

THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322nd Bomb Sq.



323rd Bomb Sq.



Supporting Units



324th Bomb Sq.



401st Bomb Sq.

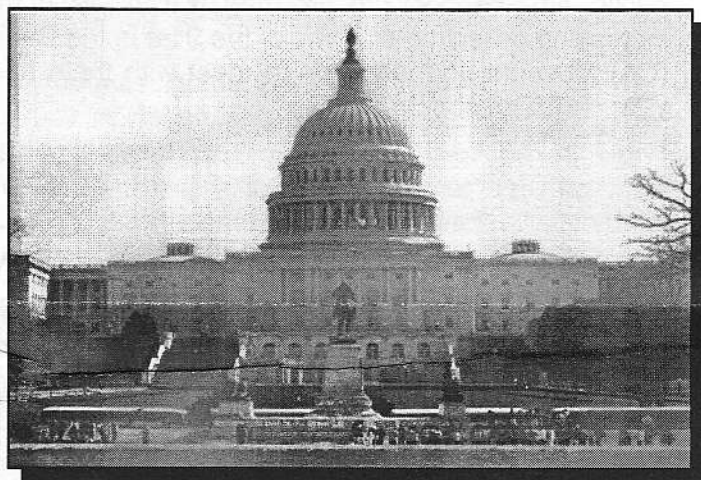
**DUES
2004
ARE
DUE**

Vol. 37 No. 1

91st Bombardment Group (H)

January 2004

Mark your Calendar for the Reunion in Washington DC 30 Sept.- 3 Oct. '04



The Reunion events are tentatively as follows: (details will be in the April RI.)

Thursday, 30 Sept.:

Morning - Registration

1300: Depart for the new Air Space Museum

1800: "Not so-Gala" Reception (Free Food)

1900: Dinner on your own.

Friday, 1 October:

Morning - Registration

Visit to Andrews AFB (If we can arrange a visit to Air Force One, the President's Aircraft)

Lunch: Club at Andrews AFB

Afternoon: Visit the Archives in College Park MD where our combat records are stored.

1730: Depart for a Dinner Cruise on the Potomac. Return 2200.

Saturday, 2 October:

Morning: Business Meeting for Full Members and lunch buffet.

Tour of some special sites for Ladies and others.

Afternoon: Bus tour of WWII Memorial and other sights on the Mall.

Sunday, 3 October

Morning: Brunch Cruise on the Potomac, Church or Sightseeing.

Afternoon: Bus tour of Mt. Vernon, Arlington Cemetery, Old City in Alexandria and other sights in the area.

Evening: Banquet and our final Hospitality Room farewells.

Registration forms will be in April Issue of RI

There is so much to see that we will arrange with the Reunion Hotel to guarantee our prices for a week ahead and for the following week on a space-available basis in case you wish to come early or stay late. Cost will be about \$98/day including tax.

Unfortunately, the Hotels require us to meet 90% of our block or pay a penalty; so we plan to block only 80 rooms on Saturday and Sunday, with lesser numbers on the other days.

Whichever Hotel we select, it will be near a Metro so you can make many sightseeing trips on your own, if you wish. As always, we will have bus transportation for those who want to go as a Group.

We hope to have a sizable Hospitality Room and intend to have it open as much as possible.

Registration will be open in the mornings and on Thursday, Friday and Saturday afternoons.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It is 14 Dec 03 as I write this and it is indeed a memorable date for a number of reasons. First, this was the day 100 years ago when the Wright Brothers (almost) made their first flight. Older brother Wilbur was at the controls in Kitty Hawk, NC, as the result of a coin toss. But the "airplane" reared when he applied full throttle, fell back and busted a couple of things. Wilbur rushed back to Dayton, OH, fabricated new parts and returned in time for Orville to catch the winds just right three days later. Second, we woke this morning to the good news that Saddam Hussein had been captured in a "spider hole" near Tikrit. Third, 80 years ago today a little boy was born in Kansas City, KS, and named Edward; OK, so nobody but me and a few of my kids consider that very memorable. Until I think of something, let's review the past 3 months in the life of the 91st.

Your Board held our quarterly Conference Call on 8 Nov 03 with only Phil Mack unable to participate. We applauded the gradual increase of the Memorial Maintenance Fund to over \$3,190; all sales of the litho "Ruhr Valley Raiders" done for the Tacoma Reunion go into that fund, as do appropriate gifts to the Fund. We also applauded Marv Goldberg's up-to-date handling of the PX; it is adding to our resources. By the way, we only have a dozen copies of the Memoirs of the 91st Bomb Group and a couple of dozen of the calendars left; neither are likely to be available for reprint. Turner has notified us that they sold 344 of the books for which we will receive a royalty for the Maintenance Fund.

Following up on our discussions at the last two Conference Calls, Jake Howland feels that he is getting closer to a definitive resolution of many of the discrepancies in our records for our "Honor Roll" of deaths. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to Bud Evers who did all of the basic research in the mid-1980's. "Curly" Havelaar's book, The Ragged Irregulars of Bassingbourn, which gave us the only real history of the 91st, relied heavily on Bud's work. I contributed no original research for the Memoirs of the 91st BG but did try to correlate the discrepancies from Bud's earlier data, some changes in Curly's book, and the data Jake was reporting from the graveyard memorials. Until we have Jake's final figures, it seems best to use 886 total KIA/MIA and other deaths; since there were nearly 100 in the latter category, we hope people will be careful to correctly state that there were about 800 "combat-related" deaths. Hopefully, by next year, Jake will have an even more accurate figure for us.

