

The Ragged Irregular



322nd SQDN



323rd SQDN



Supporting Units



324th SQDN



401st SQDN

Vol 33 No. 2

91st Bombardment Group (H)

April 2000

Nominations for Association Officers

When the British Army used the "hollow square" as a tactical formation in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, one of the commands to have reserves replace the casualties in the front of the square was, "Stout men to the front!" "Stout" for "Stout-hearted."

Today, as the ranks of the 91st BGMA thin, we need stout men to the front; we need willing candidates to run for office and to serve our Association. In one way or another I have been involved in the previous seven elections and finding candidates has always been a problem.

At times we have had Association officers play musical chairs, serving in one office and then in another; a partial solution was to combine the offices of Secretary and Treasurer thereby reducing the number of Officers to President, First and Second Vice Presidents, the Secretary-Treasurer, Historian and the Editor of the Ragged Irregular. Our effort now is to nominate candidates for these positions.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that the 91st BGMA is rich in diversified talents. Our members are from the air and ground crews, the skilled professionals of the 441st Sub-Depot, the Army Nurse Corps, the American Red Cross, and from all the specialized supporting units. If you wish to be a candidate for a particular office, please call or write me and I will provide you with the requirements for and the responsibilities of the office. If you wish to nominate another member, be certain that you have his/her concurrence.

**Call or write: Paul J. Limm, 601 Calle de Soto,
San Clemente, CA 92672-2252**
or Phone: 949-492-4502

Brave Women or Stout Men to the Front!

A Message from the Secretary/Treasurer



Asay B. Johnson

The past three months have been trying and demanding. My wife, Gloria, has been hospitalized since mid-December, first with a heart condition and then with diverticulitis. A diverticulum ruptured and peritonitis set in requiring emergency surgery with a dim prognosis for recovery. She did survive the surgery but the other complications ensued ending in a lengthy and debilitating hospital stay. Fortunately she is now home and on the long road to recovery. Her goal is to recover enough to attend the reunion in Galveston.

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First Flight in a Flying Fortress

Midland, Texas, 1992—Kevin Pearson is a B-17 enthusiast who lives in St. Joseph, Missouri. He was born well after the end of World War II. Today, he serves the Eighth Air Force Historical Society as Secretary of the Missouri Chapter/St. Louis Wing of that organization. Mr. Pearson has written a book, "A Flight into the Past" ©. Excerpts are presented here with the permission of the author. Let us who made our first flights so many years earlier relive that experience through the words of Mr. Pearson.

A Flight into the Past

The crisp morning air in Midland, Texas, was abruptly broken by the thunderous, deep-throated roar of four 1200 horsepower Wright Cyclone engines belonging to the B-17 flying fortress named "Texas Raiders." Each engine coughed, sputtered and belched large quantities of blue, oil-laden exhaust as each of the nine cylinder Cyclones, one by one, roared into life with a sound reminiscent of a time long past.

It all started in the summer of 1991 when I sat down for a root beer float at Lou's Drive-in in Peoria, Illinois. On that day, I was wearing a cap bearing the letters and numerals, "B-17G" and a T-shirt with a picture of a B-17 Flying Fortress on it. The owner of Lou's Drive-in, Louis La Hood [FM 322nd], came up to me and asked in a skeptical and somewhat sarcastic tone what a young guy like me knew about the B-17 flying Fortress. Lou had flown 30 combat missions over occupied Europe during World War II. We spent the rest of that day discussing such things as manual versus automatic turbo-supercharging, the magnetic vs. flux-gate compass, stratospheric flight characteristics, and, of course, the inherent advantages and disadvantages of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress versus its major rival, the Consolidated B-24.

During our conversation, I told Lou I was writing a book about this remarkable aircraft and this is what he said to me, "Before you can ever write a book about the B-17, you have to fly on one. No other plane flies quite like the '-17.'" I took his advice to heart and contacted the Confederate Air Force (CAF) museum in Midland, Texas, and after several months, received permission for both Lou and myself to fly on their B-17, affectionately known as "The Raiders."

We walked into the main hangar at CAF Hq., and were immediately greeted by the sounds of "Chattanooga Choo Choo," a wartime classic originally sung by Frances Langford in 1942. Other type aircraft were in the hangar. But where was the B-17? Then I spotted her parked outside the hangar on the ramp.

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The President's Corner

Even those of us who have considered themselves to be participants in the building of our scientific and technological society, are constantly amazed. When, because space exploration will be the theme of our November reunion, I requested a banquet speaker from NASA who would talk about "Space in the 21st Century." They gave me a name and telephone number. The response to the subsequent phone call was a tape message reporting that our speaker to be was in Moscow and would return in 19 days. However, by calling another number, one would get a phone to ring simultaneously in Huntsville, Alabama, and in the 6th floor room of a Russian Hotel! I opted to wait the 10 days and speak to him when he returned. You will, I think, find his talk to be quite interesting.

Then, I got a letter from a lady in Pennsylvania. She was born in 1943, several days after her father, flying as Co-pilot on a 91st aircraft, went down over Wilhelmshaven, Germany. She, who never knew her father, had learned that the Pilot also had an infant daughter in 1943. She wants to know the lady. I Xeroxed her letter and sent it off to Mike Banta. He and his e-mail loop have learned much about their quarry and should have her located soon.

