



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bomb Group (H) Memorial Association Newsletter

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The Rigid Digit - How It Came About

Prominent at every 91st Rally Round and Reunion is the large banner with "Wray's Ragged Irregulars" and a large clenched fist with middle finger upraised emblazoned on it. Life members are awarded large models of the symbolic hand, and tie tacs with the same emblem are sported by many Memorial Association members. Each membership data sheet has a cryptic question at the end--"Are you a member of the Rigid Digit?"

This distinctive symbol of the 91st--The Order of the Rigid Digit--has a history almost as long as that of the unit itself. It came into being in the winter months of 1942, an award designed by Col. Stanley T. Wray, Group Commander, to boost morale and lighten hearts during some of the darkest days ever faced by the 91st.

Daylight bombing by B-17s was just getting under way. Fewer than half a dozen groups made up the entire bomber force of the Eighth, and fighter protection was non-existent. The loss rate was high, often reaching ten



Col. Stanley T. Wray displays the famous symbol before "Hell's Angels"

per cent a mission and there were no replacement crews or aircraft available. It soon became apparent that if the rate of missions and rate of losses continued the last aircraft with the last crew would fly from Bassingbourn on April 19, 1943.

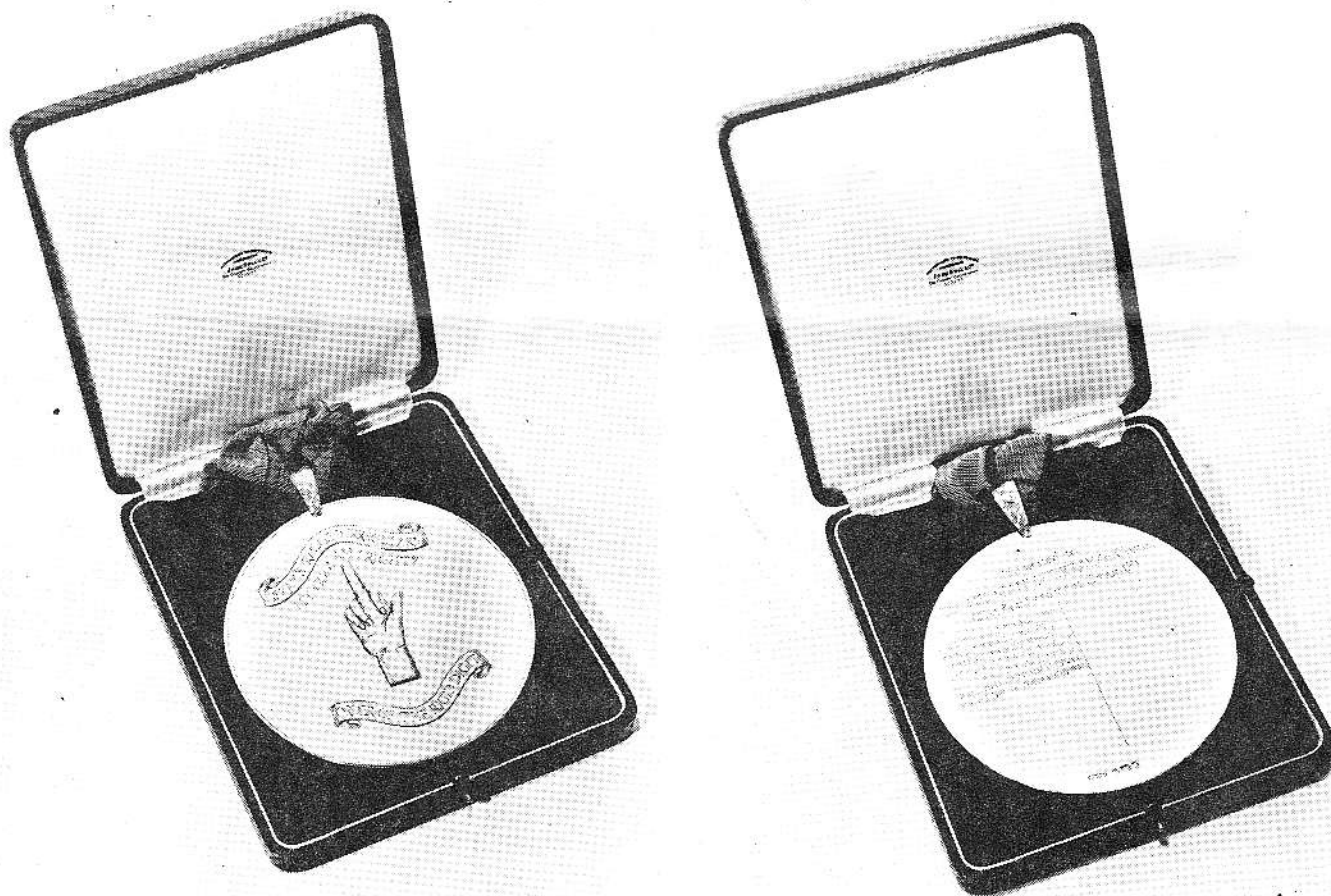
Of course, this did not happen. Replacement crews, aircraft, and additional groups began flowing in in the early spring of 1943, and never again was there any thought that the 8th Air Force would simply dwindle away.

