

The Ragged Irregular



322nd SQDN



323rd SQDN



Supporting Units



324th SQDN



401st SQDN

Vol 31 No. 1

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

January 1998

A 1944 Christmas Story as told by a Crew Chief

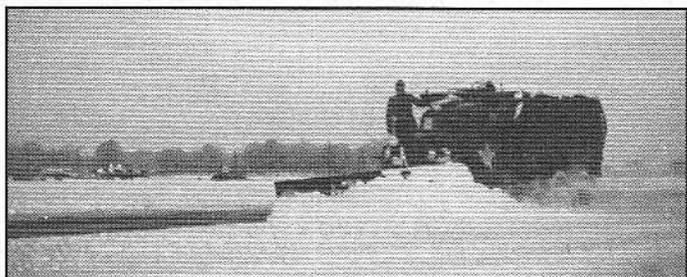
Bassingbourn, Dec. 24, 1944. For several days, missions had been canceled on account of severe winter weather that descended on England and northwestern Europe. Missions had been scheduled for Dec. 19th and 20th both of which were scrubbed. This siege of bad weather couldn't have come at a more inopportune time. The German High Command had ordered a major offensive aimed at stopping the Allied advance in Europe and driving a wedge between the American lines in a drive to Antwerp. What developed was "The Battle of the Bulge."

In support of the beleaguered ground forces, a break in the weather allowed attacks to be carried out on Dec. 24th against targets at Merzhausen and Kirch-Gons, two German airfields. Fifty B-17s of the 91st Group left Bassingbourn that morning and returned to find that their base was closed due to fog. They were diverted to an airfield at Bury St. Edmonds.

Jack Paxson was a Crew Chief in the 322nd Sq. He tells the following story of his experiences trying to provide support for "his" B-17 at Bury St. Edmonds until it could return to Bassingbourn. Editorial assistance was provided by Rudy Malkin, former Editor of the *Ragged Irregular*, and by the present Editor.

December 24, 1944 was a long day for the 322nd Squadron's Corporal Jack Paxson, now of Edmonds, Washington. He, along with other 91st ground crewmen, awoke at 2:30 a.m. to the pounding of line chiefs' fists on barracks doors.

Jack Paxson remembers the day's intense cold, the snow covered ground and icy under-footing.



Snow Plow at Bassingbourn Photo by Joe Harlick

Nevertheless, the 91st took off into dense fog that had settled upon the base for its first mission since the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge.

Having helped service the planes, Paxson, like most ground crewmen, returned to the sack to get some rest before the planes returned and required servicing again. The needed rest was interrupted about 10 a.m., when Paxson was jarred awake by more door pounding and orders to send someone to the hangar "... with winter clothes and ready to go!" Paxson went. It was the last sleep he would have for a time.

Arriving at the hangar, Paxson learned that the Group had been unable to land at Bassingbourn due to the intense fog and had instead landed at Bury St. Edmonds, home of the 94th Bomb. The ground crews had to transport ammunition, engineering equipment, extra blankets, food and other supplies to them. Paxson and other members of the 322nd departed Bassingbourn about 2:30 p.m. in a convoy of trucks.

They rode through dense fog, over roads covered with as much as ten inches of snow and with numbing cold penetrating the blankets they wrapped themselves with. The convoy arrived at the air base at 7:30 p.m. The crew of Paxson's plane, "LG-G," welcomed them for the supplies they brought! The base simply couldn't feed or care adequately for so many unexpected 91st formation guests.

Paxson writes, "In order to refuel our plane, I had another crew member boost me up onto the wing. I laid blankets on it to try to keep me from slipping. Nevertheless, while fueling the plane, I lost my footing and slid down and off the wing. Today, I only recall a fellow standing over me, shaking me and asking if I were OK. I wasn't. But his first aid was effective. I got back up on the wing to finish the fueling. I guess I was lucky there was so much snow around to fall on."

Continued on page 3.....

It's dues time again. Please refer to the yellow page for information.

The President's Corner

At the time I am writing this message, everybody is in the holiday spirit and I was going to wish the members of the 91st and their families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year. Suddenly the light came on and I remembered that you will be receiving *The Ragged Irregular* in January, 1998. Well, the Happy and Healthy New Year still applies and it comes from all of the Officers, the Historian, the Editor and Paul Limm of the 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association.

It's a new year for the 91st also and this year is special because this year the Association has its Reunion in Savannah. I'm looking forward to the Reunion and I can tell you from talking to the other Officers that they also are excited about the coming Reunion. Over the years, my wife and I have met and enjoyed many wonderful people and I will be able to talk over many thoughts that I have from way back when.