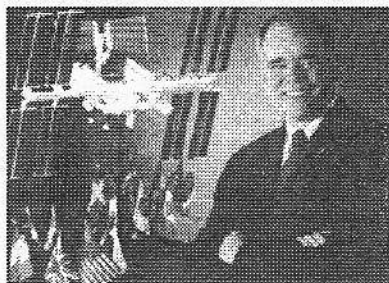
Being amazed is really nothing new. Seventy years ago, when an airplane flew over the house, we went outside to look at it. Fifty-six years ago, I was astounded to find how big a B-17 was. Most of these changes are wondrous and wonderful. I will except, however, those that have occurred in popular music.

Bob Friedman

Guest Speaker Named for Galveston

The Guest Speaker for the Reunion Banquet in Galveston, November 1-4, 2000, will be **Jack Bacon, Ph.D., Professional Engineer.**

Dr. Bacon is an expert in spacecraft integration, and in space systems architectures. He works at the NASA Johnson Space Center as systems integration lead of numerous Russian and American spacecraft, including the *Zarya* (also known by its Russian acronym: FGB),



Dr. Jack Bacon, NASA Scientist

the first element and bridge module of the new International Space Station, launched November 20, 1998.

His duties at NASA have included several assignments in the integrated architecture, design and operations of the Shuttle and of all its systems in the US, Russian, Japanese, European, and Canadian elements of the International Space Station. His duties have taken him to space development facilities all over the world, including previously secret Russian installations. He has presented NASA topics on all levels to worldwide audiences, and on numerous radio and TV events.

Dr. Bacon received his BS degree from Caltech in 1976 and his MS and PhD degrees respectively in 1978 and 1984 from the University of Rochester, where he worked on laser-fusion power reactors, fusion propulsion systems, and on microgravity fluid surfaces.

91st BGMA OFFICERS 1999-2000

PRESIDENT

Robert H. Friedman
6015 Valkeith
Houston TX 77096-3832
Tel: (713) 729-2255
bobnjoy@iape.net

1st VICE PRESIDENT

Edward C. Gates
13311 16th Ave. Ct. S.
Tacoma WA 98444
Tel: (253) 535-4246

2nd VICE PRESIDENT

Harold E. Johnson
2021 Porter Way
Stockton CA 95207-4035
Tel: (209) 477-0071
FAX: (209) 472-9569

HISTORIAN

Earl Pate, Jr.
104 Skyview Dr
Hendersonville TN 37075
Tel: (615) 824-7909
ep91bg@mindspring.com

SECRETARY-TREASURER

Asay B. Johnson
590 Aloha Dr
Lake Havasu City AZ 86406-4559
Tel: (520) 453-3114
FAX: (520) 453-6370
ace91bgma@interworldnet.net

R/I EDITOR

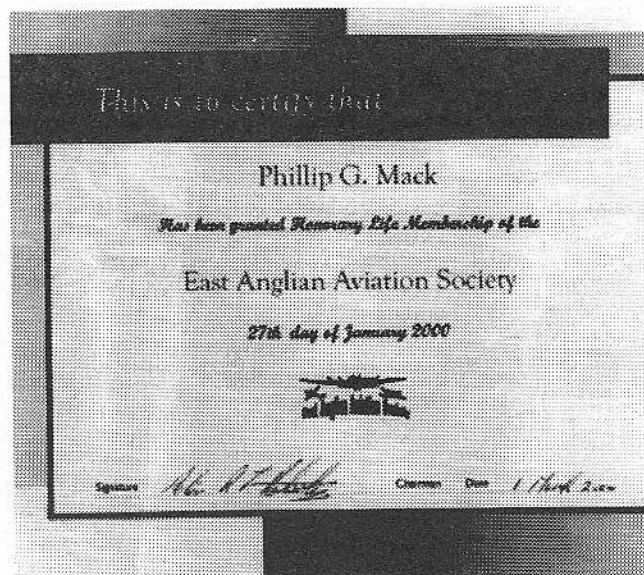
Phil Mack
17521 155th Ave SE
Renton WA 98058-9087
Tel: (425) 271-5277
FAX: (425) 227-8190
mackavco@worldnet.att.net

Editorial

The January issue of the RI included a story written by Chuck Galian and his bride-to-be met in London and eventually married and settled in the United States. The article drew the attention of Vince Hemmings, British Aviation Historian, who would like to hear from other Americans who married British girls during the war and settled in the U.S. Please drop him a line as follows:

Mr. Vincent Hemmings
53 Malthouse Way
Barrington, Cambs, CB2 5RR
United Kingdom

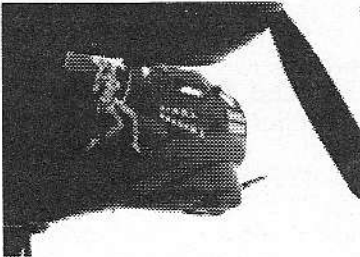
On another subject this Editor would like to express his deep appreciation for an Honorary Life Membership bestowed upon him by the East Anglian Aviation Society. Thank you Peter R. T. Roberts, Chairman, Steve Pena, Curator, and all the members of the Board..



First Flight in a B-17

Continued from Page 1

"We were in a time warp. Certainly I must be having a dream. There she was in all her splendor, silhouetted by the glare of the hangar lights. We just stood there, mouths wide open and stared up in amazed delight. Before us was this huge, four-engine behemoth of an airplane, the type of airplane I had studied for the better part of the last fifteen years.



B-17G "Chattanooga Choo Choo"

We walked around her, peering into every window, sliding our hands over her smooth control surfaces until it seemed like we studied every rivet on that plane. I felt a sense of awe just being in the presence of this time machine, a machine that had helped accomplish so much during those dark days of 1942-1945.

