



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 15 No. 4

January, 1983

How We Closed Up Bassingbourn

BY COL. ALFRED C. KRUEGER (Ret)

Editor's Note: Alfred Krueger joined the 91st July 10, 1942 at Walla Walla, and stayed with the group till May 30, 1945. Starting with the 324th Sqdn. as Mess Officer and Supply Officer, he served as Group Transportation Officer, Adjutant, and Executive Officer. After closing Bassingbourn he closed another station, returning to the States in February, 1946. He retired as a manager for Bank of America branches in 1974. He and his wife Mig spend much of their time sailing and racing their $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton Santana at the Navy Yacht Club, Long Beach, CA.

I was among the first of the 91st Bomb Group to arrive at Bassingbourn in 1942, settling in before the first B-17s arrived, and I was one of the last to leave, so that probably makes me the veteran of the Ragged Irregulars!

When the war in Europe ended in 1945 I volunteered to act as Holding Officer for the station. We had a staff of fifty to take inventory of everything on the base and to see that American equipment was shipped out and RAF material left behind and in good shape, ready to be turned over to the British Government. No one gave us written procedures for this process, so we operated mainly under common sense and the willingness to get the job done.

We accounted for millions of dollars worth of trucks, planes, spare parts, tractors, machinery, tools, supplies, armament, office furniture, bedding, kitchenware, lights, and even pictures - a whole range of paraphernalia which belonged to the United States and had to be removed. US property was taken by truck loads to dispersal areas all over England; we were warned to tell no one about the movement of troops and materials or their destinations. RAF property was inspected, mended, catalogued and locked up ready for hand-over. Thousands of English bicycles (many of them "borrowed") were left on the base by the departing troops, but at the request of the British government who feared that a sudden glut on the market would depress the local economy, the bikes were trucked to a dump on the west coast and there run over by tractors until the bikes were totally destroyed.

By the end of June, 1945, most of the physical things that you probably remember had been removed, leaving echoing,

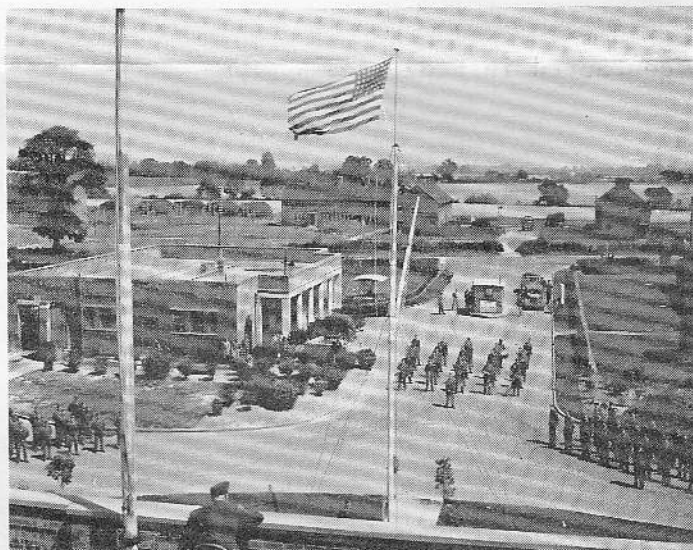


Maj. Alfred C. Krueger hands over the the "inventory" of Bassingbourn Station to the new RAF Commanding Officer.

empty buildings. It was an eerie feeling to be left at Bassingbourn in such a desolate void. The planes were gone and with them the constant noise we had all grown accustomed to; now the airfield was empty of jeeps, cars, trucks and people. In the buildings all the rooms were locked; friends had vanished from the corridors. As the inventory progressed it seemed more and more as though the Bassingbourn we knew had never existed. It was slowly being obliterated and un-Americanized. In fact, one of the most haunting memories of that time is seeing an RAF clean-up crew come in during the last few days and set to work dismantling the officers' bar, painting over the room's walls and ceiling as well as whiting-out the names of the squadron planes on the Operations Wall of the 324th Bomb Sqdn. It was as though the returning rightful owners were denying that the USAAF had ever been in residence. As wartime activities continued to wind down, the RAF in those days seemed to feel an urgency to "get back to normal."

