



91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

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Missions With Charlie...

This article originally appeared in the March, 1944 issue of American Legion magazine. Maj. C. Carlton Brechler, the author, was the Group public relations officer from the first days of the 91st. Brechler died December 31, 1977. At the time of his death he was Manager, Western Region, Public Relations Staff, General Motors Corp., based in Los Angeles.

He joined the AAF in June, 1942, and went to England with the 91st in September, 1942. He returned to the U.S. in November, 1945, one of the first over and last to return. After his service with the 91st he was assigned to 8th AF Headquarters.

Charles Hudson began his career as a 401st bombardier, later becoming Group bombardier. He flew two tours with the 91st. He holds the Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross with 3 clusters, Air Medal with 5 clusters, Purple Heart, and the French Croix De Guerre. He attributes any success he accomplished there to "A



Charlie Hudson (center) with four 323rd sqdn. crew members. Left to right, Shorty Johnson, ball turret gunner; Beauford Brush, tail gunner; Hudson; Jim Belville, waist gunner; Ted Wyzkoski, waist gunner.

few outstanding combat men -- Bill Jewett, Hillary Evers, Bob Roberts, Bill Borrellis, Bruce Moore, John Wallace, Mike Rheam, and John Davis. There are many more, but these are outstanding in my nostalgic mind."

After the war Charlie turned to professional golf and has been a PGA member for more than 30 years, associated now with the Jackson Lakes Golf Course in Lemoore, CA. He played an active part in the helicopter escape of two prisoners from the Mexico Prison in 1972. A movie called "Breakout" was made of the affair, starring Charles Bronson. Hudson was in the original cast as a pilot.

An Eighth AAF Bomber
Command Station, England.

You've been reading newspaper stories about the aerial offensive over Europe by General Eaker's Eighth Air Force. You must know that it's tough sledding because you'll undoubtedly recall the day sixty American bombers were lost in a single attack on Schweinfurt, Germany.

But the European air war isn't tough merely because planes are being lost. How would you like to ride along on some combat missions and see for yourself what can happen up there in the brilliant sunlight and freezing thin air five miles above Germany in that little world which is a Flying Fortress with its ten-man crew? You may be certain there will be drama and excitement aplenty, but if you can't stand the sight of blood, perhaps it's best that you stay on the ground and stick to reading headlines.

Charlie Hudson came to this base a few weeks ago, a 29-year-old bombardier fresh from the States. He's a rugged ruddy-faced Irishman who used to be a "roughneck" in the oilfields around Kern County, California, and fought sixty-three bouts as an amateur welterweight. He sounds like a good man to ride with, so let's crawl up into the nose and follow him on his second combat mission.

This morning Charlie is flying in a Fort named the "Buccaneer." The target is Frankfurt, deep in the Reich. It is a day few of the men will forget because twin-engined Messerschmitt 110's keep circling the bomber formations trying something new. They are firing rockets. Nearing the target there is a panic-stricken cry on the gravel-voiced interphone. It's the plane's radio gunner.

"Sir! The two waist gunners are lying on the floor back here. They're dying, I tell you, they're dying!"

Charlie slips out of his armored flak suit, puts on a portable "walk-around" oxygen bottle and mask and starts back to the waist. On the way he grabs two more walk-around bottles from the cockpit and radio room.

The one waist gunner, Jim, is lying on his back, unconscious. He is a hideous blue and frost covers his face and clings to his eyebrows. The other gunner, Harry, though conscious, is sitting in a stupor, unable to move. He has vomited on the floor.

Charlie slaps the frost off Jim's face, and puts one of the temporary oxygen masks on him, then puts another on the other casualty. He tries the two guns and finds both are frozen and out of commission, so he closes the waist windows to cut out some of the freezing gale which is whipping through the ship. As he closes the right window he notices that they must be approaching Frankfurt. Hastily he props the unconscious Jim between two ammunition boxes so that his regular mask, now hooked into an undamaged oxygen line, will reach his face.

At that altitude every step is sheer labor, and though he is exhausted, Charlie struggles the length of the bomber in time to work over his instruments up in the nose and get his bombs away on the target.

Back at the home station the "Buccaneer" fires two red flares as it comes in for a landing. To the people on the ground this signal means "wounded aboard," and an ambulance speeds to meet the taxiing ship. Charlie Hudson sighs: "I'm the tiredest I've ever been in my life," and heads for his bunk.

A couple of days later Jim and Harry are none the worse for their experience, though at least one of them owes his life to Charlie.