The next day we met Lou. We received our flight instructions—we would fly the next day and could spend the rest of this day photographing the Fortress inside and out. We grabbed our equipment and headed for the hangar. We rounded the corner of the hangar and Lou spotted her for the first time. His eyes widened and in the two years I'd known him, he uttered the first obscenity I had ever heard: "Well, I'll be damned!"

As Lou crawled through "his" airplane, he spoke of his six foot tail gunner, Robert Megechelson, and how he really wanted that position; about the relief tube in the cockpit, and how, if a pilot forgot to notify the ball-turret gunner of the impending flow, the ball turret's windows would freeze rendering the turret useless. We discussed frontal attacks by enemy fighters, the oxygen system and the time Lou's crew had to "hit the silk" when the landing gear on his B-17 wouldn't fully extend.

Lou is such a unique fellow. I envied and respected this man in the same way I envied and respected my own father. Sharing Lou's stories about the war and what the war had meant to him, I felt for a brief time closer to Lou than my own father, a sort of camaraderie unique to a person who has never experienced war. He did not consider himself a hero, nor does he consider what he did anything out of the ordinary. As he once said, "We did what we had to do at the time; we never thought about the danger."

The next morning, Kevin is up at 4:30 am. He checks the weather at Midland/Odessa Flight Service. He and Lou go to the hangar and meet the rest of the crew. Pat, the pilot gives them a pre-flight briefing. Kevin and Lou take up a position in the nose. Kevin thinks to himself, "this isn't real, this isn't happening. I feel as if I am out of my body, looking down at this young guy and this old guy crawling through this 50 year old aircraft."

The fire tender holding a rather large fire extinguisher calls out, "Start one first, Pat." I look to my left and see the port outboard engine, engine #1, slowly turning over. "9 Blades, mags on, mesh and start!" The engine catches and roars to life.

[Ed Note: The restored B-17s all make use of direct drive starters rather than the inertia starters in use during the war.]

I see the inboard port engine #2 turning over. Blue smoke pours from the engine exhaust manifold waste gate. Soon all the engines are turning over and I am absolutely

overwhelmed by the blaring roar of the engines, even though I know the engines are at an idle speed.

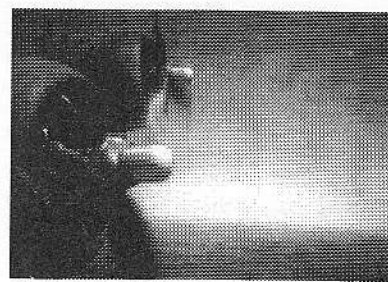
The thick acrid smell of burnt engine oil and high-octane av gas permeates every crevice of the plane's interior. The plane is vibrating so much I can barely steady my video camera. A high pitched whine can be heard over the steady drone of the engines, and I realize the pilot is cycling the flaps up and down in a pre-takeoff test.

The plane lurches forward as the pilot releases those damn squeaky brakes. We swing off the tarmac and onto a taxiway, the Fortress gently rocking and swaying over the bumps and dips in the nose of the plane. I feel a trickle of sweat pouring down my neck and am surprised because I am so hot.

We reach the threshold of the active runway from which we will be departing and swing the nose of the plane into the wind. One by one the pilot runs up each engine to 1600rpm. With each engine acceleration, the plane bucks and vibrates, wanting to leave the binding force of Earth's gravity behind. The pilot runs up number 3 and 4 together. The high pitched roar of the two Cyclones is music to my ears, no other sound in this world can ever simulate the deep-throated guttural roar of a 1200 horsepower Wright Cyclone at full throttle.

Lou says, "Can you imagine 30 B-17s lining up on a runway?" In a far off place in my mind I hear myself answer, "I've seen it in the movies but can't imagine it in real life."

The sound of the engines begins as a dull roar and progresses to an outright, ear deafening, rhythmic scream. The force of acceleration momentarily causes me to lose my balance, and I almost fall off the bombardier's platform.



The Sound of Music—1943

We are rolling. (I secretly imagine we are taking off from an ancient, weed-choked runway in the swirling mist of the North Sea, laden with five 1,000 pounders, destined for the ball-bearing works at Schweinfurt.) I turn around and point my video camera out the port window. Those magnificent Wright Cyclone engines have come into an element all their own

As we bank, I see Lou staring straight ahead with an intense, yet far off look in his eyes. I can tell by the expression on his face that for him, he is again a twenty-four year old bomber pilot winging his way eastward for yet another bombing raid on the crumbling remains of the Third Reich. For Lou, the clock has turned back 47 years.

For a brief moment I transcend time. I see the well-groomed and manicured landscape of the English Midlands racing below us, the steep, contrasting walls of the White Cliffs of Dover, and white caps dancing on the English Channel. I wonder what it must have been like to see thousands (yes, thousands) of heavy bombers popping through the early morning English cloud cover, lining up on designated Splasher beacons for force assembly.

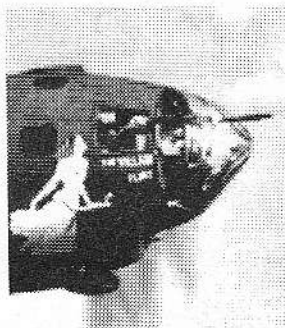
Soon, the flight is almost over. After landing, we taxi to our assigned parking area, stop and power down all four engines. No other airplane is as great and graceful in flight, and it is no small wonder that large crowds gather wherever she lands. She is a flying monument to those who fought and died over enemy skies to keep this country free. [KP]

B-17 Nose Guns

A letter from Michiel ("Mick") J. Hanou, an Associate Member with permanent residence in California, and currently living in Kuwait as an oil company employee, sent an e mail message to the RI editor expressing interest in the installation of nose guns on the B-17F. He had finished reading about the Hamm mission, published in the January 1999 issue, that reminded him of his dinner the previous Christmas "in the good ol' USA" with Buzz Birdsong, 323rd Pilot of "Delta Rebel," and with three B-24 Pilots.