Also, I will be able to sit across the table with the other Officers who I have talked with many times on the telephone and corresponded with and thank them for the tremendous help I have received. It is very difficult to run an organization when you can't sit down with all of the Officers and determine goals, work out problems and have a good old bull session.

I want to touch a little bit on the activities in England this last summer. I was not able to go and enjoy the unveiling of the Memorial Marker in the avenue of trees at Bassingbourn, the laying of flowers and taps at the Prop Memorial plus observing the results of much needed maintenance of the Prop Memorial and the dedication of the American Air Museum at Duxford, England. I want to thank Phil Mack (Editor), Whitmal Hill and Col. Walter Pickard for very good reports on what they saw and enjoyed during their trip to England.

One additional note before I leave this subject and that is the information that our good friend and prior Curator of the Tower Museum, Vince Hemmings, has retired and if you are planning a visit to Bassingbourn, you should contact Mr. Steve Pena, Bramble Cottage, Netherstone, Stotfold, Herts, England SG5 4BX, tel/fax 01462-835787. There has been no change in the operation of the Tower Museum. The East Anglian Aviation Society has been in the past, and will continue to be in the future, the organization that has operated the Tower Museum. The only change has been made in the change of the Curator.

Next year, being an even numbered year and the year the 91st has its Reunion, makes it election of officers time. We need nominations for the offices of President, First Vice President, Second Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer. I have asked Paul Limm and he has agreed to handle the program next year. Please give him your support and get involved. Throw your hat in the ring.

Harold E. Johnson

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Editorial.....

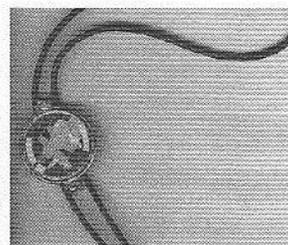
Thanks to you who have sent complimentary remarks about the R/I. Several of you have said it was not necessary for me to have issued the "Errata" sheet in the October issue, but when it came off the press and listed a B-25 displayed in the American Museum in England as a "B-15," I could not let that go uncorrected.

I also want to thank all of you who sent in material that has not yet been printed. As the last page of this issue was completed, there was on my desk a pile almost two inches high of material that was worthy of printing but for which there simply was no more space in this issue. It has been considered to add another page as an insert. Frankly, to keep pace with the rate of material received, at the least four pages would be needed.

The problem with adding more pages is a matter of cost, both in printing and postage. Our membership is declining so is the income of the organization. Sending in your dues is important. Additional contributions are also very welcome. Let us know how you feel about this. You can tell us by writing in or certainly at the next Reunion in Savannah.

New Bolo Tie Available!

Check the yellow page insert for PX items and you will see a new bolo tie available for \$21.50. Pictured at right is a scanning that hardly does justice to the beautiful emblem of the 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association.



**Make Your Plans for Savannah
August 25-30, 1998.**

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Clearing Wings December 24, 1944 Photo by Joe Harlick

The planes took off on schedule on Christmas Day and the convoy left the base at 10:00 a.m. that morning. Paxson rode in the rear of a truck towing a bomb trailer. The snow packed roads of the little towns through which they had passed finally took their toll.

While rounding a corner, the bomb trailer began skidding badly and dragged Paxson's truck into a big hedge in front of a little house. The bomb trailer overturned and scattered equipment almost up to the house's front porch. Paxson stared at the truck "kind of paralyzed" as he looked at the equipment buried and scattered in the deep snow while the convoy continued on to Bassingbourn to barracks warmth and a hot Christmas meal.

While Paxson and his detail retrieved and re-loaded scattered equipment from the deep snow, the occupants of the house invited them in for warmth and tea. Their invitation was eagerly accepted.

An elderly couple lived in the house with a lady in her thirties and a boy about seven. Once inside, Paxson and his friend were invited to share the family's Christmas dinner. Paxson knew that rations were sparse for the English families and he could see that the meager portions on the table were barely adequate for the three adults and the boy. Paxson and his friend insisted on eating their K rations but accepted the pleasure of a cup of tea in the warmth of an English home on Christmas Day.

The little boy spoke with the "Yanks" and explained he didn't have a gift from his father because he was in North Africa. "But Grandpa gave me a present," he said, referring to the elderly gentleman of the house, and he proudly displayed a toy wagon that his grandfather had carved. It was apparent the boy needed no more gifts to celebrate his 1944 Christmas.