Well, that wasn't too bad. How about going on another of Charlie's missions? This one is to Bremen. The ship has a nude painted on the nose and is named "Hell's Belle."

Far out over the North Sea the pilot of the ship flying alongside the Belle calls up on the radio: "The door has come off your ball turret and the gunner is falling out head first. He's hanging out in the slipstream with his head, shoulders and most of his Mae West outside the turret."

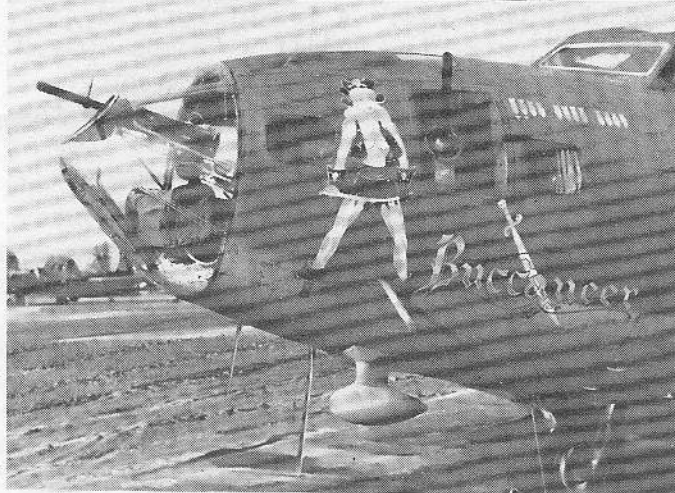
Once again Charlie jumps out of his flak suit, grabs a couple of walk-around bottles and heads back through the ship. Meanwhile the ball turret gunner has managed to pull himself back into the turret and has rotated the power-operated turret so that the open door is inside the ship. But he has caught his head in the mechanism on the way up.

When Charlie reaches the turret he finds the sergeant limp, with his head hanging and blood pouring over his face and into the bottom of the turret. His forehead is cut nearly from ear to ear, about an inch above his eyebrows, and part of his scalp is cut back like a peeled orange. Charlie grasps him under the armpits, and struggling against his own weakness due to lack of sufficient oxygen, slowly drags him out of the turret. The blood running over the sergeant's face is freezing and he is choking on chunks of ice. Charlie puts his finger in the boy's mouth and removes the ice. Then he takes off his own oxygen mask and places it over the gunner's face. Charlie's face is covered with the other fellow's blood, and he finds that he, too, has been hit by something over the eye and that some of his own blood is streaming down his face.

A thousand jumbled reactions and thoughts rush through Charlie's brain in a fleeting moment. He even recalls a recent newspaper story and considers parachuting the wounded gunner out over enemy territory, hoping a German doctor will find him before it is too late.

Crawling into the radio room he gets himself an oxygen mask and then passes out for a few moments from sheer exhaustion. When he comes to he returns to the ball turret gunner, slits the arm of his jacket with a knife, administers a shot of morphine from a nearby first aid kit, drags the boy into the radio room and plugs in his heated suit.

The ship is nearing the target, and once again Charlie drags himself up to the nose from where he can already see Bremen's



drydocks. Once again a lot of hurried, minute adjustments, and it's "bombs away." Then he mans one of the nose guns until the friendly fighter escort arrives on the scene, when he returns to the radio room to comfort the injured gunner as much as possible.

Back at the base there are red flares and the sergeant is rushed to a general hospital. A few weeks later he is back on the base with a scar across his forehead little worse than another wrinkle, thanks to the skill of his doctors.

That was Charlie's third trip. Early next morning the map in the intelligence briefing room shows a string running half-way across Europe to the Pomeranian village of Anklam, seventy-five miles north of Berlin. The target is a vital German factory making component parts for their crack Focke-Wulf fighters. This is deeper into Germany than the Forts have ever been before. Charlie is flying in "Lightning Strikes." On the nose there is a cartoon showing a bolt of lightning knocking the shingles of a Chic Sale, with Hitler dashing out the door with his pants down. Let's climb aboard and go on one more trip.

To the Nazis this attack must look as if it were headed for Berlin. They send up nearly 350 fighters of every description which stay with the Forts for more than three and a half hours. One of "Lightning Strikes" engines is knocked out of commission going into the target and another is hit and starts smoking. After Charlie cries "bombs away," there is a loud WHO-O-M and a crash as a flak burst wrecks the hydraulic system, making it impossible to close the bomb bay doors. The trail of smoke, the open doors and the one stilled propeller are an invitation to enemy fighters. The Nazis prey on crippled bombers. And "Lightning Strikes" is flying "tail-end Charlie" at the rear of the formation, down in what the flyers call the "Purple Heart Corner." It looks as though Charlie Hudson is due for his Purple Heart.