Some urgency for these accurate numbers was increased by the recent contacts from the Base Commander at Minot AFB, ND, who has expressed a strong interest in our history since his is the successor organization. The contact came about through the excellent work of Mike Banta's "Ring." We cannot say enough about the credit that is brought to the 91st by the contributions of The Ragged Irregular (thanks, Steve), Jim Sheppard's web site, and Banta's "Ring." They are wonderfully complimentary and give us great coverage.

While we do not plan to open our own museum --- and hope that our dedicated volunteers in England can get The Tower Museum open in the spring -- we are exploring possibilities of putting some of our pool of historical materials in a research facility open to the public. Jim Shepherd has provided us with a list of the increasing collection of items of the 91st in the Chino (CA) Museum and we hope to meet with them next year on future cooperation.

I have asked Ace, Jake Howland, and Paul Limm to work with me to prepare a policy paper for future contacts with the overseas memorials.

All of them are knowledgeable on various aspects and Jake has been tremendously helpful in coordinating our Memorial Day and other participations abroad. We need to regularize a way that it can be carried on in the future. We will incorporate it in some proposed changes to the By-Laws that we will be putting out in April. I have asked Joe Harlick to lead our Nominations Committee. He will be publicizing that in the April issue.

As for the Reunion 2004 plans, I will be mailing data on 5 hotels in the Crystal City/Arlington VA area to W. W. Hill who will be our Reunion Chairman. He will personally look at them, make his recommendations and then I will sign the contract (hopefully by mid-Jan.) The cost will be about \$98/day including tax; most have free parking. We plan to block only 80 rooms because we have a penalty clause at all of them if we fail to fill 90% or so of our block; so start making your plans.

Finally, what really made the 14th of December such a memorable day -was that Joan and I had lunch today with Joe and Jenny Harlick who drove over from Ocean Shores. At our age what can be more memorable than good fellowship with good friends? To all of you on behalf of your Board, we hope you had a very Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and are enjoying a Happy New Year.Ed Gates

LETTERS to the EDITOR and MORE

**It is with deep sorrow that we report the loss
of Our Secretary/Treasurer Asay Johnson's**

Wonderful Wife, Gloria

who passed away the 12th of December 2003.

A Memorial Service is planned for the
7th of January

Any donations can be made to the



Hospice of Havasu

PO Box 597

Lake Havasu City, AZ 86405

From Mike Banta, 91st Ring:

Congratulations and many thanks for the magnificent October issue of the R/I. I loved all the stories and articles and especially those on Chaplin Ragan. I recall that, toward the end of the war, a 323rd B-17 was named "*Ragan's Raiders*". I have no proof but feel sure that it was named in Father Ragan's honor.

Editor's note: A late starter in the air war this silver B17G flew its first combat mission on the day that the Group flew its 300th. Who named this plane is not clear but having joined the war, the plane made up for lost time by flying most of the Group's missions until the hostilities ceased. We'd be interested to find out who named the plane.

From Joe and Jenny Harlick:

T'is the season to be jolly and we want to wish you both Health and Happiness for the coming year.

Most of all, we want to thank you for the work you both are doing on the Ragged Irregular publication. That is a real challenge for anyone. You are doing a great job, only one thing wrong. .it seems that the folded wings column is getting bigger and bigger and I keep checking it to see if my name is on the list!!!!

All kidding aside, keep up the good work. We are setting our sights for the trip to Washington DC next September and hope to see the WW II Memorial before all of us are gone.

Editors note: The National World War II Memorial will be dedicated in Washington DC on Saturday, May 29, 2004. To get details of this memorial, go to the memorial website at www.wwiimemorial.com or call 800-639-4992.

Curly Havelaar:

Inform us that 4,068 copies of the "Ragged Irregulars of Bassingbourn" have been sold to date (July). 799 of these were autographed by Curly.

President, Ed Gates
13311 16th Ave, Ct. S
Tacoma WA 98444
Tel: (253) 535-4246

1st Vice President
Marvin M. Goldberg
437 Narragansett St. NE
Palm Bay FL 32907-1332
Tel: (321) 953-3694

2nd Vice President
Phil Mack
17521 155th Ave. SE
Renton Washington
98058-9087
Tel: (425) 271-5277
FAX (425) 227-8190
(mackovco@aol.com)

Secretary-Treasurer
Asay B. Johnson
590 Aloha Drive
Lake Havasu City AZ
86403-4559
Tel: (928) 453-3114
FAX (928) 453-6370
(ace9bgma@rraz.net)

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

Editor, Steve Perri
12750 Kelly Greens Blvd.
Ft. Myers FL 33908
Tel: (239) 454-5838
(deltareb@aol.com)

**INVITATION : from The 91st SRWA
to their Reunion 16-20 Sept. 2004**

The 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (1948-1957) was a descendent of our group. Their association graciously invited us to their reunion at:

The Radisson Hotel

Rate \$119 860-442-0631
35 Governor Winthrop Blvd.
New London CT 06320

While our reunion will be the 30th of September to the 4th of October, I hope that some of us who live in that area can attend to represent the 91st BG (H) of the Mighty Eighth Air Force and that one of us can accept the offer to address the 91st SRWA reunion at their banquet.

If you are interested, please contact Jim directly at JimBardJr@adelphia.net with a copy to me B17banta@aol.com

Or you can write to: Jim Bard, Secretary, 91SRWA
3424 Nottingham Rd.
Westminster, MD 21157

Events Being Considered are: Hospitality Room, Bradley field Museum & Lunch, Mystic Harbor Tour, Newport Tour, Foxwood Casino/Shows, Ocean Fishing, Steam Engine Train Trip, Beach-side party (clam bake), Golf, Semi-formal Dinner.

Sent to us by Melinda Pate

The Tower Museum at Bassingbourn

EAST ANGLIAN AVIATION SOCIETY Autumn 2003 Newsletter

Dear Friends:

Another autumn is upon us and it seems a good time to review the past year. Again, as always, I ask myself, "Where has the time gone?"