The contented youngster eventually ended up sitting on Paxson's knee before the evening ended. On the spur of the moment, Paxson offered the lad his GI knife, "This is a Christmas gift from us who shared Christmas with you and your family for a couple of hours."

Continued to next column.....

The boy's eyes widened but before touching it, the over-awed boy asked his grandfather, "Can I have it?" He answered, "You may have it."

The bitter weather, the pleasure his impromptu Christmas gift gave the boy, and the family's generous hospitality left a vivid memory with Paxson.

When his detail departed it was taken for granted they'd see one another again. Unfortunately many little towns separate Bassingbourn and Bury Saint Edmonds and there was never time to return and locate the little house at the accident scene.

They arrived back at Bassingbourn at 11 p.m., where they learned the 91st's planes had returned safely, a stand-down called for the 26th and a Christmas dinner still awaited them. Adding the still vivid hospitality of the English family to the foregoing provided a pleasant, memorable conclusion to what could have been just another day of the brutal tedium ground crewmen experienced during lengthy overseas service.

Editor's Note: Joe Harlick, eminent photographer of the 324nd Sq. and 91st BG was contacted to see if he had any photos appropriate for the above article. He responded with the foregoing photos and added his own little story of the winter on '44-'45, and the photo below of himself and Frank Donofrio on the occasion of a donation Joe and his charming wife, Janice, made to the Memphis Belle Museum in 1991. The donation was a complete set of his 125-photograph series.

Harlick's photos have appeared in almost every significant publication about the 8th Air Force, the 91st Bomb Group and others: Reader's Digest Magazine, "Song of the Valiant Lady," National Geographic Magazine, "The Wings of War," British Majesty's Stationery, "Target Germany," Thomas Coffey's "Decision over Schweinfurt," Jablonski's, "Flying Fortress," Bowers' "Fortress in the Sky," Freeman's "Mighty Eighth, Fortress at War," Logan & Nield, "Classy Chassy," Kaplan's "One Last Look," Seattle Museum of Flight's "50th Anniversary of the Flying Fortress, Boeing B-17," Birdsall's "Fighting Colors, B-17 Flying Fortress," Havelaar's "The Ragged Irregulars of Bassingbourn," and others.



Frank Donofrio Receiving Joe and Janice Harlick's Contribution of 125 WWII B-17 Photos.

Jub Jub Bird Survivors Meet 50 Yrs Later

Roger Dale Lemley is a cousin of S/Sgt. Herschel W. Bowers, former Radio Operator on the Crew of the "Jub Jub Bird," a B-17G assigned to the 401st Squadron. The name is taken from a poem "The Jabberwocky" written by Lewis Carroll in his book "Alice in Wonderland." Here is Roger's story in memory of the crew of the Jub Jub.

My cousin, Herschel Wayne "Ted" Bowers was killed on his 21st mission, the Jub Jub Bird's 69th mission, on Nov. 2, 1944 while bombing synthetic oil refineries in Merseburg. [Ed. Note: 13 B-17s of the 91st were lost on this mission out of a total of 36 that dropped bombs on the target.] The ship was hit by flak and exploded. Two members, 1st Lt. Ray Nickola and S/Sgt. Arnold Kramer, miraculously survived but were taken prisoner.

I never knew my cousin, Ted, since I was born ten years after World War II, but my father and family told me about him having been shot down and that two of his crew survived. My father had a photograph of Ted and the crew standing by the airplane. I would stand and stare at that picture and wonder which two survived and how was my cousin killed.



Crew of the Jub Jub Bird, 401st Sq., Bassingbourn, 1944

About ten years ago, I began a search for information about my cousin and members of his crew. Another cousin gave me a list of names of the crew that her mother had kept. My uncle told me one of them was named Nickola. I began a relentless search to locate Ray Nickola not knowing if he was still alive after 50 years. Finally, with the help of an agency that had a data base to locate people in cases like this, they produced his name and phone number.

In March 1994, I phoned Ray and explained that I was a cousin of Ted's. Needless to say, he was overwhelmed and shocked that someone would contact him about this after 50 years. He was willing to talk in detail about that fateful day, Nov. 2, 1944, over Merseburg.

Ray lived near Chicago and traveled to Mt. Morris, PA., to visit with me and another cousin, Wayne Lemley, who was named after Herschel Wayne Bowers.

We were also accompanied by Ted's uncle, Charles "Blackie" Lemley. We enjoyed the visit very much and Ray told me about another crew member, Leon Wagner who did not make the mission due to injuries from previous missions.