On the Sunday afternoon of July 15th, 1945, Bassingbourn was returned to the RAF. We held a joint parade of fifty USAAF and fifty RAF, accompanied by a smart 30-piece USAAF band which was sent for the occasion. It was a very emotional moment for us all when the Stars and Stripes was hauled down and the RAF ensign hoisted once more. A large number of special guests and spectators watched as we celebrated this final wind-up to an incredible three years. There were many wet eyes among the audience, according to the Hertfordshire and Cambridge Reporter.

They printed a picture of Squadron Leader H.R. Evans and me as I handed over the envelope supposedly containing the completed inventory -- actually a wad of toilet paper, since the huge inventory consisted of several bulky files. Evans, the new Commanding Officer of RAF Bassingbourn, also accepted the American flag which, the RAF said, was "to be lodged in the Station Church." The newspaper item ends, "Goodbye, Yanks, thanks a lot."



The final ceremony -- handing Bassingbourn back to the RAF, July 15, 1945.

Where To For The 1984 Reunion?

Where do we go for the 1984 National Reunion? Following the Dayton Reunion in September, Group President Tom Gunn asked for recommendations in addition to those sites put forth at the 1982 business meeting, so that 91st members might choose the most popular site for the next get-together. There were only three restrictions on site choices -- there must be at least two willing workers there who would take on the heavy responsibilities for setting up the reunion, it must be easily accessible and with adequate facilities, and it must be west of the Mississippi River, in keeping with the policy of alternating between eastern and western sections of the U.S. when planning reunions.

As of the January 5 deadline no additional sites beyond those published in the October Ragged Irregular that fully qualify have been suggested. That list included Brownsville, Texas; Colorado Springs, CO.; Rapid City, S.D.; Long Beach, CA., and Seattle, WA. The Seattle nomination carried the proviso that the Reunion be delayed till 1985, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the B-17. A couple of persons suggested San Francisco but there were no volunteers to honcho the affair there.

To facilitate the choice of a site, each member is asked to drop a note to Sec.-Treas. George Parks not later than March 20, indicating whether you would prefer Brownsville, Colorado Springs, Rapid City, Long Beach, or Seattle, so the results can be given in the April Ragged Irregular.

Shoo Shoo Baby Progress Report

Restoring a vandalized near-40-year-old aircraft to like-new condition is a time-consuming, tedious, and frustrating job, but the annual report on the 512th Antique Aircraft Restoration Group's progress in rebuilding the 91st "Shoo Shoo (Shoo) Baby" shows that Mike Leister's crew is making steady and excellent progress. In their November, 1982 restoration update on the various portions of the aircraft the group has this to report:

Cockpit: Brake lines and actuators installed. Instrument panel frame installed. Instrument tubing installed. Some overhead panels and radio gear installed. Beginning work on replacement and repair of side panels.

Bomb Bay: Electrical junction boxes on sides begun. More work on bomb racks.

Radio Room: Eighty per cent of radio equipment installed. New fully serviceable wiring installed. Some radio equipment installed and on the air. Operators in Canada contacted in radio test.

Wings: Inboard: Right - Installed on aircraft, taper pins reamed and tightened per T.O. instruction, rewired magneto harness and gen control wiring. Corrosion treated and installed 95 per cent of right wing air ducts, deicer boot distributor valve and tubing installed in right wing root.

Left - Ninety per cent re-skinned, interior refurbishing begun.

Outboard: None

Aft Fuselage: Trailing wire antenna motor and installation completed. Wiring harness started to install. Aft radio bulkhead equipment begun.

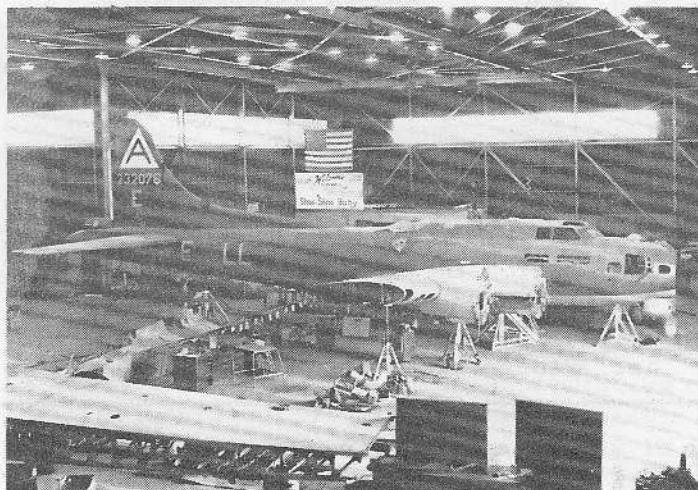
Props: Fully overhauled by Hamilton Standard and certified for 35 hours.

