



# The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

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## A Royal Flush - But Not High Hand

Editor's Note: The following account by former 401st sqdn. navigator Maury Herman tells the story of the last flight of "Royal Flush," one of the original planes of the 91st, and an aircraft that was in a nip-and-tuck battle with "Memphis Belle" to be the first to complete 25 missions. Maury was on the second crew that flew the ship.

This is really the first part of a two-part story. Part two is that Maury escaped from Stalag Luft 3, returned to England, attended pilot training, Aircraft Maintenance Officer School, Command and Staff School, and Industrial college of the Armed Forces. He retired from service in 1960 to work for Lockheed Aircraft. Since 1972 he has been with Litton Industries in their naval shipbuilding facility in Pascagoula, Miss. The story of his escape from POW camp is one of the unique stories of the 91st. We hope to carry it in the April issue. (continued on page 2)



The crew of the Royal Flush shown here are, kneeling, 1 to r: Lt. Maury Herman, navigator; Lt. Norman Williams, bombardier; S/Sgt Carlson, tail gunner; Lt. Marcel Fountain, pilot; Lt. Brown, co-pilot. Back row: T/Sgt Fred Sneed, engineer; T/Sgt William Darden, radio operator; S/Sgt Raphoon, asst. engineer; S/Sgt Larry Moertle, waist gunner; S/Sgt Miller, ball turret.

The Ace, King, Queen, Jack and Ten of Spades is called a Royal Flush in the game of poker. It is the best poker hand a player can hold. It can't be beat. This is the story of the only time a Royal Flush lost.

The "Royal Flush" in this story is not a poker hand, but a B-17F in the 401st squadron of the 91st Bomb Group (H), Eighth Air Force. The story begins in late March of 1943 at Station 121, Bassingbourn. For Americans, Bassingbourn was the country club of the 8th Air Force, the only pre-war base assigned to their use. Compared to all the other Air Force units, the 91st had it plush!

Our crew considered ourselves most fortunate on being assigned as replacements to the 91st. Not only because we were going to a plush base, but also because the 91st had a reputation as being the fightingest Bomb Group in the European Theatre of Operations; i.e., heaviest tonnage of bombs dropped, most enemy fighters shot down, and heaviest losses. We soon found out how valid the 91st's reputation was.

Our crew was split up on our first mission to fly as members of other, experienced crews. The date: March 15, the mission the Focke-Wulfe plant at Bremen. The 401st put seven planes up that day. I was aboard the only one to return. Half of our crew, that had trained together in the states, were aboard aircraft that went down. That was the end of our crew.

New crews were developed from the remnants of personnel that did not fly that fateful 15 of March. The one I was assigned to as the navigator was given the "Royal Flush." It had suffered heavy battle damage on its previous mission and had just come out of the depot repair shops. As I recall, there were about twelve bombs and eight swastikas painted on her nose. These, and her battle scars, were evidence that she was a true fighter. My second mission was my first as a crew member of the Royal Flush. In the weeks that followed, during April, May, and June, we hit St. Nazaire, Lorient, Antwerp, Hamburg, Bremen, Kiel and Flensburg. We painted eight more bombs and six more swastikas on her nose. We patched up her holes, replaced her damaged engines and control surfaces, and replaced her wounded crew members.

On 22 June, 1943, we flew again. This was my ninth mission; my seventh aboard the Royal Flush. (I flew one mission aboard "Bomb Boogie" while repairs were being made to Royal Flush.) Our target that day: the synthetic rubber plant at Huls, a German city in the Ruhr Valley. Intelligence had told us at briefing that this plant manufactured about one-third of the synthetic rubber being produced in occupied Europe at that time. If we succeeded in destroying that plant we would severely impede Germany's ability to wage the war. The German High Command knew this also. Their Luftwaffe and anti-aircraft defenses were ready for us.