I called information and located Mr. Wagner in Reading, PA. He too was shocked to hear from someone after 50 years. I told Leon about Ray Nickola and he was excited to know that Ray was still alive. He had also tried to locate Ray previously.

When Ray visited me near Pittsburgh, PA, he traveled on to Reading and visited Leon and his family. They had shared barracks in Bassingbourn over 50 years ago and I am sure they had a lot of memories to share. Leon and I still keep in touch, but Ray passed away on Feb. 3, 1997. When I received the news I felt that I had lost a very special friend. I felt that I was very fortunate to have found the missing links to my cousin. In addition, I am very thrilled that I could reunite Leon and Ray one last time.

Ted's mother was a widow and with the help of his grandparents, Minor and Laura Lemley, Ted developed into manhood and took his responsibilities seriously. That is what he did when his country called him to do his part in saving the lives of many in a foreign land while he and thousands of fellow Americans made the supreme sacrifice. This article is dedicated to my cousin, T/Sgt. Herschel Wayne Bowers and the rest of the crew who didn't return Nov. 2, 1944 from Merseburg.

S/Sgt. Carroll B. Tallant (KIA)
Sgt. James A. Foltz (KIA)
2nd Lt. Daniel DeBonis (KIA)
2ND Lt. James F. Hundley (KIA)
Sgt. Luther E. Salter (KIA)
1st Lt. Herbert W. Chounard (KIA)
S/Sgt. Arnold E. Kramer (POW)
1st Lt. Ray L. Nickola (POW)

and Sgt. Leon Wagner who did not go on that mission but completed his tour subsequently.

These are valiant men who had a camaraderie with our cousin for several months and spent their last precious moments of their young lives fighting for freedom. Ted's relatives, who are too numerous to list, and I salute the crew of the Jub Jub Bird and all who served to protect the U.S.A.



R. Lemley L. Wagner



Ray Nickola



Wayne Lemley

Submitted by Rodger Dale Lemley

Letters to the Editor

Mr. Stefan Naef, Gartenstrasse 15, 4415 Lausen, Switzerland, has informed the 91st BGMA that he had found pieces of a B-17, *Champagne Girl*, S/N 42-1070755, that had crashed near the village of Obersaxen, July 19, 1944. He has written an article about the crash that was published in the Swiss aviation magazine, *Cockpit*, and sent a translated copy to us. He reports that four of the former crew members: Pilot Cyril Braund, CoPilot Jack Sykes, Engineer Don McBey, and radio Operator Bill Bridges, met for the first time in 1955 at a reunion of members of the Swiss Internees Association. It is an interesting article and it is hoped that space in a future issue of the R/I will permit its publication.

Theodore "Mike" Banta, FM, 324th, has written a book, *Vignettes of a B-17 Combat Crew*, a copy of which he has sent to this Editor. More recently he has forwarded a rewritten portion covering the Dresden mission based on additional background information sent to him by Roger Freeman. Banta writes very well and warmly in respect to his fellow crew members. It is hoped that the final edition will be made available to members of the 91st and others in the near future.

Brent Perkins, President of the *Memphis Belle* Association, tells an interesting story. Cass Nastal, a former member of the crew of the "Belle" and his wife were in Hope, Arkansas, on Sept. 24, 1997, when President Clinton happened also to be there in Hope which is his home town. Cass had taken part in the unveiling of a "Return of the Memphis Belle" jigsaw puzzle from Fink and Co., and had asked Perkins to try to arrange a meeting with the President. The following is quoted from Perkins letter:

"..... It [the meeting with the President] appeared to be falling through until it was mentioned to the President that Cass, the only surviving waist gunner of the *Memphis Belle*, had come to try to meet him. Bypassing a good many VIPs, the President went a couple of hundred feet out of his way to greet Cass Nastal and his wife Doris."

Yves Carnot, Rosporden, France, has informed the 91st BGMA that he has found remnants of *The Black Swan*, a B-17 that crashed in France Dec. 31, 1943 taking the lives of two crewmen. The story deserves full treatment in a future issue of the R/I and it is mentioned here only to acknowledge M. Carnot's most interesting letter and accompanying photos.

Ray Ward, 322nd, and your Editor of the R/I, have exchanged some correspondence in which Ward has found some interesting coincidences: After graduation from flying school, we were both stationed at Ephrata, WA. A Col. Olds, who commanded the 2nd Bomb Group at Langley where I first was stationed, was CO of the 96th BG, Ward's initial assignment in England. We both flew on a mission to Emden and had a rough time.

