944, another Squadron Commander led the group to Ludwigshafen in the heart of the Ruhr. The flak was intense and accurate but Major Klette barreled them on through to the target and got the bombs away with good results. On this mission the 324th showed the stuff of which its combat men were made. The following officers and enlisted men turned in outstanding performances: 1st Lt. BEASLEY, Freeman- Pilot, flak wound through the skull. Remained conscious and gave instructions over interphone. Dragged himself back into the pilot's seat halfway across channel and flew ship with one arm paralyzed until he became sick to his stomach. 1st Lt. Donahue, Howard C.-Co-pilot, did an exceptionally fine job of flying the flak-riddled A/C in which Lt. Beasley was wounded. At one point with the controls jammed by the wounded pilot's body, he narrowly averted a collision through his flying skill. T/Sgt. ZILMER, Evan L.- Top turret gunner, rendered skilled first aid to wounded Lt. Beasley and assisted co-pilot Donahue in flying the damaged A/C. 1st Lt. LOVE, Gordon H.- Mickey navigator, painfully wounded by flak on the bomb run stayed at his post until bombs away. 1st Lt. O'TOOLE, Arnold J.- Pilot, flak bursts smashed thru center of his floor, breaking several bones, and the same burst severed some of the A/C controls. Lt. O'Toole refused to leave his seat or relinquish control of the A/C until the ship was out of A.A. danger. 1st Lt. WEEKS, Elbert W.- Pilot, on bomb run his co-pilot was killed and he was painfully wounded, yet flew the ship without mentioning wounds of broken right hand, severed arteries, and thigh wound until co-pilot was taken care of. Landed the ship on an airstrip in France, too weak to rise from seat. S/Sgt. SAUNDERS, Henry C.-Top turret gunner, with great skill and presence of mind, removed co-pilots body, gave pilot first aid, and assisted in flying badly damaged aircraft.

From the Editor's Desk...

By Paul C. Burnett Box 909 Auburn, Ala. 36830

A number of alert 91st-ers who were on hand when the first Berlin mission was made caught the error in the official account written by the Air Force Historial Section that we reprinted in the past two issues of the R/I. They gave the date as March 22, 1944. 'Them who was there' note it was March 6. There was no attempt made in the reprint to correct date discrepancies from our official missions log run several years ago. We heard from R.F. Harris, Cullman, Ala.; Robert Megchelsen, Ainsworth, Iowa, and Charles R. Phillips, Glastonbury, Conn.

I'm sure the date made a lasting impression on every 91st-er who made the mission.

It takes an awful lot to stop a determined 91st-er who wants to get back with his old buddies. John W. Miksell, former 401st flight engineer, now living in Baphule, Ariz., is totally disabled and confined to a wheel chair from injuries received in action with the 91st, but he's planning to be on hand for the Colorado Springs reunion. John hasn't been in touch with any of his old friends since the war and would like to hear from them. His address is: P.O. Box 1255, Bapchule, Ariz. 85221.

Life member Ralph Tomek recently was awarded his Air Medal for meritorious service--34 years late.

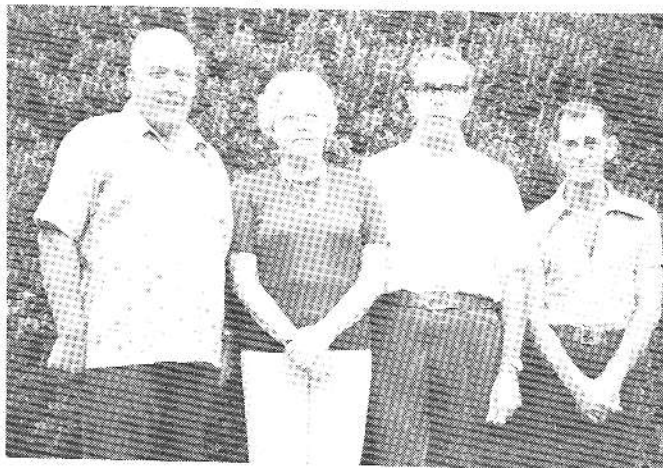
Ralph flew his bombing missions in 1942, but he became a German POW on the Romilly raid in December, 1942, and the medal never caught up with him.