Inspiration for the Order of the Rigid Digit came from the RAF's fictional epitome of ineptitude--Pilot Officer Percival Algernon Prune, who completely destroyed 23 British aircraft in as many different ways during his flight training with the RAF. For this feat he was awarded the Iron Cross First Class with swords and diamonds by Der Fuehrer, since it represented more British aircraft destroyed than had been done by the entire Nazi Air Force in 1939.

Col. Wray felt that a humorous award for assorted goofs, awarded with pomp and circumstance, would help bring some cheer into the dark days.

The medal designed was of sterling silver, four inches in diameter, hung from a ribbon of the baby blue of innocence. At the top was engraved "Wray's Ragged Irregulars," and immediately beneath was the motto of the Order "My God, Am I Right?" Since this was a play on the British Royal Motto "My God and My Right" this use had to be cleared with the Royal Family, which gave its approval. Below the motto was the clenched fist with upraised middle finger, and underneath was engraved "Order of the Rigid Digit." On the back was engraved the names of those to whom the award was given.

Ten miniature copies approximately one inch in diameter were made to be permanently kept by the recipients. The medals were made by John Bull silversmiths in Bedford and paid for personally by Col. Wray.



The presentation was made before the assembled group officers and the unlucky recipient wore the large emblem around his neck for the night of the reception. Thereafter he wore the small emblem below his military decorations. A lengthy citation was read with each presentation, beginning with "In gross disregard for his own safety and that of his passengers and bringing great shame and discredit to the military service this medal is given to...."

The initial award was planned for Capt. William Clancy for an episode during group training in the States. At Redmond, Ore., Clancy's plane ran off the end of the short mountain runway and crashed in a ravine. Col. Wray was in the co-pilot's seat and suffered back injuries. (Actually the brakes on the plane had carbonized and could not function, but Clancy took quite a ribbing from the group for trying to dispose of the C.O.) Some wags from headquarters, knowing of the upcoming award "borrowed" the medal and had Col. Wray's name engraved at the top, and prepared a citation admonishing him for not stopping Clancy from not stopping the plane. So the first recipient was Col. Wray himself, then Clancy, and others as circumstances merited. Lt. Col. Baskin Lawrence won the award for raising the landing gear instead of the flaps as he finished landing an A-20 tow-target plane. Brig. Gen. "Possum" Hansell got his for landing short of the runway by about 100 yards.

After the war was over possession of the Rigid Digit became a much desired decoration in higher echelons, so three of America's top generals have their names on the award.

The headquarters group of the 8th Air Force--the Castle Coombe group--met each year in Washington following the war. Members who had received every major military decoration felt that the Order of the Rigid Digit was needed to make them truly distinctive, so citations and medals were wrangled by Gen. Ira Eaker, Gen. Carl Spaatz, and Gen. James Doolittle. So the award had gone full cycle, to finally become a sort of 8th AF Order of the Garter.

A less sought after award was also given regularly during the early months. A 1½ foot Nazi Cross was hung around the neck of some poor officer from the squadron with the highest VD rate for the month. Needless to say, there was no demand to perpetuate this distinction.

California State Rally Round Feb. 5

Another in the annual series of California State Rally Rounds is set for Saturday, February 5, at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim.

Briefing, sign in, and hospitality will begin in "Pene's Pub," Room 140-A at noon Saturday. A cocktail hour will be held at 1800 hrs. with dinner following in the main ballroom. Tab for the dinner, which also includes a gift and two free drinks will be \$8 per person.