Lt. Marcel Fountain was the aircraft commander. Lt. Oscar Diedring flew the right seat. Sgt. Fred Sneed, flight engineer, occupied the top turret. Norman Williams and I were up front. Norm had the responsibility of putting our bombs on target and I had the responsibility for directing us to the target. I see their faces in my mind but I can no longer recall the names of the other guys who flew with us that day. There were ten of us, the extra man being a photographer.

The formation formed and crossed the North Sea without incident. The flight from the Zuider Zee into the Initial Point was routine-- not too much flak, no fighters. Then the situation changed. The run from the IP to the target took us up the north side of the Ruhr River Valley, better known to the 8th Air Force bomber crews as "Flak Alley." "Stay well to the north and you'll be out of range of their ack-ack," Intelligence had told us.

As each Bomb Group in the formation made their turn over the IP they slipped a little further to the south than the preceding group had. The 91st, "Wray's Ragged Irregulars," was the last group in the formation. The Royal Flush was right wing of the last flight in the group, and the furthestest south in the bomb run from the IP to the target.

Flak hit the number one engine. We feathered it successfully and went on to drop our bombs on the synthetic rubber plant. Flak found us again coming off the target. Huls was burning and so were we. We were able to put the fire out in Number 3 engine

but couldn't feather the prop. Number 2 engine still ran, but only on five or six of the nine cylinders. We fell out of formation as we fought to maintain speed and altitude. That's when the jocks in the FW-190s and Me-109s spotted us. That's when the fire-fight for our lives began!

We were at about 24,000 feet when the fighters hit us. They kept coming in, firing their guns and cannons, fishtailing all the way and rolling under us. We fired back with our 50s from all stations at each attacker. By the time we ducked into a cloud at about 7,000 feet, maybe five minutes later, we had shot down eight of our attackers. But we had suffered casualties also. Both the tail gunner and the ball turret gunner had been hit. The plexiglass nose of the bombardier/navigator compartment had been shot out. The hydraulic system had been shot out too. But the Royal Flush flew on.

The German fighters were gone. Now, our problem was to get to the coast before we ran out of altitude. We threw our empty ammo cans and now useless guns overboard to lighten ship. But Marc and Oscar still couldn't maintain altitude. Marc hit the bail-out bell switch at 2500 feet. We started to bail out. When all were gone but Marc, Oscar, and Fred, they found they could maintain altitude. They flew on-- to the west and the North Sea.

Those of us who bailed out landed in the vicinity of Wesel at the confluence of the Ruhr River with the Rhine. Oscar, Marc and Fred were able to make the coast. However, anti-aircraft fire hit them once again and they had to ditch. They got out of the Royal Flush and into her dinghy. They were captured by the crew of the German patrol boat which picked them up. The rest of us were captured in the area where we landed. I managed to evade capture for ten hours, but that's another story. The "Royal Flush" went to the bottom off the coast of Holland. She was a good ship. May she ever rest in peace, for this was the only time a Royal Flush had ever lost.



Here is the crew of LTC Louis Malone, 322nd sqdn., posing before Zootie Cutie for their official crew shot. The crew flew Wabash Cannonball, My Baby, and Chowhound on their missions. They are, kneeling, 1 to r: J. Downs, radio operator; Ivan Winters, engineer; E. Hofferber, tail gunner; W. Hogan, waist gunner; T. Kandior, ball turret; B. Hall, waist gunner. Back row: Robert Shea, navigator; Oren Harper, co-pilot; Lou Malone, pilot; Milton Freiday, bombardier.



## Members Approve New Bylaws

Votes on the proposed new by-laws for the Memorial Association have been officially tabulated, with members voting 304 FOR the change, 27 AGAINST, and 7 ballots indicating no choice. The new by-laws provide for a centralized organization rather than the original two divisions, Eastern and Western.

Col. Frank Kamykowski, who headed the 441st Sub Depot at Bassingbourn, together with the editor of The Ragged Irregular, made the official count. All ballots are retained in Association files.

### A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The official count of the votes on the changes as proposed by the new by-laws produced the following tally: 304 For, 27 Against, 7 No Choice. The mail vote provided a representation of at least twice as many as had ever voted at a reunion. By their failure to submit a written ballot approximately 500 additional members gave their tacit approval to the proposed changes.