The award was made by Col. Judson Herriott, Los Angeles Air Force Station base commander, at a meeting of the B-17 Combat Crewmen.

In the salute to famous movie director William Wyler on national television recently the 91st got a boost. Some shots of the 'Memphis Belle' were included with clips from some of his Oscar winning shows. Wyler is a Life Member of the Memorial Association. The CBS special was a salute by the American Film Institute, who honored him with a life achievement award.



This picture was taken at Kearney, Neb., October 29, 1943, just prior to going overseas to Bassingbourn. It was the occasion of John C. Flinn's marriage to his wife Kay. From left to right are John Paget, tail gunner, Kay Flinn, John Flinn, co-pilot, and Gene Letalien, assistant engineer. They were all original crew members of "Destiny's Child."



Last fall the Paget's visited the Flinns in Pennsylvania and they decided to re-stage the original scene. Since Gene Letalien was unable to attend they got 91st-er Russell Ruth to stand in for him.

CMSgt. Kenneth L. Jones has retired from active duty with the Air Force after more than 30 years of service. So far as is known CNSgt. Jones was the last active duty Air Force WW II prisoner of war to be serving in the Air Force. Jones was a ball turret gunner with the 91st and was shot down on a mission over Gelsenkirchen.

Chief Jones is now a manager with the Zale Corporation of Dallas. His home address is 1012 Goodwin Drive, Plano, Texas, 75074.



Getting together for the first time since June 1944 were Western Division Sec.-Treas. George Parks and ex-324th sqdn. pilot William L. Major, now living in Glennallen, Alaska. Bill was the pilot during George's first tour. He also returned to the 91st for a second tour but got in only one more mission before the war ended. Bill and his wife spent two days in Vallejo. They are making plans to attend the National Reunion.

The Friends of the Eighth, the British group dedicated to the memory of the U. S. 8th Army Air Force, will devote their June meeting to the 91st. British air historian Roger Freeman, author of *The Mighty Eighth*, will give a rundown of the group's history from 15 April '42 until its departure from England.

Steve Gotts will talk about particular incidents, crashes, etc. in detail. Major Urban L. Drew, who was an ace with the 361st Fighter Group at Bottisham and who flew escort missions with the 91st, will talk of the fighter pilots problems on these missions.

Charles Gallegger will talk about characters and personalities of notable 91st members.

Col. Charles Baldwin will talk about early days at Bassingbourn, and Col. Jim Fletcher will give a pilots eye view of operations from Station 121.

The cartoon on the front of this issue of the R/I was contributed by Belgian artist Guy Jacquemin, an admirer of WW II American airmen. Jacquemin has sent the R/I several of his cartoons which will appear in future issues.

Col. George Birdsong (Ret), one of the original 91st-ers and pilot of Delta Rebel II, will be receiving his Master of Business Administration degree in June from Michigan State University. He plans to be on hand for the National Reunion in Colorado Springs.

Life member Sam Newton, who piloted "Time's A Wastin'", has added another to his string of enterprises. Sam is now president of Avionics Engineering, Inc., Arapahoe County Airport, Englewood, Co. His company specializes in instruments and avionics sales, installation, and service. Sam was honcho of the second National Reunion, held in Denver in 1969.

Each issue we learn of the sad passing of more and more of the old group. Among those recently reported were:

Thomas Figley of 3250 Osceola Ave., Columbus, Ohio. He passed away March 28 of a heart attack. He was hospitalized last October with a heart attack, and suffered several after leaving the hospital.

Ex-401st sqdn. member Lumir Tomek of Truscott, Texas, died of a heart attack at his ranch April 23. Lumir had lost a foot last year in an accident on his ranch but was planning on making the National Reunion.

Edwin L. Baxley, former pilot with the 322nd sqdn., died on November 2, 1975. His address was 10 Gay Place, Little Rock, Ark.

We also received word that Dean Ripa, wife of Frank S. Ripa, ex-401st sqdn., 850 Regulus St., Foster City, Cal., died July 1, 1975.



Enjoying the hospitality at the Anaheim Rally are Bonnie Clapp, Edna Yaroshak, Tony Starcer, Bob Clapp. Bartenders are Bob Letalien and Aubin Pene.