This year has been fraught with its share of problems. As most of you are aware, the ATR closed the Tower Museum in January whilst radiation checks were carried out, under the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974.

In 1999 and via our membership of the BAPC (British Aircraft Preservation Council) we were made aware of the tightening of legislation regarding ownership and display of artifacts containing luminous/radiating elements. We sought advice from the Health and Safety Department of ATR Bassingbourn. In November 2002 (two and a half years later) the MOD Naval Radiation Department at Gosport monitored the collection. At that time, we were lead to believe there was no real problem and advice was given on how to proceed safely to ensure compliance with the new IRR99 regulations.

However, the Commanding Officer, at that time, made it known that he did not want any privately owned and likely hazardous materials on the barracks and requested that all our radioactive items be removed by April 30, 2003. After some careful consideration of his demand, a conscious decision was taken not to dispose of a few chosen items. These were deemed to be of prime historical importance and value to the collection and their loss historically significant. Work was immediately put in hand to desensitize them and this was carried out after seeking professional advice and with the utmost care and understanding of the situation. Other non-essential items were made ready for disposal by the required date of 30th April 2003.

In January 2003 the MOD came to Bassingbourn with more sensitive monitoring equipment; mildly chastised us for our "desensitizing" action, but agreed no contamination to the items worked on. However, other sources of radiation contamination within the Tower were found which required further investigation. It was agreed that the MOD would return to complete this investigation, followed by a thorough cleansing program in order that we regain use of the Museum by the end of April 2003. In the meantime the Museum was closed. Events in Iraq and other delays has meant that the Museum has remained closed indefinitely -- We patiently wait it's

re-opening! We have not been able to attend any shows as a result. However, a small display supported by a slide presentation has been operating in our Hangar 3 offices. This has allowed us to continue welcoming visitors to Bassingbourn.

One great delight was in the return of Paul Chryst with another 91st BG "One last time" tour in May. Although the Tower Museum was not available to them the ATR gave their full support to make it a very memorable day.

Work continues on seeking Charity status, although progress has been severely hampered due to domestic and health problems within the investigating team.

This situation, yet again, highlights the desperate shortage of manpower, which is becoming worryingly prevalent in operating not only the Museum but also the Society itself. My appeal for more members to get involved with Society business becomes ever more relevant; so please, if you can spare some time - however small--please let us know. Help in operating the Museum is now becoming URGENT.

In January, we were saddened by the death of Maurice Smyth, one of our most ardent and stalwart Museum staff and supporters. In April Vic Lawson stood down as Treasurer when he relocated to Sheffield. Vic did a first-rate job. John Doughton has now taken over as Treasurer in June after being co-opted onto the Committee. I hope you will join me in wishing him every success in this role.

The Committee wishes you best wishes for the coming year and please encourage new members to join us and become involved.

Peter Roberts, Chairman EAAS

HURRAH! HURRAH!

**OUR PRESIDENT HAS JUST GIVEN
US WORD FROM PETER ROBERTS
THAT THE TOWER MUSEUM IS
NOW OPEN
WHAT A GREAT WAY TO START
THE NEW YEAR!**

KUDOS TO THE GROUND CREW

JACK GAFFNEY enlisted in October 1941 and after



graduating from Air Mechanics School he was assigned to the 91st BG in Basingbourn England. The first B-17 to receive nose art painted by him was called "Stinky", which was featured in "Life" magazine. The second plane he was assigned to, which also received nose art painted by him was "**Invasion 2nd**" which flew 23 missions before being shot down. He also painted nose art on the "**The**

Bad Egg," "**The Sky Wolf**," "**Los Angeles City Limits**," "**Sunkist**," "**Hotshot Charlie**," "**The Shamrock Special**," and "**Destiny's Child**". The following are two stories told by Jack about two of his famous B-17's:

"**The Shamrock Special**" LL-Z was parked outside the 401st hanger for repairs when it was rammed by, ironically, "**The Careful Virgin**," of the 323rd Bomb Squadron. Minor damage was done to "**The Careful Virgin**," however the damage was considerable to "**The Shamrock Special**." "**The Careful Virgin**" had its hydraulic system shot up and it tried to make the turn off the runway onto the taxi strip. It hit LL-Z in the elevator and vertical stabilizer section with its number four engine prop, and rammed the prop done right through the stomach of the 337 girl painted on the dorsal fin. I had been working on some oxygen lines in the tail section just prior to the accident, when a little voice told me to go out and grab a smoke. Just as I was swinging out of the waist door, I was rolling, unhurt, on the grass, only to look back and see my artwork, as well as the end of "**The Shamrock Special**," in a state of disrepair. It went to the sub-depot, where they took it apart at the number six bulkhead by the back of the wings and replaced it with the good back end of another plane that had its front end messed up. After we got it back from the hanger and did a thorough inspection, Lt. Francis Porada and I took it up for a test flight. We flew around the field a few times and came back for some more adjustments. After another test flight, we declared it ready to go back into combat on Dec. 30, 1943. It flew another twelve missions to add to its fifteen for a total of twenty-seven missions. In mid April it was reassigned

to the Air Force Service Command to become a general's plane. It was returned to the United States at the end of the war. The plane was original with the 95th Bomb Group and was know as "**Easy Aces**", having flown only two missions before it was transferred to the 91st BG. I named it "**The Shamrock Special**" when we received it.

"**Destiny's Child**" was named by the original crew of 1/Lt. Howard Weber when each crew member placed his choice of a name in a hat and the one drawn was chosen to be the name of the plane. S/Sgt. Eugene Letalian, who was the assistant radio operator and waist gunner, placed the name "**Destiny's Child**" in the hat. They left it up to me to decide what to draw on the nose, provided they all agreed with the design. I drew up a character from one I remembered in a comic strip about hillbillies. That character as called Uncle Rafe and was the kid in diapers with a long rifle. The crew all liked the design so I went to work and created the nose art using bubble letters and the Uncle Rafe character.