Charlie and the navigator are sweating over their nose guns and the great bomber is vibrating as gunners throughout the ship pour out their protective fire. A flak fragment crashes through the nose glass, hitting Charlie on his left wrist. His feet fly up in the air and he is sent sprawling in a heap of spent shells on the floor. The



Capt. Charles S. Hudson receives the Distinguished Service Cross from the 91st Commanding Officer, Col. Henry W. Terry, for heroic action on the Anklam mission.



Charlie's feats achieved worldwide recognition in Ripley's Believe It Or Not.

fragment put a hole through his wrist the size of a silver dollar, breaking the bone. Moore, the navigator, helps him to his feet and attempts to give him first aid.

"Get back to your gun and keep firing at the so-and-so's. I'm all right," Charlie insists. Then he takes out his knife and cuts a slit from wrist to elbow through his leather jacket, flying suit, sweat shirt and pajamas. After giving himself a shot of morphine, he pokes his wounded arm through the low slung neck of his Mae West life preserver, using it as a sort of sling, and returns to his heavy 50-caliber machine gun, maneuvering it, aiming it and firing it with his right hand.

He notices that the Fortress on his right wing is gone. (It didn't return to England.) Then a fighter attacks the bomber on his left wing, setting three engines ablaze. The ship pulls away to one side. Apparently the pilot has sounded the bail-out alarm. Four parachutes blossom out and then the ship disintegrates in mid-air with a terrific explosion. It must have been the gas tanks. The tail spins crazily in one direction, the wheels in another, and debris fills the air looking like a slow motion film. Bodies can be seen pinwheeling upward. Then, right in the midst of the smoke and debris, a parachute mysteriously opens up and floats away. Charlie looks away. He doesn't want to see more. He resumes firing.

Again there is a whoo-oo-oom and Charlie feels a searing pain as another piece of flak comes through the nose, burying itself in his already wounded left arm. He is knocked sprawling again, but scrambles back to his gun and tries to continue firing it. But the Fort is going through violent evasive action, diving, climbing and slipping, one moment flying with the top element, the next with the lower.

Then Charlie fires his last cartridge.

The navigator goes back to the radio room to get some more ammunition. Too exhausted to carry a heavy boxful, he takes off the lid, grabs one end of the cumbersome 350-round belt and staggers back through the ship dragging the long chain of bullets behind him...across the narrow catwalk through the open bom bay...over the base of the top turret where the gunner reaches down between bursts to help inch the belt along... under the cockpit where the co-pilot leans down to give a few tugs... down into the nose where it takes both men to load the gun...and the firing resumes.

There is another explosion and pieces of metal come through the roof, lacerating Charlie's right arm twice, above and below the elbow. Charlie is down on the canvas for the third time in one round, but his fighting blood brings him back to his machine gun. That ship must get home to England!

Now the plane is out over the North Sea. The smoking engine stops running altogether and "Lightning Strikes" falls farther and farther behind the disappearing formation, unable to maintain sufficient speed. Dropping down nearly to water level for protection against pursuing fighters, they head for home barely skimming the whitecaps. Moore pores over his maps and keeps an eye open for check-points on the English coast. The fuel is low.

With no brakes, due to the damaged hydraulic system, the ship lands at the home base firing red flares to attract the ambulance. The pilot guns the engine on one side taxiing the ship around in a big curve across the grass of the field, and it finally comes to a stop. Charlie is removed and speeded to a hospital.

After twenty-eight days of stitching, skin grafting and bone setting, he is back on the base, ready to go on his fifth mission as soon as they take the cast off his arm.

Now you've been on three bombing missions with Charlie Hudson. If you go on two more they may give you the Air Medal, but you'd have a long way to go if you wanted to stick with him until he finishes his tour of combat operations in this theater.

No one was killed or permanently crippled on these three missions, and all three ships returned to the home base safely.

The missions were a success.

But now you see the difficulties, the pain, the hardships and the blood which lie behind those headlines you've been scanning. And the next time you read the newspaper, or go to work at the plant, or consider buying some war bonds, remember your three missions with Charlie Hudson.

Notes From The President...

The location of the 1984 reunion has been determined by you, the members. The method of selection was discussed at the 1982 reunion business meeting and reviewed in the October and January issues of The Ragged Irregular. Results of the vote indicate it wasn't even a horse race: Colorado Springs won hands down. The final tally was: Colorado Springs (84); Brownsville (27); Long Beach (21); Seattle (16); Rapid City (10); and San Francisco (1).