Miscellaneous: Engines found to be missing all log books -- they may have to be overhauled or replaced. Top turret located, still awaiting shipment.

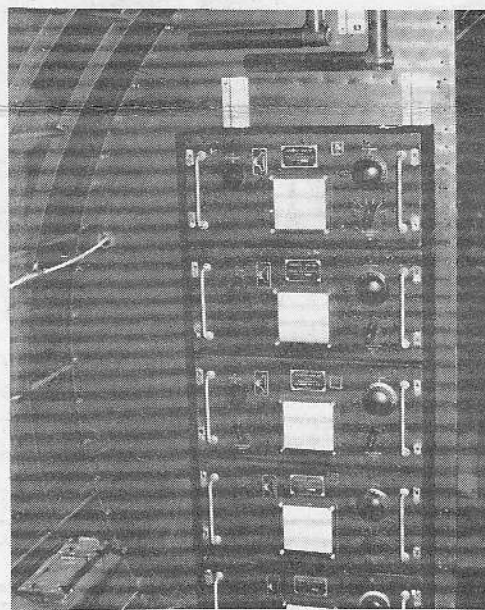
Bombardier's and Navigator's Compartment: None.

Tail: None.

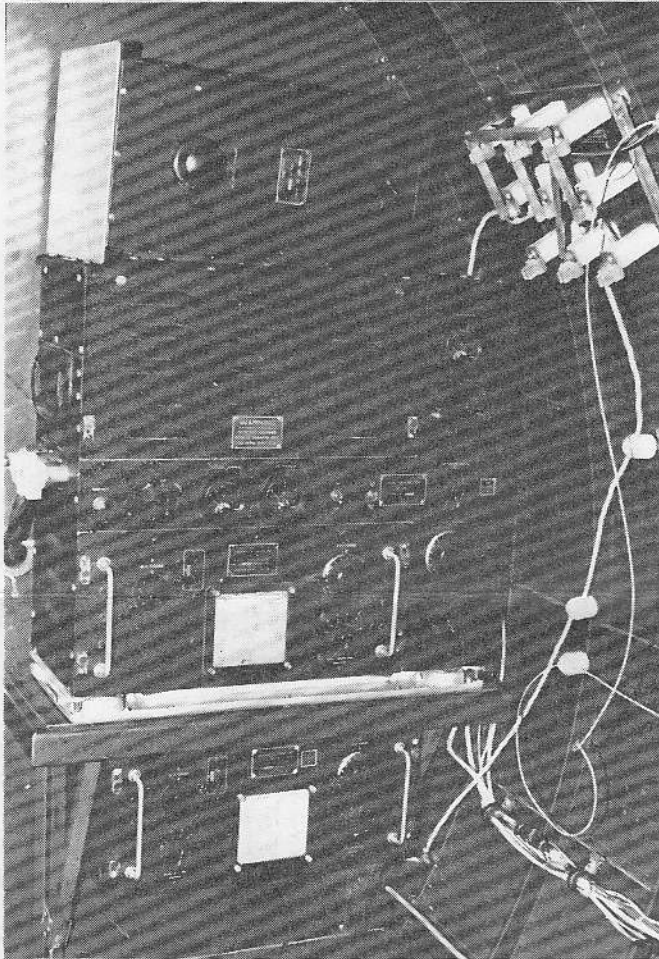
Horizontal and Vertical Stabilizers: None.