Col. Thomas H. Gunn USAF (Ret), first vice-president of the Memorial Association, and his wife Emalee will attend the Rally Round from their home in Arlington, Texas. Col. Gunn, who was a member of both the 324th and 401st sqdns., will be the guest speaker and will brief the attending members on the past operations and future plans and goals of the Memorial Association.

Contact M/Sgt. George W. Parks (Ret), 109 Wilshire Ave, Vallejo, Cal., 94590 (telephone 707-642-6392) for reservations not later than Feb. 2.

In addition to California members a number of 91st-ers from Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Texas and South Dakota have indicated they intend to make the Rally Round.

The Unique 'Little Miss Mischief'

By Lt. Col. (Ret) P.R. McDowell

Certainly one of the most unusual planes ever to fly for the 91st has to be "Little Miss Mischief," 42-97880 DF-F, of the 324th squadron. Starting her life as a silver B-17G built by Vega, she ended her flying days as a strange hybrid--front half silver Vega and rear half olive drab Boeing. The plane has been featured on the cover of Steve Birdsall's book "B-17 in Action" and in Roger Freeman's "The Mighty Eighth." How the ship came to be the oddity she was is related here by pilot Paul McDowell, whose crew was flying it on the mission that led to the unusual grafting.



The crew examines the "hole big enough to throw a calf through."

It began on the October 15, 1944 trip to Cologne, Germany. At 27,000 feet, just as we had gone on the bombing run after hitting the I.P., things began to really happen. The first thing I recall was that one of the rudder pedals went all the way forward independently of the other. That was the rudder cable cut away back at the waist, it turned out later.

Electric power was out all over the ship except that which kept the engines running. Jim Hobbs (engineer) went back towards the rear of the airplane and found out we had a "hole big enough to throw a calf through" at the ball turret, and that Glenn Slaughter and Ed Abdo were hurt. Glenn was trying to give himself a shot of morphine and Ed was trapped in the ball turret with the back popped off.

Ralph Barrett (bombardier) helped Glenn and we shoved blankets down to Ed in the turret.

The plane was cut nearly in two and flying nose heavy, and the trim cables had been lost with the rudder pedal cables. We turned back toward England, jettisoned our bombs over Germany, and started to try to make the plane flyable. With men hurt and Ed trapped in the turret there was no thought of abandoning the aircraft if there was any way at all we could nurse her home.

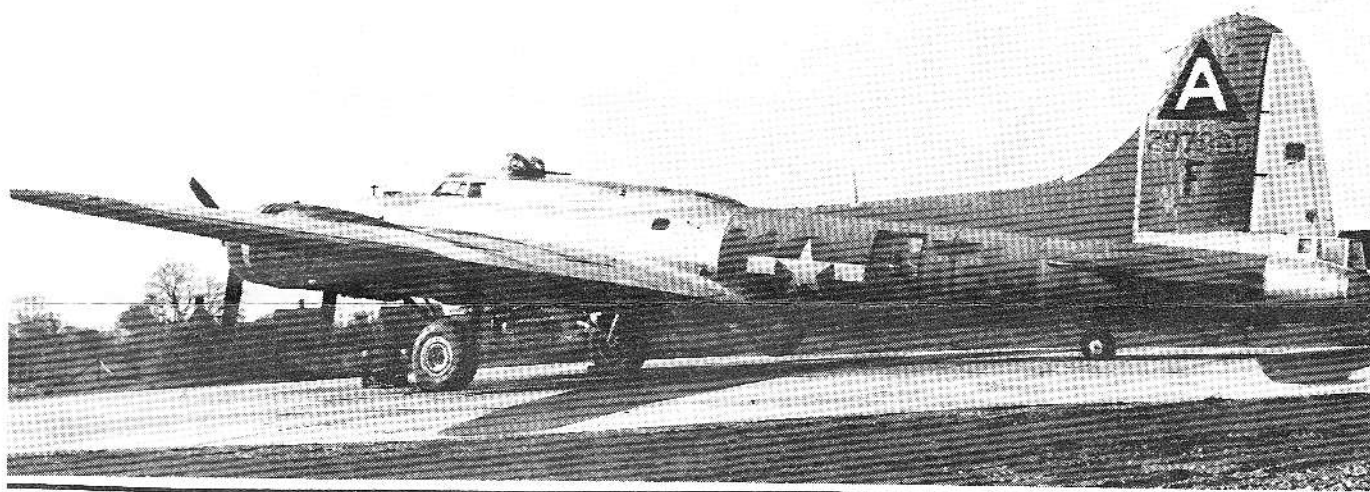
By trial and error the severed trim cables were retied until the ship was trimmed to fly at about 100-110 mph. Some of the spare trim cables were tied into the ends of the cut rudder cable and the ship regained some right and left rudder control.