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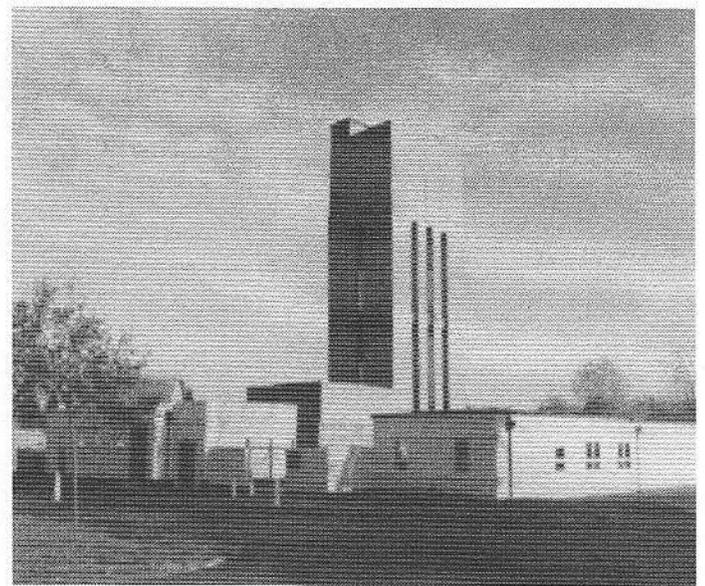
We were both on the Dec. 31, 1943 mission to Bordeaux and took flak hits. We both had to fly 26 missions instead of 25. We flew on several other missions in the same flight, we both had brothers flying in B-17s in the 8th, and after the war, we both attended Purdue University and married girls from Purdue. We're looking forward to meeting at the 91st BGMA Reunion in Savannah in August, 1998.

Lester Duggan, 322nd, sent in a lengthy letter that merits publication in full. He starts out, "I didn't meet Audie Murphy, the most decorated hero of World War II, a genuine hero. I have met some of the real heroes of the 91st Bomb Group at Basingbourn." We hope to publish the entire letter in a future edition of the R/I.

Freeman Municipal Airport, Ted Jordan, Airport Manager, informs us that the City of Seymour, Indiana, is hosting a Reunion, June 5th - 7th, 1998, of former members of the Army Air Forces stationed at Freeman. For further information, contact Ted Freeman or Jane Henley, Freeman Municipal Airport, P.O. Box 702, Seymour, IN 47274, or phone: (812) 522-3607.

Word from the Tower

Steve Pena, Curator of the Tower Museum, at Basingbourn, has informed us that a famous landmark at ye olde aerodrome is being removed. The water tower had been declared redundant and will be removed in 1998.



Water Tower—Basingbourn Barracks

Photo by Steve Pena

The beacon from the top of the water tower will be retained for display in the Tower Museum.

The Tower Museum continues to look for contributions of artifacts and clothing suitable for display or use on mannequins. Pena would especially like to obtain a chest pack type parachute harness. He is also planning on dressing two mannequins, one as an Intelligence Officer and another as a female Red Cross worker.

Letters to the Editor—Continued from Page 5

Harold Kiou, 322nd, has been advised in a letter from Steve Crook, Exhibitions Director, American Air Museum in England, that errors in the listing of component squadrons of the 91st Bomb Group in a Memorial Plaque at the Air Museum have been corrected. The errors were noted during a visit by Mr. Kiou for the dedication ceremonies. The 91st BGMA thanks both Mssrs. Kiou and Crook, for their actions.

Paul Chryst, 401st, sent in several newsletters of other bomb groups including a 1988 edition from the 306th Group, Triangle H at Thurleigh, that devoted three fourths of a page to the late Manny Klette. Klette began his 8th Air Force tour with the 306th Group as co-pilot on Lt. Keith Conley's crew. Between March 18, 1943 and September 23, 1943, he flew 28 missions with the 306th, was the 50th pilot in the Group to complete a combat tour of 25 missions, and the first to fly additional missions.

Klette and his navigator were seriously injured returning from his 28th mission to Nantes on Sept. 23. After recuperating, he was assigned to the staff of Gen. Spaatz in London and developed a friendship there with Lt. Col. Henry W. Terry, Jr. who has also been an original member of the 306th Group and had become their Deputy Group Commander.

After Terry took command of the 91st, he asked Klette to take over the 324th Squadron. From August 6, 1944, to April 25, 1945, Klette flew 63 missions for an all-time record of 91 combat missions in the 8th Air Force. His decorations included the Air Medal with 14 Oak Leaf Clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart, ETO Ribbon with eight battle stars, the French Croix de Guerre and the Air Force Commendation Medal. Later he was awarded the Silver Star for the mission to Merseburg on August 21, 1944.