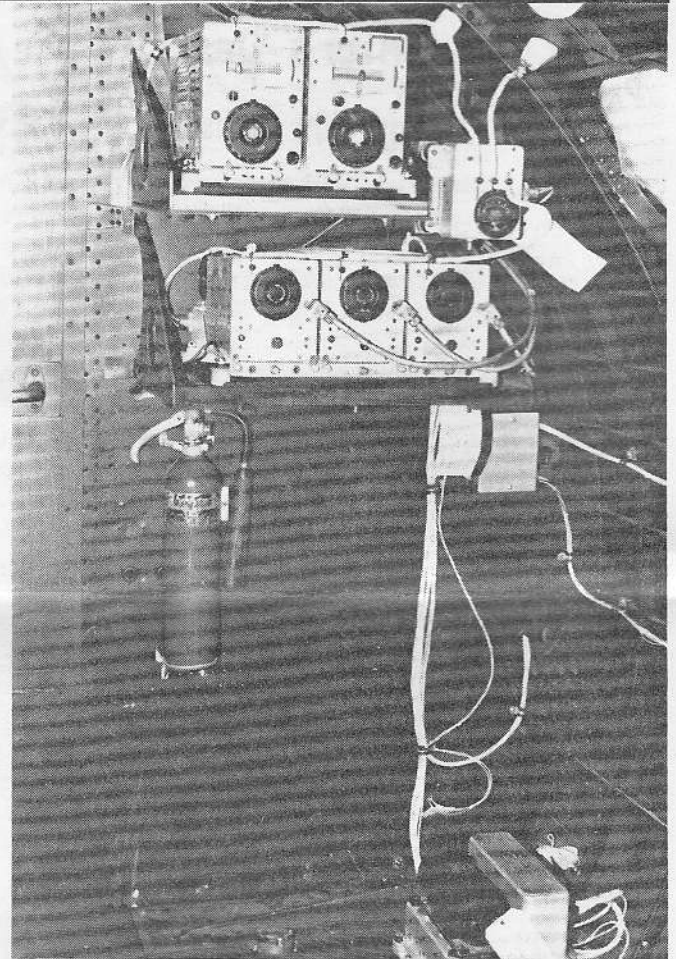
Overall View Of Exterior Restoration



Right Aft Radio Room Bulkhead



Left Aft Radio Room Bulkhead



Right Forward Radio Room Bulkhead



91st officers elected at the Dayton Reunion include, 1 to r: Col. Tom Gunn, president, at microphone; Cliff Burnett, editor-historian; George Parks, secretary-treasurer; Glenn Boyce, second vice-president; Sam Cipolla, first vice-president.



New Life Members recognized at the Dayton Reunion included, 1 to r: Don Pescot, Chuck Kirkham, Harold R. Harding, Bob DeGeorge, Robert J. Powers, James F. Daley, Sec. George Parks presenting Rigid Digit.

Don't Forget Your 1983 Dues

From the Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett

Box 909 Auburn, Al. 36830

Joe Giambrone, ex-324th sqdn., former crew chief of the "Memphis Belle," is getting together a group for a fifth anniversary return to the 91st B.G. Prop Memorial at Basingbourn "one more time," set for April 29-May 7. Joes passes along the word that he can still make room for a few more participants if they hurry. The program will be operated on a "first come-first served" basis, with a minimum of 30 persons and a maximum of 40 persons total.

The group will leave Boston Friday, April 29, arrive in London Saturday and remain there for Sunday and Monday sight-seeing. They will leave for Cambridge on Tuesday, and spend Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday in Cambridge, visiting attractions in the area, returning to London and the US on Saturday, May 7. Per person cost for the trip from Boston is \$1349 (2 in a room basis); single room supplement \$99. Flyers with complete details of the tour have been mailed to most 91st members.

Since this is not a group-sponsored tour all inquires should be sent directly to Joe Giambrone, 303 Brookdale Ave., Glenside, PA. 19038, or to Paul Chryst, Galaxy Tours, P.O. Box 45, King of Prussia, PA., 19406, telephone (800) 523-7287.

If you have not received all the medals, especially the campaign medals for which you are eligible, write to: National Personnel Record Center, 9700 Page Boulevard, St. Louis, Mo. 63132. If you are seeking medals for a deceased veteran, include a copy of the death certificate along with other records of service.

Be sure to list your squadron when you pay your dues. We are trying to add this information to our next directory, but we do not have it on a number of our members.