Apart from the repartee between Birdsong, representing the B-17, and the B-24 Pilots, Hanou says, "I just sat back and listened to a great conversation among some great people." He also remarked that "Buzz held his own about the relative merits of the B-17."

Specifically, Hanou asked for additional information on the installation of .50 caliber machine guns in the nose of the



B-17F with .50 Cal. Gun

B-17F both as single and twin-guns. How was the nose reinforced, where were the ammo boxes placed, did the guns interfere with the bombsight, was the airplane nose heavy, and what red tape was involved. This Editor asked W. W. Hill, a 323rd Sq. Sheet Metal Crew Chief, if he could provide any response to Hanou. Hill's response is repeated as follows for the information of all readers of the RI.

One day, Capt. Birdsong, Pilot of the "Delta Rebel," came into the shop and asked if we could install a .50 Cal. machine gun in the nose that would fire straight ahead. After looking over the nose, we determined it was possible. We acquired a small room on the end of Hangar #2 to set up our Sheet Metal Shop. The Squadron had two welders assigned, Eddie Boisvert and Jimmy Hufmann who joined us.

Our Engineering Officer heard about this and threatened action if we cut a hole in the nose. After we explained that the gun was to protect Capt. Birdsong, and not the Engineering Officer, he withdrew his objection and watched the installation progress from afar. After making plans, our welders obtained steel tubing for a tripod to hold the gun and armor plate to mount the tripod in the nose with the .50 Cal. sticking out the Plexiglas nose of the Delta Rebel. It shot straight ahead but did have a little flexibility. The men in the 441st Sub Depot Plexiglas shop cut the hole in the nose and strengthened the area. However, I don't recall putting any type of wind barrier to cover the gap between the gun barrel and the Plexiglas nose. The Gun Worked!

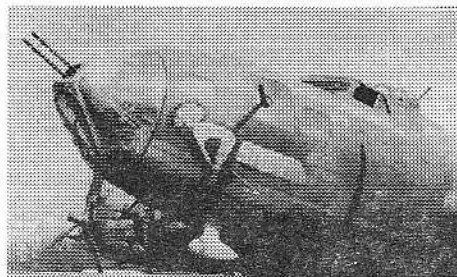
With that experience, it seems we fitted the "Eagle's Wrath" with the same type of gun. I may be wrong but later B-17F replacements came over with two .50s sticking straight out the nose. These were then followed up by the B-17Gs which had the chin turrets that were a great improvement. The only setback to the chin turrets were they had to be loaded and unloaded in flight by the Bombardier with guns pointing down, and then stowed at a 45 degree angle with the guns pointing up on landing. In one instance my friend Lyle Cook, a Ground Crew Chief, received his aircraft after a mission with the guns still pointing down to the ground. At this time of the war, we had doubled the

number of aircraft in the Squadrons which required that each parking pad now had to park two B-17s, usually facing each other because of the space. Lyle, after parking the B-17 in the appropriate spot facing the other B-17 on the pad, noted that the guns were pointed down and not up. So, assuming the Bombardier had unloaded the guns, but had not stowed them, Lyle grasped the gun control and as he raised them to the stowed position, tripped the triggers and shot the hell out of one of the engines on the B-17 facing him.

Fortunately, no one was injured, and for us, the Sheet Metal Crew, there were no structural damages requiring sheet metal repairs. The only requirement was to install a new engine—a job for Cook's crew.

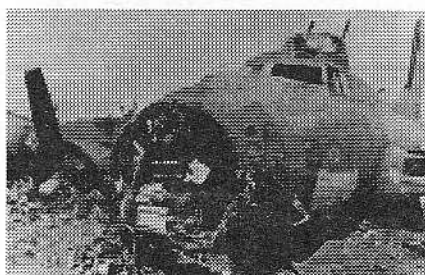
Installation of twin-50s is not discussed by Hill, but is described in "Fortress in the Sky" by Peter M. Bowers. © 1976, Sentry Books, Inc. that addressed this modification.

"....Boeing Field Service Engineers came up with some early solutions. In the adjacent photo, the tail turret guns of a wrecked B-17E



B-17E with Twin .50s

were welded to the nose of another complete with sighting station above the fuselage contours. Twin .50s were snugged in with canvas.



B-17G (It had a Chin Turret when it left)

Eventually, of course, the designers at home solved the forward fire power problem with the chin turret on the B-17G. In the meantime, we can thank Whit Hill and his team and Buzz Birdsong for his leadership in getting something done.

The Red Lion is Alive and Well

Located on the "main Drag" by the base at Bassingbourn, we are informed by Steve Pena, Curator of the Tower Museum that the Red Lion Pub is doing a thriving business as many 91sters may remember.

The Proprietor is Paul Willey and the address is:



51 Old North Road, Bassingbourn/Kneesworth, Cambs, SG8 5JL, UK. Telephone: 0172-249902.

Message from Secretary/Treasurer

Continued from Page 1.....

During this time I spent from 9 to 12 hours a day comforting her, as best I could, in the hospital which left little time for anything else. Consequently, my normal prompt response to the 91st BGMA duties went by the wayside and many pieces of correspondence went unanswered. If you communicated with me, in any way, during this period and I failed to reply, I apologize and if you feel inclined resubmit your request and I will answer ASAP.