Klette retired in July 1967 at the rank of Colonel. He died February 12, 1988 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. [Ed. Note: It was my privilege to have met Klette at the 1985 50th Anniversary of the B-17 at Boeing's facilities in Seattle.]

George H. Odenwaller, 323rd, after seeing the photo of the "Outhouse Mouse," p.6 of the October issue of the R/I, wrote to say that the picture was "his." He took it and still has the negative. It has been printed in many books over the years, including Ray Bowden's *Plane Names and Fancy Tales*, p. 160.

"M/Sgt. Rollin Davis serviced both '909' and sister ship '636.' Many good men worked for him, a few being: Sgts. Emil Yezdimer, Edward T. Lincoln, Robert M. Waddell, Nicholas V. Palmer-Ball, Cpls. Charles H. Huffman and Albert A. McLaughlin. These men didn't work for Davis all the time and there were others who are not listed.

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Odenwaller was Ball Turret Gunner of 1st Lt. E.J. Harvey's crew. He said, "We were the last crew to use the 'Mouse' for our 26 missions. She was some airplane." He added this as a P.S. "Speaking of our ground crew, one 'down' day, my tail gunner, Lindy, and I decided to take a close look at that old beat-up '909' next to our old beat-up '636!' To our surprise we found the ball turret and tail positions in '909' were fleece-lined. We spoke to a few of the ground crew about it and left.

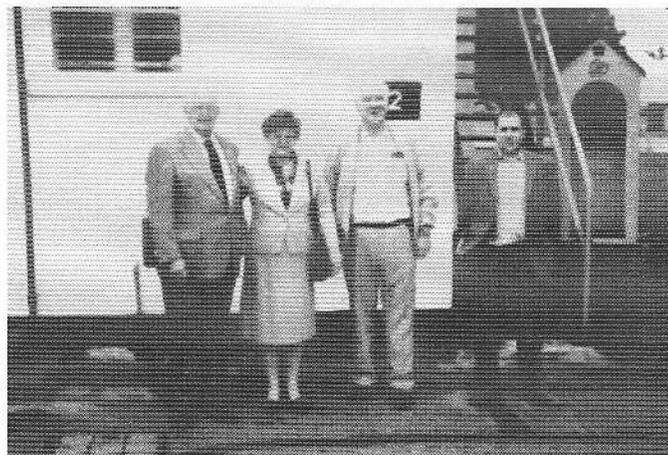
"Would you believe on our next mission, in the dark, Lindy and I both found our positions, 'fleece lined,' just like '909.' I often wondered which of these guys did this for us! We never did find out who they were to thank them."

Odenwaller closed saying, "Will most likely see you in Savannah."

Vince Hemmings, Historian and former Curator of the Tower Museum, asks, "Did the B-17 'Man O War Horsepower Ltd.' which crashed at Bredgar result from damage inflicted on the 29th January 1944 mission or through a malfunction? Who were the crew? My German contact is tracing planes of the 91st that crashed and has asked the question. I will write to a colleague in Kent, who may be able to help."

Vince also enclosed copies of some photos, one of which was used in the October issue of the R/I.

Walter M. Pickard, 323rd Pilot and retired USAF Colonel, sent in the following article about his visit to Bassingbourn in May 1997, including the photo below. It arrived too late to make the July issue of the R/I, and the October issue reached its capacity much too soon. It is presented here in its entirety.



L-R Walt Pickard, Amy Pickard, Vic Lawson, Steve Pena

When I arrived at Bassingbourn in mid-morning of 21 May, this year [1997], I almost felt right at home. There was a solid overcast at about a thousand feet; visibility was less than a mile in that infamous "mist" that we all remember; and the cold 15-20 knot wind felt as if it had come right off the North Sea—which it had. Then. When at Duxford a little later when I saw an

Continued on Page 7.....

Walter M. Pickard—Continued from Page 6

“.....in-commission B-17 in wartime camouflage markings sitting on the flight line, ready to go, the illusion was almost complete. So much so that I began to scheme-up a really good excuse for getting off of the alert roster for the mission that was sure to be flown the next morning—early.

“Well, perhaps I exaggerate a trifle, but not too much—and not about the WX [weather].