"**Destiny's Child**" flew 53 combat missions without having to abort due to mechanical failure and flew 44 plus missions on the original four engines. It was shot down on a mission to Berlin. On July 14, 1944, Jack Gaffney received the Bronze Star for the maintenance work he did on "**Destiny's Child**". Jack said, "All I could think of is: here you are, entrusted with a \$300,000 bomber, so you had better take good care of it and those who fly it." He was also awarded the Good Conduct Medal, the Victory and American Defense Medal, the Distinguished unit Citation with cluster and the European Campaign Ribbon with six battle stars. After his service in the 8th Air Force, he worked in the grocery business for 41 years and then retired to focus on his artwork, with scratchboard art as his specialty. He has also announced high school sports for 25 years.



"**The Shamrock Special**"

CREW CHIEF STORY

as told by Jack Gaffney

July 20th 1944, Basingbourn England - it's dark outside the barracks and the glow of the C.Q.'s flashlight shines in your eyes as you hear him say - mission on, briefing at 0400 hours, takeoff at 0500 hours. You dress and wake up Sgt.'s Charles Zentz and George Popowitz, two of the best asst. crew chiefs on the 401st Bomb Squadron, let alone the 91st Bomb Group.

You go to the mess hall, but not down to the flight line as your plane "**Destiny's Child**" is a standby, to be used if another plane has troubles and cannot make the mission. As the countryside comes to life with the roar of B-17 engines, you watch as the planes taxi out and begin their takeoffs. There are 3 other standbys, one from each squadron and already one and then two are taken. You have a bad feeling in the pit of your stomach and wish there had been something you could have redlined the plane for, but you know you would not have done that for this is war.

Suddenly, a truck pulls up in front of your plane and an aircrew unloads and as the plane is fully loaded with bombs and guns and gas and pre-flighted, all they have to do is load and go. This is your plane's 53rd mission without an abortion due to mechanical failure, and it flew its first 44 plus missions on its 4 original engines. You watch as it takes off and you say an extra prayer for that eerie feeling will not go away. As always, you wait for quite a while to be there in case they would abort and return early.

When it nears the time of return from the mission, you and all the other crew/chiefs who have sent their birds out start sweating out their return. Suddenly, you hear the yell. There they come and you crane your neck and gaze into the distance as you start counting the aircraft. The closer they get, you look for distinctive patches and call letters as you look for your baby.

Now in the landing pattern with the badly damaged and those with wounded aboard given priority for landing, you watch as red flares come out and the meat wagon (ambulance) take the medics to the planes with wounded on board.

You look to see if any planes do not have all their fans turning and the returning group gets smaller and suddenly you realize that they are possibly not coming back. You think that they could have had to land at another field because they could not make it home. You stay at the hardstand until it gets dark, tears in your eyes and a heavy heart when you hear they went down. Then, your mind wanders back to when you were first assigned as an asst. Crew/Chief on Capt. Oscar O'Neal's "**Invasion 2nd**". You think of the Hamm Mission when T/Sgt. Eddie Yelle, the radio operator, was hit in the base of the spine by a bullet and bled to death in the radio room and you had to clean it up.

With every spongeful of blood and spinal fluid you squeezed into the bucket, there were a lot of tears.

On the mission to Lorient, the Squadron Commander, Major E. P. Meyers, was hit in the femoral artery and died in the co-pilot's seat. Once again the pail was filled with blood and tears.

On Dec. 30th, "**Invasion 2nd**" was one out of the 9 sent out by the 401st Squadron. and one of the six planes lost that day by the 91st BG.

You get another plane as Asst. Crew Chief, "**The Shamrock Special**," and one day the Flight Chief, Charles Reitz, comes out in a jeep and tells you to get your toolbox and put it in the back of the jeep. As you approach the 401st hanger, there is a brand new B-17G parked there and he tells you "You are now the Crew Chief of this aircraft."

After it is shot down over Leipzig, your next plane is "**Sunkist Sue**." It is abandoned on the continent after the Neiderlahnstein Marshalling Yard Raid.

It is replaced by "**Hot Shot Charlie**," which flies until the war ends and flew POW's back from Barth, Germany. It was flown back to the USA by the 323rd Sqdn.

You fly home on war weary "**Betty Lou's Buggy**" in June of 1945. In 33 months, you have been Asst. Crew Chief for 44 missions and 119 as Crew Chief. On July 1944, you are awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious achievement. During those 33 months, you also find time to paint the nose art on "**Invasion 2nd**," "**The Shamrock Special**," "**Destiny's Child**," "**Sunkist Sue**," "**L.A. City Limits**," "**The bad Egg**," and "**The Sky Wolf**." You also find time to be the vocalist with the Airmen Dance band and dance and sing in the 91st version of the stage show "Red, Hot and Blue and to pitch the 401st Sqdn. to the base softball championship in 1944.

You learn the fate of "**Destiny's Child**" some 40 years later -- it was shot down over Mochau Airfield near Leipzig. Five of the crew bailed out and were POW's and four of the crew were KIA. Since then you've gotten in contact with some of the survivors and the nicest thing to hear was, "It was not your fault, they just blew us out of the sky."