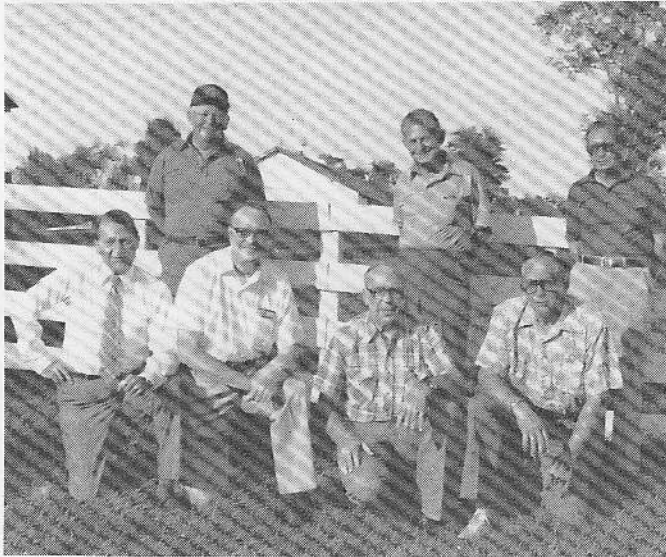
First vice-president Sam Cipolla advises that he can have plaques made up of the new memorial plaque dedicated at Dayton in brass or bronze, and a copy in plastic at a reasonable cost. If interested, write Sam at: 6818 N. Dowagiac Ave. Chicago, IL. 60646.

Group patches and the Ladies 91st neck-lace distributed at the Dayton reunion are still available from Sec.-Treas. Geo. Parks. The patches are \$5 and the necklaces \$3, which includes shipping. Contact George at 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, CA. 94591.



Don Pescot, of Buriton, England, accepts the Mug for the member travelling the greatest distance to attend the Dayton reunion. Pescot, a member of the RAF, spent 18 months at 91st headquarters, working as a counterpoint to 91ster Bill Cornwell.

Brownsville International Airport has passed along the following plug in helping Brownsville's bid for the 1984 National Reunion: "Brownsville, Texas' motto is "On the Border, by the Sea." The town where you can enjoy the enchantment of Mexico as well as its shopping bargains while having the amenities of the U.S. The beauty of South Padre Island is only minutes away, where you can fish, swim, or just sun. Brownsville has ample convention facilities for meetings free of charge, that can handle groups from a few hundred to 2,500 persons. No trip would be complete without a visit to the Confederate Air Force Museum, especially dedicated to preserving the heritage of WWII aircraft. Brownsville can be reached from any of 1,400 cities in the U.S. on either Continental or Ozark Airlines."



For the second reunion in a row the crew of Chuck Kirkham had more members in attendance than any other crew. This photo taken at a barbecue at the A. J. Jolly farm at Ft. Thomas, Kentucky, on the day following the Dayton reunion shows the crew: Front row, 1 to r: Ed Gates, co-pilot, Chesapeake Beach, Md.; Lauri E. Kivimaki, navigator, Seattle, Wash.; Charles M. Kirkham, pilot, Arlington, TX; Joe Frankie Jr., bombardier, Los Fresnos, TX. Back row: Wesley Rabedaux, waist gunner, Wilton, IA.; A.J. Jolly, ball turret gunner, Ft. Thomas, KY.; Emil F. De-Quardo, radio operator, Waukesha, WI. Missing were Calvin Perkins, waist gunner, Pagosa Springs, CO.; Edmond Floyd, tail gunner, deceased, and Harold Griswold, engineer, deceased. Photo by Kerttu Kivimaki.

One of our Swiss associate members is gathering information on American aircraft that went down in Switzerland during the war. He is trying to get in touch with crew members of three 91st planes: 42-31585 OR-B (Mount 'N' Ride) landed at Dubendorf 3-16-44; 42-10742 LL-Z, landed at Payerne 5-27-44; 42-10707 OR-Q, crashed at Obersaxen 7-19-44. If you can help, contact: Hans-Heiri Stapfer, Bergstrasse 35, CH-8810 Horgen/ZH, Switzerland.

A British researcher is eager to get in touch with ground crew members of the 401st plane "Old Faithful," and to get any pictures of the plane that he can find. If you can help, contact: Rex Poulton, 42 Sunnyhill Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3QJ England.