Response to our dues notice has been near normal with an approximate 75% return. My "Reach out letter" (2nd Notice) will historically bring that percentage up considerably so we remain strong for the present.

My thanks to Mike Banta and the members of the "91st Ring," the interesting information exchange vehicle. Previously most of the queries, now directed to the "Ring," were sent to me and for the most part I had neither the knowledge nor the resources to answer these questions. Now, thanks to the "Ring" members, a good number of personal questions have been answered to the satisfaction of the members and a tremendous burden has been lifted from my shoulders.

[Ed. Note: For those of you who are not computer savvy, the "Ring" is a list of known 91st BGMA members who have E-Mail addresses. A single message can be sent to all members, or selected members, at the click of the mouse button. Mike Banta, FM, 324th, is the "Ring Master." If you are on the internet, his address is: <B-17banta@aol.com>].

Kudos to Steve Pena and the Tower Museum people. I receive many complimentary remarks concerning the good work these people are doing in perpetuating the memories of the 91st and the graciousness these people have shown to visitors. Keep up the good work, Steve, Peter, Allison, et al.

Our thanks to Jim and Suzy Shepherd (daughter of Tex Frye) and their son for the fabulous job they have done on the 91st bomb Group web page. There are approximately 3000 hits each month on this site and this is doing much to preserve the heritage of the 91st. If you haven't visited the page you should. You will find it extremely interesting, educational and nostalgic.

Several Bomb Group memorial associations, such as ours, have elected to disband following this year's reunion. Your officers have decided that this is not a viable option at this time and that we should continue as long as possible. We need your input on this.

There have been some suggestions that we open the full membership of the 91st BGMA to all associate members. There is a serious consequence to this action. First, the by-laws would have to be amended, no big deal, but should we pursue this course, we would lose our "Veteran Exemption" under the (501)(C)(19) Code of the IRS. Again, we need your input on this.

I didn't intend this to be so lengthy, but all the subjects are pertinent and of extreme interest to all members, consequently, the length. I hope it has been informative.

Have You Visited the 91st Web Site Lately?

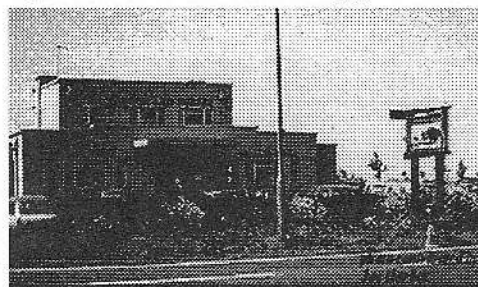
Jim Shepherd and his wife, Suzy, (daughter of Tex Frye) have done a marvelous job of developing a web site for the 91st BGMA. If you are not "on the web," call a friend and ask him or her to look up "91st Bomb Group.com."

Where Were You When the War Ended?

Here's one story. Well, maybe. It took place the day before the Peace Agreement was signed. It is told by Joe Harlick, well known photographer of the 91st.

"It seems like a good time to bring up this story about the Waggon [sic] & Horse Pub and a photo I took in 1978. (It may have been called a different name in 1945.)

"On May 7, 1945, it was announced that the Peace Agreement would be signed the next day. We were told that the personnel on leave would have their leaves extended, but the ones on base were restricted to the base. This didn't go over too well. Bill Pulliam and I, in our fatigue uniforms, decided to borrow a couple of bicycles and ride out the main gate like we were going to the barracks across the road. When we got to the middle of the road, we made a quick left turn and peddled like hell down the road. No one stopped us, so we headed for the Waggon & Horse Pub



The Waggon & Horse Pub

"After a couple of Ales, we mentioned to the owner that the war was over and he could turn his lights on the outside sign board. After flipping the switch and nothing happening, we

asked if he had a ladder and we proceeded to climb up and fix the wires and exchanged the bulbs. When he flipped the switch a second time, the lights came on. When we got back in the Pub, he had come out of the cellar carrying a dusty bottle of prewar Scotch. He said those lights had been out since 1939 and I can't think of a better time to bring out this bottle. We helped him kill the bottle of Scotch. Neither Bill Pulliam nor I remember how we got back to our sleeping quarters that night. We also don't know what happened to the two bicycles. This was just one of my flashbacks."

Cheers, Joe Harlick

A Chance Meeting—54 Years Later

George Jacobs, Navigator, LM, 324th, flew a mission on April 16, 1945 to bomb a railroad bridge at Regensburg. He was filling in on the crew of 1/Lt. Harry Camp in B-17G, 44-6568, "Skunkface III." More recently Jacobs was attempting to get the identity of the other crew members on this mission, only to learn, through the assistance of Mike Banta and Lowell Getz, that Skunkface was shot down the following day and all the crew members were Killed-in-Action, except the Tail Gunner, Sgt. Herman U. Evans, who became a POW.

While Jacobs was dropping his bombs on a bridgehead over the Danube, a group of starving, exhausted slave laborers and concentration camp victims on a death march south were passing through Regensburg and were slowly approaching the area near the bridge. Bill Luksenburg was among them. At 1157 am the bombs rained down. Bill was close enough to hear the bombs screech and whistle on their way towards the bridge. He was so close that a crater formed by one bomb covered him with mud and debris. Fortunately he was not injured, but he did lose a shoe.

Continued on Page 6.....

Who Liberated Stalag VIIA (Moosburg)?