“My wife and I were in the UK for a couple of weeks to tour gardens and cathedral towns in the south of England and to visit London. Taking advantage of this, I had made arrangements for a visit to Bassingbourn with the long-time Curator of the Tower Museum, Vince Hemmings. Vince, as was announced in the April newsletter, has retired from that volunteer position and has been succeeded by Steve Pena.

“We were met at Royston station by Vic Lawson, who is the Treasurer of the East Anglian Society (EAAS), and a Director of the Tower Museum. The EAAS is the organization that established the Tower Museum in 1974 and has maintained it since.

“Vic Lawson lives about mid-way between Bassingbourn base and Royston. As a result he is the frequent receiver of telephone calls from the British Army ‘RedCaps’ (MPs) on sentry duty at the main gate to Bassingbourn who ask him, ‘Come and take care of some bloody Yanks who have dropped in for a visit, unannounced, as usual.’ Or, that is probably how the sentries describe these visitors. But not how Vic would characterize them—he says he is always happy to welcome former 91st members.

“Vic drove us to the Tower Museum where we met Steve Pena, as well as other EAAS volunteers who were showing some British visitors around the Museum. The photo [page 6 lower right], taken in front of the Tower building shows, L to R: me, Amy, Vic Lawson and Steve Pena.

[Ed. Note: Vic Lawson has experienced recent illness the full details of which are not known at this time, but we are advised by Steve Pena that he is out of the hospital and at home. We wish him well and a full and speedy recovery. His address is Grafton, Old North Road, Bassingbourn, Royston, Herts SG8 5JL, England.]

“Unfortunately, due to a signals mix-up, we missed seeing Vince Hemmings. However, I did talk with him by phone from London a couple of times. I told him how much we all appreciated the work that he and other members of the Society had done to keep the memory of the 91st, and its people, well burnished at Bassingbourn.

“Our old base looks much as it did over a half-century ago, but with some notable differences. The then small trees have matured taking away the more open look that we remember. The quonset huts used for supply, gun barrel maintenance/storage and those

Continued next column.....

used for living quarters (across the highway from the main gate) are gone. There is still one large hut now used as the base chapel, that was probably the main briefing hut, where we got the bad news on mission days. [Ed note: As I was typing away and got to the foregoing clause, the number of typos increased significantly.]

“The ‘gate’ though which the 323rd pilots (and crew chiefs) taxied their planes to cross the highway to reach the dispersal hardstands amongst those huge elm trees is gone. As are the trees, taxiway and hardstands and the motley huts, made out of engine shipping crates by the 323rd ground crews. The trees succumbed to Dutch elm disease, the rest to the need for farm land.

“The major buildings such as the headquarters, the officers club, NCO mess, combat crew officers mess, the houses used by Group and Squadrons and so on are pretty much as remembered. But the major notable difference is that the base has lost its original *raison d’être*—the runways. Most of them, as well as the taxi strips and dispersal hardstands have been taken up and the rubble used for road building. In the photo, it is possible to see a portion of the security fence which now separates what was the flight line from where the runways once were. Parts of the outer areas of the airfield, once used for fuel and ammo storage is now a golf course—the beating of swords into nine irons, perhaps?

“On the old flight line, the hangars once ‘owned’ by the 322nd, 323rd and 324th squadrons, no longer shelter aircraft undergoing maintenance or squadron operations offices. Rather, they are now used for storage, as gymnasiums, etc. The 401st hangar has disappeared!

“The former control tower looks, in silhouette, much as it did ‘back then,’ but, its wartime coating of camouflage paint has been covered by gleaming white coats. The big difference is inside—the Tower Museum devoted almost entirely to the artifacts of the 91st BG. The 20-30 members of the EAAS have done a great job in gathering and displaying many mementos of the 91st and its people.

“I was told that the Society welcomes, and seeks out, memorabilia from people who served at Bassingbourn. If you have old photos, diaries, other documents, bits of uniform insignia, etc., that you think might be suitable for display, you can contact Steve Pena at the address shown in the April ‘97 *Ragged Irregular*. His current phone number is 01462 8335 787 [omit the ‘0’ if dialing from the U.S.]. If you plan to visit I suggest you contact Steve Pena or Vic Lawson to give them the chance to roll out the red carpet treatment that we received.

“Our short visit brought back many memories: some good and many very sad about my days at Bassingbourn. However, it seems to me that what is even more important is the knowledge that this small, but dedicated group of aviation/history buffs are making sure that what we, and other USAAF people did, is appreciated and remembered all these years later.” [Ed. Note: I nominate Walt for next Ed.]