Note:

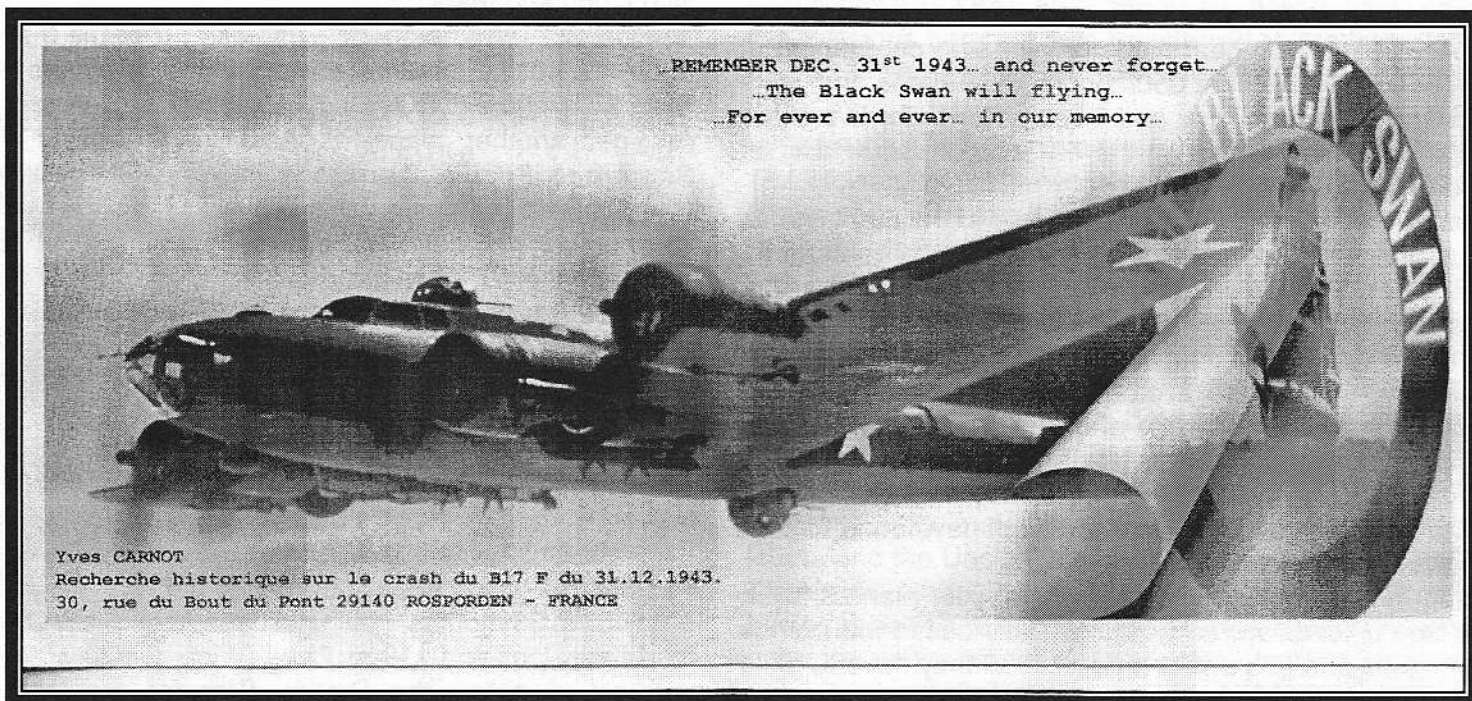
"**The Shamrock Special**," "**Sunkist Sue**" and "**Hot Shot Charlie**" all flew home after the war and ended up in the boneyards.

Jack Gaffney crewed 30 missions as a Sgt.; 41 as a S/Sgt.; 21 as a T/Sgt.; and 26 as a M/Sgt.

DON'T FORGET TO SEND IN YOUR 2004

DUES

See enclosed application

THE DEATH OF THE BLACK SWAN**42-29895. December 31, 1943**

This Invitation was sent to the Editor by Monseur Yves Carnot, Historian of the Crash and Monsieur Yvon Le Bris, Mayor of Bannalec and his Town Council, written in both English and French inviting all to the 60th Anniversary Ceremony of the crash of the B17F Flying Fortress from the 91st Bomb Group (H), 324th Squadron at Locality Kerancreac'h, at Bannalec, on Wednesday, December 31st 2003 at 10:30 AM

The December 31, 1943 mission to the Bordeaux-Cognac area of France was a long one - a scheduled eleven hours from take-off to landing. Nevertheless, we were told that it would be an easy milk run. Our regular pilot, Lt. Stuart Mendelsohn, flew as co-pilot in the right seat. Because our crew's plane, "*The Duke of Paducah*," was in the hanger for flak hole repairs, we were assigned a replacement, a B-17F, "*The Black Swan*"

The mission was flown at 21,000 feet. Over the Bay of Biscay, a strong tail wind took us to the Bordeaux area much sooner than expected. That same wind, however, would greatly retard our trip home. Immediately after crossing the French coast, we encountered unexpectedly heavy and accurate enemy flak. A loud and powerful explosion suddenly rocked our plane sending it careening dangerously close to another B-17. The flak burst, with its bright orange center, exploded directly above the right wing, the big black cloud enveloping us momentarily as we passed through it. Shrapnel tore holes into the aluminum skin near Lt. Mendelsohn but no one was hit. But a moment later, the number three engine froze and we were unable to feather the prop. Manifold pressure of the number four engine dropped sharply, an indication that the supercharger on that engine had been damaged as well. At full throttle, we couldn't maintain altitude. We fell behind, seeing the formation stream off ahead of us. We reversed course, turning northeast, back out over the Bay of Biscay. There we opened the Bomb-bay doors and released our bombs harmlessly over the water. With greatly compromised engine thrust, we assumed a limping solitary, northerly course that we hoped would take us back to England. Our progress was slowed by a strong headwind. We estimated that it would take us two hours to reach the Brest Peninsula. We were still gradually losing altitude and there was nothing we could do about it but, when we reached the denser atmosphere, at about 14,000 feet, our altitude stabilized as we had hoped it would. Soon afterward, however, the temperature gauge on our number one engine began to creep up. We throttled back and, as a result, began to lose altitude once again.