The Royal Air Force Bomber Command is building a Bomber Command Museum to stand alongside the Royal Air Force and Battle of Britain Museums at Hendon. It will stand as a permanent memorial to the 57,000 members of Bomber Command and 65,000 members of the U.S. 8th and 9th Air Forces who lost their lives during the strategic bombing offensive of World War II. They have launched an appeal to raise the 5 million dollars needed to finance the project. Any 91ster who would like to contribute to the project may contact: Flight Lieutenant A. St. J. Stevens, RAF, Bomber Command Museum Appeal, Royal Air Force Museum, Aerodrome Road, Hendon, London NW9 5LL England.

Fred Collins, who flew with the 493rd B.G., is trying to get information about his brother-in-law who flew with the 91st, S/Sgt. Joseph Uhrick, of Blaine, Ohio. Uhrick was killed probably 11-9-44, on his final mission for his tour. He usually flew in "Mary Lou." If you can help, contact: Frederick B. Collins Sr., Box 306 Quimby Ave., Blaine, Ohio 43909.

A British aviation enthusiast is hoping to contact 91sters familiar with two 91st planes that landed at his home area of Burton On Trent, Staffordshire, during the war. One plane was named "Ridge Runner," with nose art showing a hill billy running over a hill. The other was named "Big Dick," with the possibility of perhaps also being called "Ironbird." Contact: Eddie Walker, 32 Mill End Lane, Alrewas, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire DE13 7BY, England.



Six old buddies from the motor pool got together at the Dayton Reunion for this photo. Shown above are, bottom row, 1 to r, Joseph Camelleri, Andrew Manzano, and Richard Knutelsky. Back row, Edward Haller, Joseph Franke, and John Taylor.

M/Sgt. Otto Meikus (Ret), who has lived in Cambridge, England since his retirement, represented the 91st B.G. Memorial Association at the Memorial Day activities at Madingley Cemetary, laying the memorial wreath and providing the flowers for the 91st memorial altar bowl in the chapel there. Otto is the manager of a garage service department in Cambridge. He and his wife flew back to Wisconsin during the summer to visit his family.

There is nothing like a group reunion for overcoming time and distance to unite you with old buddies. Maury Herman passes along this story from the Dayton reunion:

January 28, 1945 and September 4, 1982 are roughly 13,715 days apart. Dayton, Ohio and Sagan, Germany are roughly 3,750 miles apart. But a picture-taking session following the reunion banquet overcame this time and distance interval for three former 91sters: Maury Herman of Ocean Springs, MS., Leonard Figie, of Central Square, N.Y., and Ken Carson, of Granville, OH. Each had been shot down in combat action over Germany, captured, and held prisoner of war at Stalag Luft III. Maury and Len were standing next to one another during preparation for a group picture of 401st squadron members. They struck up a conversation during which they learned that both had been POW's in the same compound (south) in Stalag Luft III. Maury asked Len what block he was in. ("Block" was the Luftwaffe term for a barracks). Len couldn't remember, so Maury asked him if he could remember who his combine mates were. ("Combine" is an RAF term for a group of POWs sharing the same space and resources within a Block). Len remembered a pilot whose foot dragged because of nerve, muscle, and tissue damage to his wounded foot, and the pilot who was the photographer for the "X" committee. (In the POW camps "X" always meant escape).

Maury exclaimed with amazement that those fellows were his combine mates also, in Block 126! He and Len had been room-mates since September of 1944, when Len had been captured. (Maury was captured in June, 1943.

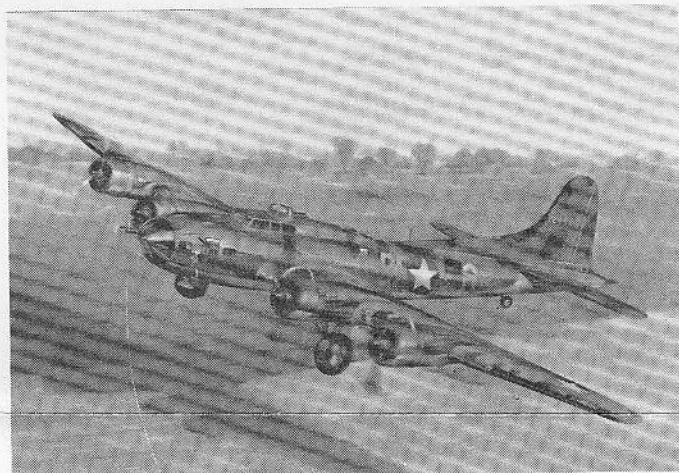
Ken Carson of Granville, OH., overheard this conversation, introduced himself, and announced that he also had been imprisoned in South Compound, Stalag Luft III, and had resided in Block 130.