Member hosts for Colorado Springs can now set about the time consuming task of putting together the 1984 reunion: Motel/hotel accommodations (availability, date and cost negotiation); arrangements for dinner dance, music, "Pene's Pub," business meeting facility, etc.; coordinating visits to areas of local interest within time frame of motel availability; transportation, and coordinating all the foregoing with your elected officers who, through this publication, will keep you posted on a current basis.

The time and out-of-pocket expenses dedicated by reunion and rally-round hosts are not incalculable. However, I have never seen an accounting wherein any of them have sought reimbursement. Their dedication is motivated by a love for their fellow 91sters.

The paid membership, including associate members, at the end of 1982 was 1,121 in comparison to 1,014 in the preceding year. Not bad for an aging group, as we did lose some loved ones during 1982. Preliminary dues data indicate 1983 also could show yet another increase.

The last report to you on our money situation reflected a net worth of \$4,799 at the end of 1981. As of 31 December 1982, that amount had increased to \$6,202. This is not as excessive as it appears on the surface, for in odd years your updated directory is printed and disseminated to each member whose dues are paid. The directory is the single greatest expense incurred by your association. The 1983 directory will be going to the printers soon.

Let's all make 1983 another banner year for the 91st!

Tom Gunn.

From The Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett Box 909 Auburn, Al. 36830

Vice-president Glenn Boyce, of Lakewood, CO. (in the Denver metropolitan area) is hosting another of his regular Rocky Mountain Rally Rounds for area 91sters May 14.

While details are not complete, activities planned include a tour of Coors Brewery and dinner at the Lakewood Elks Lodge. The meeting will also enable area members to coordinate their ideas for the 1984 National Reunion, set for Colorado Springs.

President Tom Gunn plans to be on hand for the Rally Round.

For additional details contact: Glenn Boyce, 1874 South Hoyt St., Lakewood, CO. 80226. Telephone (303) 986-8040.

The restoration crew rebuilding "Shoo Shoo Baby" has been searching for four years for information concerning the "bar-

red waist windows" used on the plane. No Boeing blueprints or technical drawings survived. This type of waist gunner's window was used only for a relatively short time, and little usable information has been found.



If anyone has any photographs showing

closeups of inside or outside of this window, or any AAF Tech orders or factory manuals giving any part numbers or technical information, please contact; 512 MA/AARG, Dover AFB, DE. 19902.

Mike Leister, who has been Director of the restoration program, is stepping down after 4½ years, and Ray McCloskey is taking over the job. Ray has been largely responsible for rebuilding both inboard wings and much of the other "heavy maintenance." He reports that both inboard wings are now on! Mike will be taking over as curator of the "mini-museum" and continuing to work toward the restoration.

On March 24 Mike visited Bassingbourn and presented a slide show on the restoration to the East Anglian Aviation Society. A plaque made of a piece of Shoo Shoo Baby's skin was presented to Vince Hemmings for the Tower Museum, with the following inscription: Shoo Shoo Baby, B-17G, Serial #42-32076. This skin was removed during restoration from the last surviving B-17G that flew in combat. For all who sacrificed so much WE REMEMBER. From 512th Antique Aircraft Restoration Group. 91st Bomb Group Mem. Assn. March 1983.

A number of photographs of the restoration and a litho of the plane in flight were also given.

Says Mike: "Tuesday, June 28 is open house at Dover AFB and the Thunderbirds will be performing in their new F-16s. Shoo Shoo Baby has both inboard wings on and should be sitting on her landing gear by then. Stop by and visit with us."

In the January Ragged Irregular Maury Herman told of his meeting with two fellow 91sters from Stalag Luft III in Sagan during the picture-taking session at the Dayton reunion, and their reliving of old experiences there. Unfortunately, a slip of the ear led Maury to mistake one of the names -- he heard Ken Carson, instead of Bill Corson, who was the person he was talking to -- a former resident of Block 130, Stalag Luft III, Sagan. Bill Corson is from Lebanon, OH. Ken, of Granville, OH., was never a POW and did not attend the reunion.

The letter from Maury drew more response than any story in quite a while -- especially the reference to the Death March from Sagan to Mooseberg, when more than

600 POW's died. Hubert Carpenter of Pittsburg, Texas, who was at Stalag Luft III also, sent a copy of a diary kept during the march, and a copy of the book "Kriegie" which tells the story. Numerous others sent their recollections. We plan to run the accounts in the July R/I.