The overheating had resulted from the extra-lean fuel mixture we had set for engines one and two in order to save fuel. A richer fuel/air mixture would lower the engine temperature, but at the expense of increased fuel consumption. The combination of the unfeathered prop on engine three and the yawing to the left due to unbalanced engine thrust, had created a heavy fuel-depleting drag. We feared that we would have to ditch the plane in the Bay. Mendelsohn and I debated the wisdom of turning east again where, if we had to abandon the plane, we could parachute over dry land.

This extreme measure was ruled out because we knew that at lower altitudes reciprocating engines (unlike jet engines) are more efficient. Also, in the denser air of lower altitudes, engine cooling improves and we would then be able to get more thrust from

The Black Swan (cont'd from page 8)

our overheating number one engine. It seems implausible, I know, but of all the besetting concerns facing Mendelsohn and me during that long homeward journey, the thing I most clearly remember now, in retrospect, is how Mendelsohn and I constantly adjusted and fine-tuned the air/fuel ratio of engine one. At about 10,000 feet, we again stopped losing altitude. Our concerns over fuel had so absorbed us that we gave little thought to the 40 minute transit across the Brest Peninsula and the possibility of a fighter attack awaiting us there. During the two hours over the Bay, Lt. Mendelsohn and I had ample time to weigh our various options. Should we follow recommended procedures whereby straggling planes, having left formation, are to hit the deck - that is, to fly over enemy territory at a low altitude where detection and tracking are more difficult? Or should we maintain our 10,000 feet altitude?

Several considerations led us to decide to remain at that altitude. We thought it probable that we would run out of fuel somewhere over the Brest Peninsula. If so, we would need a safety margin of about a thousand feet if we had to bail out. But the real reason that we decided to remain at 10,000 feet was because we needed the altitude cushion. Our crippled B-17 simply wouldn't climb. Once we lost a bit of altitude, we couldn't, even with the two and a half engines at full throttle, regain it. Later, of course, I was to rue the fact that we didn't follow recommended procedures whereby pilots of straggling planes are instructed to return at tree-top level.

Finally, we reached the Best Peninsula, and immediately we were attacked. In spite of intercom warnings to be vigilant, no one saw the two FW-190s until they appeared suddenly right on top of us. They came from the classic twelve o'clock high position in tandem, one after the other. I saw the exploding 20mm shells, small black puffs of smoke, before I saw the undersides of the two FW-190s, as they made a diving turn directly ahead of us. Only the ball turret gunner got a shot at them. The FW-190 pilots seemed to be inexperienced, both had fired their guns much too early, unlike the fighter attacks I'd been subjected to over Germany where pilots held their fire until they almost rammed you. After that first pass, the crew watched (and reported on the intercom) as the two planes circled back out of range on our right. On their second frontal pass, they again fired their 20mm cannons prematurely. Because of this seeming ineptitude, I was beginning to feel a little more confident that we might escape. Then on the third pass, the lead FW-190 held fire until the last second. I knew we were going to get blasted -- and we were.

Two or three (maybe more) shells crashed through the right cockpit window tearing the from away. Exploding in the cockpit, the shells killed Mendelsohn instantly. Blood was spattered everywhere. Seeing it on my jacket and flight gloves, I thought I was hit too. The wind coming through the large gap on the right side of the cockpit was deafening but the plane itself seemed to be flyable, except that I couldn't correct for a shallow dive to the right. The rudder seemed locked tight; I think I pushed the panic button signaling everybody to leave the plane but I don't remember.

I tried to get the plane straight and level but was unable to

correct because of the jammed right rudder. The wind-noise in the cockpit was unbelievably shrill but the engines were running fine. Then, at about 4,000 feet, in a moment of sudden panic, I decided that I'd better get the hell out. I switched on the automatic pilot (in accordance with procedures for abandoning planes) and left the cockpit seat. I was surprised to see Richard Hensley, the engineer/top-turret gunner still there, sitting on the pedestal of the top turret gun. He didn't seem to be hurt. I gestured toward the open front escape hatch from which the bombardier and navigator had already exited. I then picked up a parachute pack to give him, but he refused it. He acknowledged nothing that I did. Then, I realized that the plane was about to crash at any moment. I snapped on the same parachute pack I had offered to Hensley and dove through the open hatch.

I pulled the cord, the parachute opened and the next second I was on the ground on my knees. A hundred or so yards away, "The Black Swan" hit the ground at about the same time. I knew that Mendelsohn and Hensley were in it. Heavy black smoke soon marked the impact point. Far downwind, still high in the sky, I counted five parachutes of crew members who had bailed out earlier. Where were the other two crew members, I wondered. (I would learn much later that they too had gotten out safely.)

EPILOGUE ONE: My B-17 crashed into a French farmers barn in the small village of Bannaiac in Brittany. Fifty-five years later, on October 31, 1998, Yves Carnot, the grandson of the farmer, erected a small granite monument in memory of my two crew members who died there. Mr. Carnot sent me a video of the ceremonies which were attended by some 300 people. Included among them was a representative of the American Embassy in Paris, but neither I nor any of the other four still surviving crew members was there.

Earlier in the year, in May, 1998, Mr. Carnot had visited me and my wife in Lexington Massachusetts, bringing with him several aluminum scraps from "The Black Swan", recovered from the crash site. I referred Mr. Carnot to the curator of the 91st BG Museum in Basingstoke and he sent them several scrap pieces for display in the museum. Steve Pena, the Curator, subsequently wrote me to say "You'll be pleased to learn that pieces of the Black Swan have at last returned to Basingstoke."