Jim Hobbs had to crank down the landing gear manually, and the tail wheel had to be cranked down manually too. Old Basingbourn never looked better to us and we made a light "wheels" landing with everybody safe but with an aircraft that would certainly never fly again, we thought.

But Col. Frank Kamykowski and the 441st Sub Depot crew thought otherwise and came up with the unique hybrid. Sub Depot records show these repairs: 1. Repaired right wing tip. 2. Repaired large hole station 29 right wing. 3. Repaired large hole in trailing edge, right wing and flap station 12. 4. Repaired hole in wing station 29 left wing. 5. Repaired left leading edge, station 16. 6. Installed station 6 to station 11 complete (camouflaged area in photo) 7. Installed rear gun enclosure.

8. Installed fin and rudder. 9. Installed right stabilizer and elevator. 10. Installed left stabilizer and elevator. 11. Repaired and rigged all control cables from station 6 back. 12. Rivited longeron at station 6.

Little Miss Mischief made another fifteen missions as the only two-tone B-17 in the Eighth.



A little rest and recreation at Bassingbourn on August 6, 1943. At the table center left three 401st members--Ted Wolf, Al Venezia, and William Miller appear to be hogging the local talent--six girls yet! Our files don't identify the other happy faces.

From The Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett Box 909 Auburn, AL 36830

We have had a replay of our problems of two years ago when we got off-schedule with The Ragged Irregular.

In mid-October I went to the hospital with another heart attack. This stay was twice as long as the last, but recovery seems to be progressing nicely and I am back at the university, though with a reduced teaching load. Just as we were about ready to go to press in early December I was called to Texas by the critical illness and subsequent death of my mother. We were not able to return to Alabama until the end of the first week in January.

We're hoping for another issue in February to get back on schedule, if recovery permits.

Newest life member of the 91st is J.C. Bull, of Jasper, Ala., who made a \$100 donation in November.

J.C. was one of the original members of the 322nd sqdn., a waist gunner on Robert Campbell's plane "Dame Satan," before suffering severe frost-bite to his hands on a mission in early 1943. He is in the construction business in Jasper and attended the Memphis and first Denver reunion.

Jerry Newquist of Seattle, ex-322nd sqdn., whose plane "Chowhound" was recently featured by Monogram models in their outstanding new B-17 reproduction, died Sunday, Oct. 3, following open heart surgery four weeks earlier. Jerry served two tours with the 91st and flew more than 45 combat missions. He was a distinguished leader in the Latter Day Saints church and author of several books about the church. Jerry was for many years a pilot for United Airlines prior to his death. His wife Marie resides at 3624 56th SW, Seattle, Wash. 98116.



First division basketball champions in 1944 was the team from Bassingbourn. Shown are: bottom row, 1st Lt. W.S. Borellis, 2nd Lt. R.T. Jones, W/O J.B. Oliver.

Second row: 2nd Lt. J.T. Newquist, 2nd Lt. N. Saltzman, 2nd Lt. R.W. Thompson, 1st Lt. B.P. Webb. Not shown is 2nd Lt. R.G. Morgan.

Any members who are interested in getting a deluxe Group insignia blazer patch can obtain them for \$13 postpaid from M/Sgt. (Ret) G. W. Parks, 109 Wiltshire Ave., Vallejo, Ca. 94590.

Emmitt R. Wilson, a 323rd ball turret gunner on Charles Silvernail's crew in Stupen-Takit Jr., passed along an interesting note in his membership dat sheet that some of you members may be able to elaborate on. His note says "The 323rd insignia was drawn by a tail gunner who kept a little dog with him in flight. He was shot down but he threw the dog out and the dog's chute opened. This was over Belgium. This flying dog story sounds terrific. Can anyone elaborate on the story for the editor. I have heard rumors of several "flying dog" stories but have not been able to get details.

Response to our request for photo identification of the National Reunion group shots was good, but a number of persons did not reply. We are still trying for 100 per cent, so if you forgot to send a note please do so. We're short about one-third of the members who attended.