Some confusion has existed about who opened the gates of Stalag VIIA at Moosburg Germany in the latter days of WWII. One source wrote that Gen. Patton burst through the gate in a Sherman tank. Another source said it was lieutenant driving a military vehicle but not a tank. Eisenhower's book, "Crusade in Europe" would lead one to believe that Patton was operating farther north and east and that General Patch was in the general area with his VIIth Army. James H. Keffe, a prominent individual in the Seattle eastside City of Bellevue, a former member of the City Council, and a B-24 pilot who was shot down and ended up as a guest of the Luftwaffe at Barth and then Stalag VIIA, tells this story:

"On Sunday, 29 Apr '45, at about 11:35, a jeep, a couple of 6x6 trucks and a couple of half-tracks with infantry soldiers were all led into and down the central street of Stalag VIIA by a Sherman tank, which rolled right over the series of barbed wire gates. The jeep contained a driver and a young Army Officer (a 1st Lt., as I recall, but maybe a Captain) who had a case of pink champagne and was looking for his brother, a USAF POW. The brother was produced in a few minutes and they proceeded to drink champagne! I peeked into the rear of one of the 6x6s, which were all tarped up (weather was cold, wet and miserable—we'd had snow a few days earlier). It was full of guns, swords, etc., which'd been collected from Germans.

All morning many of us had sat on the roofs of the barracks and watched "The Battle of Moosburg"—tanks, infantry deploying, knocking out a CP in a church tower, then the little convoy which came into the camp. One small column of tanks had earlier gone right past the camp and fired into it with .50 Cals., wounding a few and killing a few.

The troops were 14th Armored Division and 99th Infantry Division of Patton's 3rd Army. Understand that in the mad dash eastward and to the south, different divisions and smaller units would be transferred from one army to another as the fluid situation warranted. Patton came into VIIA and walked into the camp down the main street through the mud and puddles, accompanied by 3 or 4 other officers/sergeants. I passed him on the street on my way out of the camp for a walk in the countryside. I understand he was in the camp for a couple of hours.

Realize, there were 30,000 of us POWs in and around the camp—every nationality that was fighting the Nazis—including a bunch of Italian Generals! Patton's forces liberated the camp; the officer in the jeep didn't really liberate us, per se. He was merely looking for his brother and, luckily, found him. An administrative detachment came in and set up shop, and when Patton came in he ordered a of stuff—showers, food, medics, etc.

Patch never came into the camp. He was farther south with I believe, the 7th Army." Cheers, JK.

A Chance Meeting

Continued from Page 5.....

which under the conditions that prevailed could have been a disaster for him.

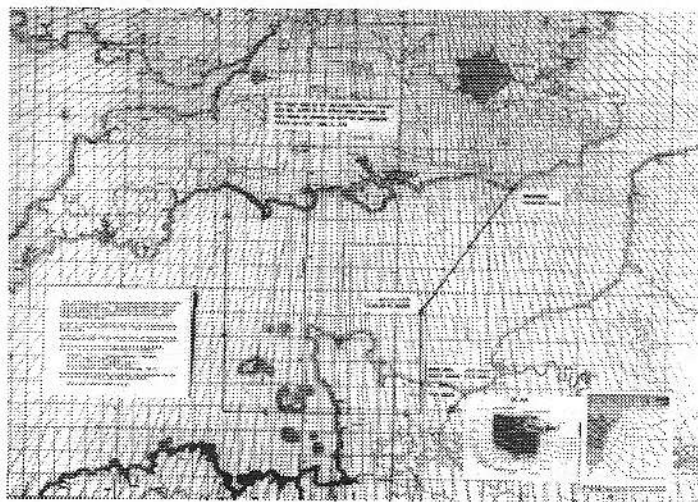
I did not know Bill's involvement in this episode until after I met him here in Silver Sprig about thirty years ago and we exchanged stories. But, at 1157 am on April 16, I was less than four miles away from him, straight up! I felt at that moment God ordained that we would both survive the War, and that we would find each other and be friends. For this I feel blessed.

[The foregoing article was submitted by Bea and George Jacobs, George Jacobs & Associates, Broadcast Engineers.]

Letters to the Editor

Don Gilmore, son-in-law of Lyle Jones, Top Turret Gunner on "Times-a-Wastin'" reported a correction in the e-mail address of Roy and Lois Fratz, FM 401st, in the January 2000 issue of the RI. The correct address is <lfrazz@juno.com>. Roy was Crew Chief of "Times-a-Wastin'."

John Howland, writes, "The D-Day Museum is scheduled to open in New Orleans next summer and I decided to donate the GEE chart I used on D-Day while leading an attack on Gold Beach. I also put together this account and published 1000 copies all donated to the museum. I hope it might help them generate some income.



D-Day Invasion Gee Map

To my way of thinking, the technology we used, especially in the field of navigation is one of the untold stories of world War II. I hope this sheds a little light on the procedures we used. [John was a PFF Navigator]

Jason Wilson is 28 and works as a Systems Engineer and Web Developer for TAP Publishing Company in Crossville, TN, better known for its publication, "Trade-A-Plane." He is building a B-17 replica (scale model) and wants to give it the markings of a 91st airplane, "Just Plain Lonesome." Ray Bowden's book, "Plane Names and Fancy Tales" contains a good write-up on this ship that was shot down after 40 missions on 30 May '44 with only two survivors. Jason would like to hear from any one who can give him information about the airplane, who flew it, ground crew, and stories about it. His address is 524 Lee Dr., Crossville, TN 38555; e-mail <jwilson@tappublishing.com>.