The by-laws printed in our directory are effective immediately. All officers elected at the 1978 reunion will, of course, continue to function in their elected positions until the 1980 reunion.

With respect to those members who voted against the proposed change, I solicit constructive criticisms from any member. All comments will be provided to a committee appointed to consider changes to the by-laws.

Col. Tom Gunn

### AN EDITORIAL FROM EASTERN DIVISION CHAIRMAN, WHITMAL W. HILL, JR.

Where do we go from here, boys, where do we go from here??? Sometime ago at one of our Rally Rounds a member commented that the 91st Memorial Association was a "terminal case" and it was just a matter of how long the last member would live - then "kaput," it's all over. Well, that's taking the bull by the horns and also looking down his throat. There is no doubt that we 91sters like other old soldiers will fade away. But, we here today could leave our mark on the world that would remind future generations that the members of the 91st Bomb Group lived and died for

our American heritage and freedom.

From the success of the Bassingbourn Prop Memorial, it seems fitting that we should follow up with other historical markers, by identifying those other places where the 91st "slept." The historical markers need not be costly extravaganzas, but simple historical "road markers" similar to those seen posted on the numerous roads and highways throughout the United States. Ideally, markers should be erected at MacDill AFB, Fl., Walla Walla, Wash., Redman and Pendleton, Ore., Fort Dix, N.J., Kimbolton, England, Camp Kilmer, N.J., and finally Drew Field, F., disbandment location.

The historical marker message should be worded for the specific site location, and have a short, concise history of the 91st, and the installation be made in conjunction with a local Rally Round. Through the installation of such historical markers we would not only be leaving a permanent reminder of the works of the 91st Bomb Group, but we would also be giving our Rally Rounds and Reunions a focal point and objective that seems to be missing.



A familiar figure at Group Headquarters for the entire war - popular Otto Cahill.

## From The Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett Box 909 Auburn, Al. 36830

Eastern Division Chairman W.W. Hill has finalized arrangements to raise funds to be used in the restoration of Shoo Shoo Baby which is being accomplished by the 512th MAW Reserve Unit at Dover AFB. For every \$10 contribution the contributor will receive a unique T shirt with a reproduction of Shoo Shoo Baby printed on the front. (Pictures of the T shirt will be shown in the April R/I, attractively modeled.) In the meantime you can be one of the first to wear one of these distinctive T shirts by sending shirt size (S-M-L-XL), your \$10 check or money order made out to the 91st Bomb Group (H) Memorial Association, Inc. and your return address to: W.W. Hill, 4002 Braddock Road, Alexandria, Va. 22312.

The reproduction of Shoo Shoo Baby is a copy of the charcoal drawing by Ken Fox from the collection of the Aviation Art Museum.

We've said over and over again that there is nothing like attending a Rally Round or Reunion to really find the true reason for the Memorial Association -- meeting again with old buddies you knew at Bassingbourn. Jim Wood of Anacostia, D.C., experienced this particularly at the Shoo Shoo Baby Rally Round last summer. Jim writes: "We went out to Dover AFB on busses. Paul Bara (tail gunner on Jim's crew) and I were on different busses. He glanced at the guy across the aisle from him. As you know, while some of one's features may change, the profile remains fairly constant. At any rate, when the crew was formed, I had fifteen missions, Bara had fivw, Smitty, the pilot, had six or seven, Capparell, the bombardier, had five with another crew, and we filled in the navigator, co-pilot, radio operator and waist gunners from a B-26 replacement depot at Belfast. I trained Harding, the ball-turret gunner, a kid from the armament shop who wanted to fly on a crew. We weren't mis-fits, we were just survivors from other crews and other outfits. At any rate, Bara finally asked the guy if his name was Harding. "Yes."

Were you a ball turret gunner? "Yes."  
Were you on Smith's crew in the 401st?  
"Yes." Hell! I'm Bara, your tail gunner!