Harold Mannon of Tulsa, who initiated the cancer detection program for the 91st wives at the July Reunion, has recently been named to national offices in both the American Cancer Society and Make Today Count, an organization designed to aid cancer victims and their families. MTC was written up in the January Family Circle magazine.



The weekly search--trying to find YOUR laundry among all those bundles. Trying their luck here are 1 to r Milo W. Eagle, Isadore I. Brukman and Bales W. McCall.

Another English author is writing an account on the "Big Week" series of combat bombing missions flown by the 8th Air Force during the month of February, 1944. He is very much interested in hearing from all 91st-ers who were involved in raids during that period. Mr. Wilson recently enrolled as an associate member of our group. If you can help his address is:

Andy G. Wilson
27 Fairlands Road
Guildford
Surrey, England

Paul Chryst and Hubert "Tex" Carpenter graduated from the same cadet class in Feb. 1944. As the new replacement crews arrived at Bassingbourn in July they met again to learn that one was assigned to the 401st and one to the 324th sqdns. On Wednesday morning, 16 August 1944, Tex was checking out his bombsight as his airplane moved into hold position for take-off with pilot Larry Gaddis at the controls.

A jeep from Group Ops. sped along the grass area, stopped at the B-17 and quickly traded Lt. Carpenter a Toggelier. Tex was "farmed" into a make-up crew for the day and finally took off to rally into the high sqdn. position as the 91st departed for the briefed target, LEIPZIG.

Approximately 60 miles from the I.P. the Luftwaffe jumped the high sqdn., and notes from the combat diary of Paul Chryst simply says: "counted chutes, lost Lt. Tex Carpenter, Swede Carlson and a lot of good guys today."

The 91st B.G. lost 8 ships that day. Thirty-two years later, at a wonderful National Reunion, Carpenter, Gaddis and Chryst, with his co-pilot, Kermit Burman, met again for the first time since that day.

Flt. Lt. E.M.C. Rowe, who has been working closely with the Memorial Association in preparation for a book he is doing on the 91st and who has assisted with Operation One More Time and the Museum at Bassingbourn, has a new station. The new address is:

Flt. Lt. E.M.C. Rowe
12 Halton Road
Carterton
Oxford, England

If any 91st-ers know of any former members of the 358th Sqdn. of the 355th Fighter Group stationed at Steeple Morden from 1942-1945 please send their names and addresses to Gordon H. Hunsberger, 75 Congo Road, Gilbertville, Pa. 19525. He is attempting to organize a reunion and develop a history of the squadron.



A Merry Christmas to You! A group from the Personnel Section pose for a greeting to the homefolks in 1943. Shown are: Front row, 1 to r, M/Sgt. Robley Evans, Sgt. Arthur Plunkett, Sgt. Joseph Joseph.

Second row: S/Sgt. Charles Yanson, T/Sgt. Henry Heuberger, S/Sgt. Woodrow Whipple, M/Sgt. Thomas Neville.

Back Row: M/Sgt. Larry Simpson, T/Sgt. Robert Lagergren, S/Sgt. Luke Curtsinger, Sgt. Francis Markert, T/Sgt. Charles Sunne.

A wartime history of the Hitchin district is being compiled, and the author is looking for incidents and happenings in the district so far as U.S. airmen and local people are concerned, for example the collision of two Fortresses over Weston on the 26 th of August, 1944.

Since many 91st-ers were frequent visitors to Hitchin the author feels many of our members might contribute information. His address is: Mr. A. M. Foster

Saxon Rise, Millfield Lane
Hitchin, Herts. SG4 7NH

An outstanding book on the B-17 has been released by Sentry Books. Several members have commented that it is the best they've read on the B-17. 91st member Joe Harlick had a hand in providing material for

it. "Fortress in the Sky" is available from Sentry Books, 10718 White Oak Ave., Granada Hills, Calif. 91344. The price is \$18.95 plus \$1 for mailing.

IT'S DUES TIME AGAIN!

If we are to keep the 91st Memorial Association flying high and proud we need the active support of every member on our roster! Send your \$5 annual dues to your Division Treasurer.

Eastern Division:

Joseph M. Giambrone
303 Brookdale Ave.
Glenside, Pa. 19038

Western Division:

M/Sgt. George W. Parks (Ret.)
109 Wilshire Ave.
Vallejo, Calif. 94590