EPILOGUE TWO: The Luftwaffe pilot who shot me down, I most certainly believe was Major Adolph Galland of JG26. I have learned this only recently - in May of 1999. If this is so, then I have been under the mistaken impression all these years that the FW-190 pilots were inexperienced. Galland was, in fact, one of the Luftwaffe's most talented pilots, a fighter Ace who had downed scores of British and American fighters and bombers. My B-17, "The Black Swan", was Galland's victory number 51. The recorded date, time and locale correspond precisely with my experiences. I learned of the Luftwaffe pilot only after posting an item to the Twelve O'clock High discussion forum under the heading, "Who Shot Me Down?"

Written by Verne Woods

Visit the 323rd Bomb Squadron Website
www.bombsqd323rd.com

FOLDED WINGS (CONT'D FROM PAGE 11)

★ **Nicholas Hyman, 323rd, Age 79**
Elk Grove CA, September 24, 2003



As reported by his son Mark Nick Hyman enlisted in November of 1942 and was activated on February 3, 1943 in Pittsburgh PA. He flew missions mainly in Central Europe, attaining the rank of Technical Sergeant. Part of the "Greatest Generation" ever who fought for freedom and never questioned their destiny.

Nick was a top turret gunner who counted each day following each mission a gift. It is a gift he would never forget. He rarely told "war stories," even though

he and his crew were shot down.

When honorably discharged in October of 1945, he headed for Ohio State University where he graduated in three years, studying journalism and playing second base for the baseball team. While he was quiet about his exploits on the battlefield, he was fierce in his love of sports and his support of the Buckeyes.

Perhaps he'd look most fondly on a little side job that turned into something larger than life, namely keeping statistics for a new basketball team. Nick Hyman had an uncanny ability to connect with people at any level which prompted some of his contemporaries to refer to him as the "greatest salesman" they had ever worked with.

He is survived by his wife Florence, his two sons, Mark and Mal, their wives, Carole and Sari, and three granddaughters, Geneva, Alyssa and Nicole.

★ **Philip T. Palmer, 324th, Age 86**
Ingram TX, November 10, 2003

as reported by his Pilot, Charles E. Cliburn

He was an original B-17 Bombardier crew member having trained in Walla Walla and going over with the 91st BG. He was among the first to complete 25 missions. He flew primarily on "*Quitchebitchin*" and "*The Bad Penny*." After the war, he attended Navigation School and became a Nav/Bombardier B47 crew member for several years, then ICBM Sector C.O. and retired at Davis-Monthan AFB as a Lt. Col. With 27 years service.

He is survived by his wife Juanita, a son Philip C. Palmer and a daughter Pennie Palmer.

★ **Norman Prophet**
Hemet CA, 2002

As reported by Curly Havelaar

He was in John Follet's crew as a Navigator on the Berlin Mission of 6/21/44. Survived as a POW

★ **Joseph Frankie, Jr., 323rd Age 87**

Los Fresnos, TX . November 13, 2003

reported by his son, Joseph Frankie III

He was born in Virden, Illinois on 3 April 1916. the youngest of three children.

He worked on pipelines and with the Dept. of

Agriculture until volunteering for the armed services in 1943. He earned a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps and graduated and earned his Bombardier Wings in March 1944. He was cross trained in bombardiering and navigation and performed duties as a Lead Bombardier for the 91st BG at Basingbourn, where he completed 32 missions over Europe in B17s from July 44 -



March 45. He was recognized for his skill and efforts as the Lead Bombardier for the mission to knockout the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne, Germany. Proudly, he received the Air Medal with five Oak Leaf Clusters, European Theater of Operation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation (91st BG), Battle of Britain Medal, Normandy, France and Germany Campaign Medals.

He was the first commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post in Brownsville in 1946 and was a Charter and Life member of the Moses-Whitlock American Legion Post #632 in Los Fresnos.

In 1951, he married Sharleen Henley and they had two children, Joseph III and Nina. Sharleen, who was a career educator, serving in the Los Fresnos and Brownsville School Districts.

During the fifties and early sixties he worked sales for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, Sechrist-Hall Roofing, Clark Aluminum Window Company and the NAPCO Paint Company. In 1966, his parents turned over the reins of Frankie's Restaurant to him. He and his family operated the restaurant until 1980 when he sold the business and property. The Frankie family had operated the Restaurant for 50 years.

He is survived by his wife, Sharleen, of Los Fresnos; his son and daughter-in law; Colonel and Mrs. Joseph Frankie III of Mansfield, his daughter; Nina Frankie Price of El Paso; Despite his numerous achievements and his community work he will be most remembered as a dedicated father who selflessly gave to his family. His wisdom and tenacity of will were hallmarks of his interactions with all and it will be missed..... Paso' por aqui.

Folded Wings (Continued from Page 12)★ **E. C. "Bud" Laedtke, Col. USAF (Ret)****Fairfax VA, August 24, 2003, Age 83**

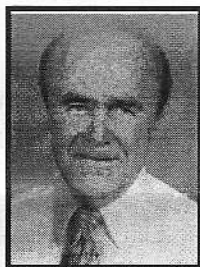
As reported by his wife

Bud was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, October 11, 1919. He enlisted in March 1942 and graduated from Aircraft Mechanics School in Chicago IL and entered the Aviation Cadet Program and was commissioned a pilot in June 1943. He served in the Army Air Corp. During WWII. In 1944, after flying his B-17 to England, he was assigned to the 91st BG, 322nd BS. His B-17 was named "Ack Ack Annie" by the



crew and he completed 36 missions. He was awarded numerous combat medals including the DFC and the French Croix de Guerre. He remained on active duty and received a regular Air Force Commission in 1947. His assignments ranged from a tour in Japan and Germany to stateside, including the Air Tactical School in Tyndall FL, the Air War College in Maxwell AL and two tours at the USAF Hqtrs. During his career he earned his Bachelor and Masters Degrees and retired as Colonel in 1969. Following his military career, he retired as a Professor Emeritus from the Northern Virginia Community College.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, May (Powell) from Ovette, MI, his son Robert and his wife Laura,; his sisters Lucille Hertzfeldt and Myrtle Potter and three grandchildren.