Well, Harding had been to three previous get-togethers and this was the first time he'd ever found anyone he'd known. He said he just started shaking, and then he stammered out the question, "Is anyone else from the crew here?"

I had spent quite some time with Bara and his wife at lunch and around the motel, but we had gotten separated when it came to getting on the busses. So Paul looked around, and not seeing me, said "Woody's here, but he must be on the other bus." Harding said he just started shaking more. This was just TOO MUCH! As soon as they got off the bus, Mary Bara pointed me out to him, standing over by the nose-wheel of that C5A. He ran up to me and said something like, "Hey, does this sound familiar? 'Engineer from ball turret!'---?"

I was speechless. I damned near kissed him and I had to fight back the tears. We had been really close, almost as though he was my kid brother, and I had considered him dead ever since he'd gone down. We had never received a report of his being a P.O.W., partially due to the fact that he'd spent so much time in German hospitals with his left forearm shot up so badly."

The Eighth Air Force Historical Society is sponsoring an 8th AF Friendship Holiday tour to England and Europe in September, 1980. Since this comes in the same general time frame as our National Reunion the 91st cannot take part as an association, but some individual members may like to join the tour. Or some 91sters may like to become members of the 8th AF Historical Society, which is a composite association with members from all 8th AF units. If you desire tour information, write 8th Friendship Holiday, P.O. Box 1304, Hallandale, Florida 33009. For Society membership write 8th AF Historical Society, 495 NE 157th Ter., Miami, Fl. 33162.

Al Marcus, ex-401st sqdn. mickey operator and his wife visited the old stomping grounds of Bassingbourn, Royston, Cambridge, etc. in October for the first time since WW II.

Howell Loper, former 323rd squadron member, has had copies made of the original shot of the 323rd personnel posed on and around a B-17. As many of you recall, each squadron made such a shot of its members. Over the years many have lost their personal copies or they have become badly damaged. If any 323rd member would like a copy Howell says they can be obtained for \$8 plus postage. His address is 304 W. Frierson Ave., Tampa, Fla. 33603. Howell retired last April and reports he is enjoying it highly.

Ken Cochran suggests that it would be appropriate to again remind those 91sters who did not get their awards and campaign medals before leaving the service that it is not too late. Send your name, service number, approximate dates of service and copies of any documents supporting the claim to:

Military Campaign Medals  
Director, Air Force Records Center  
9700 Page Boulevard  
St. Louis, Mo. 63132

One of the projects some 91sters took part in at the time of the Bassingbourn Prop Memorial was the purchase of trees to replace the elm avenue at Wimpole Hall that used to direct crews to the main runway. The restored Wimpole Hall and the new avenue of trees was officially opened on July 9, 1979. Evan Zillmer was on hand for the 91st.

For several years some 91sters have been helping Ab A. Jansen, the Dutch air historian and associate member of the Memorial Association, gather material for a series of books on the air war over Holland in WW II. Volume 1 of "Trails in the Sky" has been published. The first copies were presented to U.S. representatives at Camp New Amsterdam, Sesterberg Air Base, on November 5. Volume 1 covers raids on 27 January, '43, 4 February '43, 26 February '43, 4 March '43, 21 May '43, 25 June '43, 26 and 28 July, and the Regensburg/Schweinfurt raids of 17 August '43. It contains much material from Luftwaffe sources also. Vol. 2 will cover Sept. '43 till Feb. '44. Vol. 3 will cover Feb. '44 till May '45.

Approximately 23 91sters took part in the 8th Air Force Historical Association mini-reunion in Phoenix at the end of September. About 1500 former 8th AF members attended the event.

Attending from the 91st were: Mr. & Mrs. Oscar Mouton, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Clapp, Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Gibson, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Hadd, Mr. & Mrs. Roy VanDyke and daughter, Mr. & Mrs. Delmar Kaech, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Cluck, Mr. & Mrs. John Kurylo, Mr. & Mrs. Oliver K. Birch, Henry Tilley, Paul McDuffee, Anthony Starcer. Several other 91sters were believed to be present but were not recorded on the official list.