Maury replied that the pilots of his plane, the "Royal Flush," had also resided in Block 130, and that he visited with them at least twice a week. When Maury responded to Ken's query, "What were their names?" with "Marc Fountain and Oscar Diederling," Ken exclaimed in amazement that those fellows were his combine mates! Now, he remembered Maury, and Maury remembered Ken also.

With all this remembering going on, the tales of life as a Kriegie were reminisced.

Subsequently, the photographer took a group picture of all the 91sters present who had been shot down and taken as POWs, thus reuniting two who were roommates oh so long ago.

(Note: January 28, 1945 was the night the Germans evacuated the POWs in Stalag Luft III to prevent their liberation by the advancing Russian divisions on the Eastern front. It was the beginning of the Death March to southern Bavaria, during which over 600 POWs died in the sub-freezing, blizzard weather.



The photo above shows mission #26 of the "Memphis Belle," the flight home, by artist Ken Fox, of the Aviation Art Museum. The full color 24" x 36" lithograph, signed by the artist and by the pilot, Robert K. Morgan, is available to 91st B.G. Memorial Association members at a 40 per cent discount from the regular price, for a member cost of \$30. Orders should be sent to: Aviation Art Museum, Box 16224, St. Paul, MN. 55116.

Vince Hemmings of the East Anglian Aviation Society, who is Curator of the 91st Tower Museum at Bassingbourn, has passed along a partial report of the

year's activities there. Vince reports that the exceedingly severe winter of 1982 slowed down the work at the museum considerably. Fortunately the only burst pipe was in one of the toilets, and the split directed the jet of water into the right place!

The Museum has had a coat of paint on the outside. The Society had hoped to restore the museum to wartime colors, but orders from above directed that the museum remain white with blue doors, gutters, and drainpipes. The toilets have been repainted in their original colors, green and cream, and the downstairs entrance hall has been repainted.

Vince calculates that members have spent more than 3000 hours in the restoration of the museum. Some members come as far as 200 miles to attend meetings!

During Bassingbourn Barracks Open House Day more than 100 visitors toured the 91st museum.

Among 91st members who visited the Tower Museum in 1982 were Harry and Jane House (Harry was navigator on Lackin Shackin), Tyse and Peg Hardin (Tyse was pilot of Mizpah), and Bill and Virginia McGavern (Bill was pilot of Hi Ho Silver). Bill donated his A2 jacket to the museum.

Dr. Mack Williams and his wife Patty (Mack was pilot of The Gay Caballero) made a donation to the museum that was used to purchase a WWII flak jacket for display.



Bill McGavern (left) gives his Hi Ho Silver A2 jacket to Museum Curator Vince Hemmings.



Harry House posing before the Tower Museum during 1982 visit.

Lt. Col. Bob Abb, ex-323rd sqdn., bombardier on George Birdsong's crew of the Delta Rebel II, died August 26, 1982 in Blue Eye, MO., after a prolonged illness. He is survived by his wife Maggie, four children, four grandchildren, his mother and a brother.

Eunice Steele, wife of ex-322nd member Rudy Steele, died of lung cancer July 28, 1982. Rudy and Eunice made almost every 91st Reunion since the first one. Rudy lives at Rt.2, Box 884, Buckley, WA. 98321

Dr. Mather M. Tutton Sr., ex-324th sqdn., of Leesburg, FL. died April 26, 1982. His son, Mather M. Tutton Jr., continues as an associate member and supporter of the 91st.

Denver Woodward, ex-401st Sqdn. bombardier and ex-POW, of American Falls, Idaho, brother-in-law to ex-401st sqdn. pilot Harold DeBolt, died November 18, 1982.

LeRoy A. Brown, 91ster from Jamestown, R.I., died August 18, 1982, of cancer and a stroke.

Hampton F. Harmon, ex-401st sqdn., died in Edgefield, S.C., March 4, 1982

Hugh C. Ham, ex-401st sqdn., Canoga Park, CA., died October 12, 1982.

Robert M. Shea, ex-322nd sqdn., navigator on Louis Malone's crew, died in Melrose, MA. January 11, 1982

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