Jack Bowen, FM, 401st, was a waist gunner with Lt. William Gibbons' crew on the 21 Feb '44 mission to Gütersloh, during "Big Week." (The target of record is Achmer.) His ship, "Lightning Strikes," was one of four shot down from the 91st. Others were 401st's "My Beloved," and 323rd's "Miss Ouchita" and "Miss Minookie." [Ed. Note: I flew "Gay Cabelleros" as left wing man in a three-ship "spare element" led by Neal Ward in "Miss Minookie." Spencer Osterberg was right wing man. The fighters hit us pretty hard. We flew in a composite group with aircraft of the 481st Group.]

Eric Mombeck informs us that after 12 years of research he has completed a book about Jagdgeschwader 4 and its mother unit, the Sturmstaffel 1. For further information, contact: eric.mombeck@village.uunet.be.

Luc Dewez, our Belgian friend who places a wreath for the 91st at Maargraten each year has sent in bit of poetry to honor three B-17s lost on March 6, 1944.

Letters to the Editor

Continued from Page 6

● **Henry Jensen**, FM, 324th has been waiting a long time to get his letter printed. He wrote this to his wife from a relocation center when awaiting shipment home after finishing his 35 missions in early 1945.

"Small Talk. There's the smoke and the talk and the waiting. Sitting around in the dirty chairs where others have waited before. Feet propped up, hot hats, 35 mission hats, tipped back in planned casualness. Leather jackets open. Flight jackets with bold stories painted on them—bold stories of bold achievement. Hot airplanes and hot women on the jackets. A B-24 dropping 35 bombs with names: Rhine, Essen, Bingen, Euskirchen. A nude hot young girl and smooth lettering: Sweet 17, Sweet B-17 with flak breaking all around. A hundred jackets with a hundred names and a hundred dames. But just one story: Finished up, Lucky, Going Home.

Over it all the talk goes on. Over the poker and the pinochle, over the chess and the checkers. Over Ellery Queen and the London Times. The small talk of last month and next week goes on lazy and safe: "We went over Merseburg at 17,000 feet, they cut us to ribbons. C'mon play the goddam cards, quit stallin'. I haven't seen that jerk since pre-flight, you say he's flying lead? Women on the field for a week after the party. Yeah, old Doc went down on his 23rd. Ruhr Valley. Damn shame. His wife's pregnant, you know. Seems like the good guys all get it.

Where's the ping pong ball? Busted. Hell, let's play darts. When I get back I'm gonna fly a four-engine desk. You'll fly over Tokyo and like it. What a place that Brussels is. We were there four days waiting for a ride back, finally came back on a C-47. I'll take Brussels to London any day. She's wide open. Remember old Fat Hamilton, the chicken-hearted guy down at Marfa? Yeah, well he got the DFC for bringing his ship back with two engines and a co-pilot dead. Good job. Never thought he'd be able to take combat, did you?

Are you on that boat shipment? God I get tired of doing nothing. I'm gonna stay there a week.

The small talk goes on and on. Small talk about small things. And some things are not so small. The men, the young men, are talking and waiting to go home. Young men with lines on their faces and gratitude in their hearts. They are through, for a while, with the enemy. The enemy with many names: fog, flak, and 55 below. The enemy who is five miles below and bursting ugly and black under your nose. The enemy who crawled into bed with you at night and drilled you hollow with fear. The enemy you helped to crush—and lived to tell of it.

Not everyone is here tonight, listening to the radio and making small talk. Some with new wives and new babies lie splattered over a German Hillside. To them Boeing was no a Fortress but a tomb—Consolidated was not a Liberator but a coffin. Why have they died? We hope we know.

Wonder what the old man will think when he sees these ribbons.

Hey, Fred, how about a game of chess. Helps pass the time.

Small talk—while we're waiting. Waiting to go back to the sweet yesterday we left on the other side of the sea. Waiting for the tomorrow we helped create.

[Ed. Note. Sorry it took so long to publish this article. Now, I have to pause to wipe my eyes that have become blurred. I just down-loaded 55 years of pent-up emotions.]

Folded Wings

Continued from Page 8

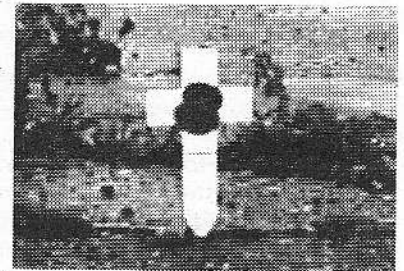
● **Walter E. Zegota**, FM 322nd, Sterling Heights, MI, Oct. 8, 1999, Age 81. Walter was a Chemical Engineer in the automotive industry. He died of lung cancer. Reported by his wife, Betty, who reports her new address: 59058 Golden Oak St., Washington Township, MI 48094.

Letters to the Editor

Cont. from Previous Column

Joe Harlick, who does an outstanding job of supplying this publication with photos when needed sent in a photo of all the men assigned to the Photo Units of the 91st and an accompanying article telling of the entire service these people performed which went far beyond taking crew photos and nose art shots. These will be held for another issue in which the full story can be told.

Steve Pena, Curator of the Tower Museum at Bassingbourn sent in a lengthy article on "Remembrance Day" last November 11, which is celebrated in the United States as Memorial Day on the same date in remembrance of the Armistice at the end of the World War.



Memorial Day Cross 11 Nov 99

American Air Museum at Duxford announces a Tour scheduled July 8-12, 2000, as a Millennium tour. For further information contact: AAM 2000 Tour, Attn: Paul Flebotte, 57 Castle Road, E. Falmouth, MA 02536, or call 1-888-507-5597.

Mike Banta, RingMaster of the 91st, sent in a lengthy piece on his visit to Old Blimey on Veterans' Day. Like so many other contributions this was passed up when we ran out of space. We did give a fair coverage of the Group Tour but it is with regret that we couldn't get all the material published.