In recent months the Air Force has become increasingly concerned about the future of the "Memphis Belle," which has been looking for a home for several years now. Col. Robert K. Morgan, who piloted the Belle and who has played an active role in preservation efforts for the plane, passes along the work that at long last it appears that efforts to keep the plane in Memphis appear to be succeeding. The Air Force, which still owns the plane, is disturbed with the deteriorating condition of the plane and has suggested moving the plane to the Air Museum in Dayton if a suitable home is not found in Memphis and the plane restored to its original condition.

The Memphis Belle Association has been working hard on the project and it now appears likely that arrangements will be completed soon to provide a satisfactory home for the big bird. Since several proposals are being debated it will be several months before precise details can be revealed.

After 31 years with Auburn University, 26 heading up the journalism program, the editor of The Ragged Irregular retired October 6. Several hundred former students returned to the campus for the occasion. At the retirement dinner the Lieutenant Governor of Alabama presented the editor with a Joint Resolution of the State Legislature commending him for his services to the state. Special note was made in the Joint Resolution of his association with the 91st Bomb Group in WW II.



A remarkable book many of you may be interested in is "The Army Air Force in World War II - Combat Chronology 1941-1945." It is for sale by the Supt. of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. The stock number to order is 0870-00334. This book covers every mission flown by every Air Force Unit from Dec. 7, 1941 to Sept. 15, 1945.

One of the biggest helps to 91st members for years has been the work of Bob DeGeorge, former 323rd navigator, for his time and efforts in producing computerized mailing labels used on 91st mailings.

As a computer consultant, Bob has been performing this service for many years on a no-charge basis. His generous donation has greatly reduced the work load of those persons responsible for addressing your letters as well as saving the association a considerable amount of money over the years.

Bob and his lovely wife Georgette, reside at 2414 Dale Road, Huntingdon Valley, Pa. 19006.

The officers of both Eastern and Western Divisions, past and present, wish to thank Bob for his work.

Newest Life Member is Bert M. Mullins of 206 Helena St., Bryan, Texas. Bert was a member of the 323rd sqdn. He and his wife have been most active participants in 91st reunions and rally rounds.

We have learned recently of the deaths of three former 91sters: Alan Bradley McHolland, former belly turret gunner, died at Veterans Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, October 15; Bill B. Baker, ex-401st sqdn., of Corpus Christi, Texas, died June 3, 1978, and Jay Eberhart, Adel, Iowa (details not available.)

DOVER AFB, DEL--It looked like a pair of B-17 wings might overcome the C-5 until a little bit of Air Force ingenuity solved the problem. Personnel of the 512 MAW had been assigned a training mission to move inboard wing sections of a B-17 wing from