★ **Charles D. Booth, 401st, Age 93****Walpole NH, October 24, 2003**

He was born, March 19, 1910 in Walpole and served in the US Army Air Corps, 8th Air Force, 91st BG (H) in England during WW II.

He was a member of the American Legion Bridge Wilson Post 77 in Walpole.

He is survived by his cousins: Jane (Phipps) Skofield; Richard Phipps, Rebecca Rowley; Karen Bresland, Heidi Nowers; Holly Adams; Barbara Kurkul as well as his cousin and neighbor, Jim Skofield, neighbors Karen and David Kuniholm and longtime family friend Genevieve Allen.

★ **Richard L. "Dick" White, 322nd, Age 80****Midland TX, November 22, 2003**

During WW II he was a combat bomber pilot with the Army Air Force and stationed in England. His plane was shot down on what was to be his final combat

mission and he was a prisoner of war from November 2, 1944 until his liberation on April 29, 1945.

After his return, he married Irene Hall on September 2, 1945 in Corpus Christi TX and he remained in the Army Air Force until 1947. He went into the Reserves and returned to Texas A&I to complete his degree in petroleum engineering. His family has many fond memories of the hours spent with him. He was a wonderful and caring man with boundless energy.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Irene. Other survivors include Katherine and Michael Leviant, his daughter and son-in-law of Oklahoma City OK; his daughter Margaret White of Stillwater OK; two granddaughters and their husbands, Stefani and Tom Wilson and Lisa and Mark Jester. He is also survived by his sister Eleanor Mathis.

★ **Howell B. Loper, 323rd, Age 87****Tampa FL, Sept. 7, 2003**

As reported by Mario Mattie

A native of Florida and a resident of Tampa since 1946, he was a Veteran of World War II serving in the 8th Air Force, 91st BG in England. He was a Master Sargent and a crew chief of B-17 Flying Fortresses in the 323rd Squadron. One of his planes was "Hi Ho Silver".



Since his retirement he has been an avid golfer at Rogers Park, where he was known as "Longball" and shot a 76 at age 86. He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Irene; four sons and daughters-in-law, Burt & Susan, James and Loraine, Norman and Loraine, Stanley and Karen; ten grandchildren, three sisters Sarah Ats, Clara Mae Lee and husband Bob and Nellie Lamoureux; one brother Donald and wife Dorothy and

three sisters-in-law, Rita, Willa and Mary.

★ **Harold C. Millis, 322nd, Age 90****Las Vegas NV, October 31, 2003**

As reported by his Son Jeff

He flew with the 322nd from 1942 to 1945 and was a 26 year retired veteran of the United States Air Force.

My father lived a long and full life. He was laid to rest with "Mom" at Palms Cemetery in Las Vegas NV and was buried with full military honors (I have the flag). He was married to Mom for 52 years and she passed on in July of this year. They are back together now and he gets to see all his old friends. They don't make men like Dad anymore. God Bless.

(more obituaries on Page 10)

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Folded Wings:

★ James R. Fink, 322nd, Age 79 Timonium MD, October 10, 2003



As reported by his daughter Frances James flew 35 bombing missions. He was a pilot of Wee Willie and he often told how they limped back to base full of holes and flying on fumes. (Carrying a different crew, that plane crashed on its 128th mission. It was the next to last B-17 to be lost in the war.) He marveled that when his airplane made it back to Bassingbourn once, it had

huge holes in the floor of the fuselage.

He was born in Bellefonte PA and was raised in Tyrone PA. After Graduation from High School, he immediately enlisted in the military at the start of the war. He returned home in 1945 and married his high school sweetheart Mary Jane Haag and the couple were married 59 years. In the late 1940's he

Eighth Air Force Association.

In addition to his wife and daughter, survivors include three other children, J. Daniel Fink, David Fink and Martha Turlik and eight grandchildren.

★ Doyle Earl Bradford, 323rd, Age 81 Oklahoma City OK, October 1, 2003



As reported by his daughter

He was born September 11, 1922, in Tulsa OK and was a graduate of the University of Tulsa. He was a B-17 pilot during WWII and was shot down over Germany and was a POW. He spent his career in the aviation business and was inducted into the Oklahoma

Aviation and Space Hall of Fame.

His greatest joy was his family who loved him dearly. He is survived by his wife Elta, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren: Dennis and Deloris Bradford; Kenneth and Kim Bradford, Jordan and Katherine; Claudia and Jim Robertson, Lauren,

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THE RAGGED IRREGULAR

These Newsletters are published quarterly, January, April, July and October. The RI's purpose is to keep alive the spirit of the 91st Bombardment Group (H) and to maintain the fellowship 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: Steve Perri 12750 Kelly Greens Blvd. Ft. Myers FL 33908

continued his flying career as a corporate pilot for the Danley Corp. and General Motors in Detroit. In 1958, he and his family moved to Timonium and he flew for the former Martin-Marietta Corp. in Middle River retiring in 1984. After retirement he and his wife traveled the country and enjoyed home remodeling projects with his children. He was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the

Jacob, Brandon and Lucy all of Oklahoma City and Bud and Lenore Bradford, Tiffany, Ashley, Hannah, Toby and Carys of Orlando, FL
(more obituaries on page 11)

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