Steve Rustad is a regular visitor to all the various B-17 web Sites and expressed appreciation to all of the gallant men of the Eighth Air Force who fought for freedom in the skies of Europe during World War II. He has written a book, "The Triumph and the Glory" that is available at major book stores. And through the web.

John W. Howland. Jake, someday we'll get publish story about the "Fastidious Mickey Operator."

Steve Pena reported the new Officers at Bassingbourn Barracks: Lt. Col. Condie, Commanding Officer; Maj. Duncan Gregory, 2IC; Maj. R. A. Licence MBE (RS) OC Wray Company; and Regimental Sergeant Major WO1 K Lowerson (RE), ATR Regiment.

Fred "Doe," former pilot in the 401st, found the 91st BGMA on the Web site and was astounded to know there was such an organization. He is now a Full Member and we welcome him to the Corps, as it were, and we look forward to receiving your last name.

Chuck Galian, after seeing his article in the January RI, wrote: "I'm sending a copy to the sister we had at the Senior class that corrected all our original errors. I'm sure the old gal will be pleased to find out her work was not in vain."

[Ed. Note: Ask her if she would like to work on the RI.]

Folded Wings

● **Howard C. H. Donahue**, Towson, MD, Dec. 16, 1999, Age 77. Donahue was a Pilot in the 91st and completed 35 missions and was awarded the DFC, Distinguished Unit Citation, seven Air Medals and six Battle Stars to go with his ETO Medal. After the War he obtained a Bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland. After working as a salesman for several years, he opened his own gun shop and eventually became a renowned ballistics expert. One of his consulting jobs involved the shooting of President Kennedy. His theory was published in the Baltimore Sun, Dec. 21, 1999. Donahue died of pneumonia.

● **Father Daniel Hunt**, 324th, Brighton, MA, Oct. 9, 1999. No further information given.

● **J. Norman Mansfield**, FM 322nd, Chattanooga, TN, February 2000 (exact date not given). Passed away quietly of brain cancer in a nursing home. Reported by Dan Collyer, a neighbor.

● **Wayne (Homer) Nail**, 324th, Webster City, IA, June 13, 1999. No further information given.

● **E. Lee Nichols, Jr.**, LM 324th, Goodwell, OK, Feb. 2000. As reported by his wife to Paul Chryst, Nichols died in his sleep of pneumonia. He was buried with Masonic honors. His wife of 54 years, Betty, came to the U.S. in 1946 to marry Lee. They have three children and several grandchildren.

"On bail out he had his .45 pistol. The following day, he joined a band of Maquis, Armed French Resisters, and after several fierce fights, they entered the American lines around Rheims where C-47s were bringing supplies to Gen. Patton. A pilot of one of the C-47s he approached happened to be a class mate of Kelley and he flew him back to England. After the War, buck married and bought a jewelry store in Marion, IA. He is survived by his wife, Lillian.

● **Robert E. O'Bannon**, FM, 322nd, Whittier, CA, January 6, 2000, Age 78. He was a B-17 pilot shot down on a mission to Berlin on June 21, 1944, imprisoned at Stalag Luft III and Stalag 7A until liberated on April 19, 1945. He is survived by five children, ten grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

● **Calvin A. Sommer**, FM, Hq. Boynton Beach, FL, May 1998, Reported by his son, Arthur.

● **Albert Spieler**, 323rd, St. Louis, MO, Oct. 10, 1999, Age 88. A former Sheet Metal Repair Crew Member, Spieler worked on many of the 91st Group aircraft including "909." Reported by Whitmal W. Hill based on information provided by Spieler's niece, Mrs. Virginia Haynes.

● **John Sykes, Jr.**, FM, 323rd, Port Orange, FL, June 21, 1999, Age 78. Sykes was Co-Pilot of "Champagne Girl" that collided with another B-17 July 19, 1944 resulting in interment of the survivors in Switzerland. This mission was the subject of articles in the *Ragged Irregular* January and July 1999. He had a history of heart problems, twice necessitating open heart surgery, cardiac arrest, congestive heart failure and ultimately renal failure. He was buried with full military honors at Florida National Cemetery, Bushnell, FL. He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Kathryn, who wrote, "at the head of his coffin was a beautiful red, white and blue flower arrangement (with Airplane) from Cyril Braund,

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THE RAGGED IRREGULAR

These Newsletters are published quarterly. January, April, July and October 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 Basingbourn, 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.

● **Grover Cleveland "Buck" Nordman, Jr.**, FM, 322th Marion, IA, Dec. 12, 1999. Buck was Radio Operator on the Crew of E. Robert Kelley who tells us "On Sept. 5, 1944, in 'My Baby,' we were shot down over occupied France. Buck landed near a block house of the Maginot Line, entered and hid his parachute and crawled to a nearby farm house where the family hid him in a manure pile from the German soldiers who were searching the village. The next day, the two wives dug him out, stripped him of his flying clothes, scrubbed him in a creek, and gave him civilian clothes and shoes."

Continued top of next column.....

Pilot of 'Champagne Girl.' His Radio Operator, Bill Bridges, came down from Columbia, SC, for the funeral. In August, his Flight Engineer, Donald McBey and his wife, Mollie, flew out from Mt. Vernon, WA, to visit me. We are a family."

● **Leon G. "Red" Wilson**, 401st, Pasadena, TX, July 16, 1999, Age 73. Edward Drake reports the death of his former Ball Turret Gunner who was with him from the time they arrived at Basingbourn, December 1944, to the end of the War. He was the youngest member of the crew. Reported by his Wife, Melba. [Folded Wings continued on Page 7]