Summer's coming! Now's the time to get your family and friends one of our new Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby T-shirts. Many parts are still needed to make the Baby air-worthy. Jan, our Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby T-Shirt girl says that for every \$10 contribution sent for restoration to W.W. Hill, 4002 Braddock Rd., Alexandria, VA. 22312, along with your T-shirt size and return address, you will receive a copy of the shirt shown above. To date we have contributed \$2500 to the restoration project.

The 36th annual national American Ex-Prisoners of War Reunion will be held in Cleveland, Ohio, July 20-22. Hosts will be the Barbedwire Buckeyes. Headquarters will be Stouffers Inn On the Square.

Any 91sters who escaped from the Nazis or evaded capture who is not already a member of the Air Forces Escape & Evasion Society may be interested in joining this active organization. Contact Heyward C. Spinks, P.O. Box 844, Beaufort, S.C., 29902 for information.

There has been a flurry of 91sters who have sent along their \$100 donations to become gold card Life Members recently.

Setting a record for crew Life Memberships is the crew that flew in Time's A' Wastin from August '44 to March '45. Life member Don Ballou, gunner, gave a Life Membership for pilot John J. Ondrovic at the Dayton reunion, and made Christmas gifts of Life Memberships for Paul J. Limm, navigator; Robert V. Manson, bombardier; Edwin Walczak, gunner, and Ben W. Whittle, gunner. Six from one crew!

New "Lifers" include 1st vice-president Sam Cipolla, of Chicago; Maj. Charles S. Hadd Sr., (USAF Ret), ex-322nd sqdn., of Phoenix, AZ.; Waldo U. Bowen, Jr., ex-324th sqdn. bombardier, of Conyers, Ga.; LTC. George S. McEwen (Ret), ex-324th sqdn., Applegate, OR.; R. Howard Tolbert, ex-401st, and Dr. Dennis E. Petrie, associate member.

Evan and Doris Zillmer were among the 91sters who made a return visit to Bassingbourn in 1982, visiting the Tower Museum, attending a meeting of the East Anglian Aviation Society, the American Cemetery at Madingley, and Alconbury AFB. Evan, a Life Member, flew two tours with the 91st, 60 missions as a flight engineer and top turret gunner with the 324th sqdn., flying with Freeman Beasley and John Westwood. Doris and Evan recommend the first week in September as the best time to visit, and Doris, a native of Cambridgeshire, should know!

We have received information since our last issue of the deaths of five former 91st members:

Stuart McArthur, ex-1st Station Complement, and former postmaster of Ashford, AL., died January 2, 1983, after suffering two heart attacks December 31.

Dr. Nick Chima, ex-324th sqdn. navigator, an oral surgeon of Rialto, CA., died of cancer November 6, 1982. Nick was the brother of C.P. Chima, 322nd sqdn. pilot. He flew his first mission with Chink, and got credit for an FW-190 kill. It was probably the only time in the 8th that brothers flew on the same crew.

Bruno C. Stanczyk, ex-322nd sqdn. tail gunner on Bruce Barton's crew in Chief Sly and Chief Sly II, (the editor's crew), of Cleveland, OH., died January 29, 1983.

Jim Bedwell passes along the information that John D. Pearson, ex-441st Sub Depot, of Cedar Hill, Texas, died in "September or October" of 1982.

Russell T. Larson, ex-323rd sqdn., of Indian Harbor Beach, FL., died September 20, 1982.

POEM OF THE B-17
by Donald S. Heiser, 305BG

You hear folks talk of graceful yachts
that sail the seven seas,
And some will talk of streamlined trains
that cross the States with ease.
Some like bikes and scooters,
and some like limosines,
But give me the queen of the airways,
a throbbing B-17.

She looks massive at seat in the bunker,
not seeming to worry or care.
But as each engine roars into life,
She is eager to take to the air.
She strains at the end of the runway,
impatient to soar into flight,
Once airbourne she is graceful and steady,
and ready to show off her might.

She's a nasty devil in combat,
with guns spewing lead from each side,
And tho bullets and shrapnel may pierce
her,
no Jerry or Jap will injure her pride.
No matter how much she is wounded
no matter the odds she must face,
She knows it is her dying duty
to return you safe to your base.

So when this war is all over
and the earth has been rid of the scum,
You will be able to look at the records
and see what the Fortress has done.
Then when my last flight is scheduled,
and I leave this earthly scene,
Please let me fly up to Heaven
In my own B-17.