Folded Wings

● **RALPH A. BARRETT**, Major, USAFR(Ret), FM, 401st, Las Vegas Nevada, Sept. 29, 1997. Ralph arrived at Bassingbourn directly from flying school without the benefit of combat crew or operational unit training, and joined John Ondrovic's crew as a replacement for a co-pilot who had been killed. As he wryly remarked, "It was exciting flying combat for on the job training!"

Ralph lost contact with his Triangle A friends after the war but discovered the 91st BGMA in 1990, and attended the '94 and '96 Reunions in Oklahoma City and Tucson. He was looking forward to the Savannah Reunion to embrace the other four surviving members of his crew. He is survived by his wife, Bea, four children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

● **MAX E. BENDER**, LM, 322nd. Reported by Lester Duggan.

● **JOE CARDWELL**, FM, 401st, San Angelo, Texas, Oct. 27, 1997. Joe served in the Army Air Forces in World War II and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal and Purple Heart. His obituary reads, "Mr. Cardwell was widely known for his store, 'Joe's Grocery' that he owned and operated on Beauregard Avenue for 26 years." He is survived by his wife, Mollie, two sons, eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

● **URBAN D. "BERN" COLE**, fm, 401st, Nashville, TN, October 13, 1997. Bern had been a truck stop operator before his retirement fifteen years

Continued from previous Column

Paso. He was a member of the Trinity United Methodist Church, 32 Degree Mason, Scottish Rite, and member of the Northeast Rotary. He is survived by his wife, Marge, a brother, sister and their families. Marion apparently died of a sudden heart attack while working on his lawn.

● **Charles Eichert**, LM, 324th, Date recent, Highland Park, NJ. Information received from fellow crew members Bob Cleveland and Frank Fomaca, and his nephew. He was in the process of preparing the information for the memorial plaque to go to Savannah when he died suddenly. It is reported that he is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

● **Argo O. Giese**, LM, 322nd, Woodland, CA, Nov. 18, 1997. His wife, Lillian, reported that they enjoyed many reunions of the 91st BGMA. He passed away with congestive heart failure after recovering from pneumonia. He had been ground crew mechanic at Bassingbourn.

● **E. Richard Knutelsky**, FM, 1/BW, Willsboro, NY, October 22, 1997. Passed away at his home as reported with regret by his daughter, Jeanne Cauchy.

● **Donald W. Moucka**, M/Sgt, FM, 322nd, Omaha, NE, August 24, 1997. Former Crew Chief, Don passed away after a 2-year illness with cancer. He is survived by his wife, Betty, who said with sorrow, "he so enjoyed the reunions and friendships."

● **Donald H. Rudolph**, M/Sgt, LM, 401st, Unter Pullendorf, Austria, May 28, 1997. He is survived by his wife, Irja, who reported with sadness that "he died in his beloved garden of a heart attack."

● **Raymond H. Bandle**, FM, 401st, Hamilton, OH, Dec. 5, 1997, of a massive heart attack. Reported by Marion Havelaar, a life-long friend. Bandle was former President of the National Waco Club since 1957.

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THE RAGGED IRREGULAR

These Newsletters are published quarterly, October, January, September and July are the publication months. The R/I's purpose is to keep alive the spirit of the 91st Bombardment Group (H) and to maintain the fellowship of all of those who fought together in World War II from AF Station 121 in Bassingbourn, England from 1942-1945.

Material for publication should be sent to the Editor, Phil Mack, 17521 155th Ave. SE, Renton, WA 98058-9087. "Time-value" items must be received three weeks before the first day of the month of publication to permit necessary priority consideration for inclusion in that issue. Every effort will be made to utilize other submitted material in the scheduled or later R/I issues.

ago. He had served on the crew of Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby. His wife of 53 years, Doris, had preceded him in death on March 3, 1997. He is survived by two sons and four grandchildren. Reported by Trevor Cole.

● **MARION J. DARNELL**, FM, 323rd, El Paso, TX, Oct. 10, 1997 at age 78. Mario Mattie reports that he was Assistant Crew Chief on "Eagle's Wrath." Marion had retired as owner of Dust-Tex Service, in El

Editor's Note

Please send reports of "Folded Wings" to the Secretary/Treasurer of the 91st BGMA, Asay B. Johnson, 590 Aloha Dr., Lake Havasu City, AZ 86406-4559. The permanent records of the membership are maintained by that officer of the Association. He in turn will inform the Editor of the *Ragged Irregular* who will publish the information in the next edition. If you forget, don't worry about it. We speak to each other. The policy this Editor uses with respect to showing former rank of the deceased is to print it if it is given to us in the notice of passing.

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