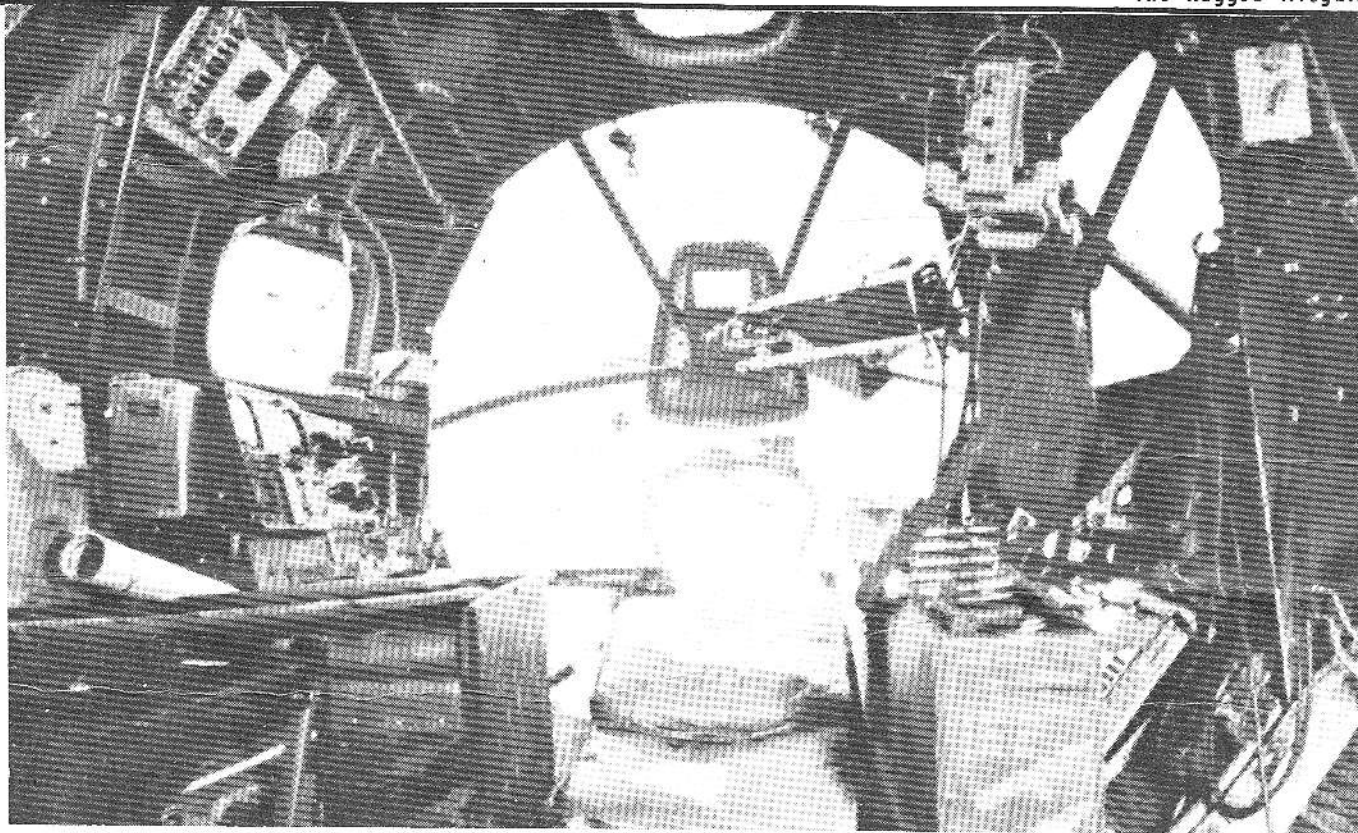
Davis-Monthan, Az., to Dover AFB for the Air Force Museum for use in the restoration of "Shoo Shoo Baby" being done by volunteer personnel of the 512th MAW.

Even the gigantic C-5 has limitations and the wings were two inches wider than the 162-inch height of the C-5's cargo area. Since pushing or squeezing wasn't going to solve the problem, Reserve Master Sergeant Edward Perkowski and his fellow loadmasters found a way to trim a few inches of metal off the wing section and make the tight fit as the C-5 swallowed up another unique oversized load.

Back in July 1978, a C-5 had moved "Shoo Shoo Baby"-- fuselage, wing parts and assorted crates-- from the Air Force Museum in Ohio to Dover AFB, but the wings had been chopped into almost unrepairable parts by a maintenance crew in France when the B-17 had been shipped by truck from Paris to Frankfurt, Germany. The new wing section will allow the reservists to put the World War II bomber back into flying condition for a hoped-for flight back to the Air Force Museum.



Here's a great shot of the 323rd sqdn. mascot Bill, not astride the bomb he's pictured riding in the official squadron insignia, but snuggled up to his good buddy and owner Bob Abb.



Here is an unusual nose shot of one of the 91st's early B-17Fs. Notice the right-hand .50 calibre and the flexible .30 in the nose. No left-hand gun at all.



Doesn't this make you homesick? These neat and sweet quarters housed part of the 324th squadron. That's also a mighty fine pin-up collection.

## Don't Forget Your 1980 Dues