

# THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Sq.



323<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Sq.



Supporting Units



324<sup>th</sup> Bomb Sq.

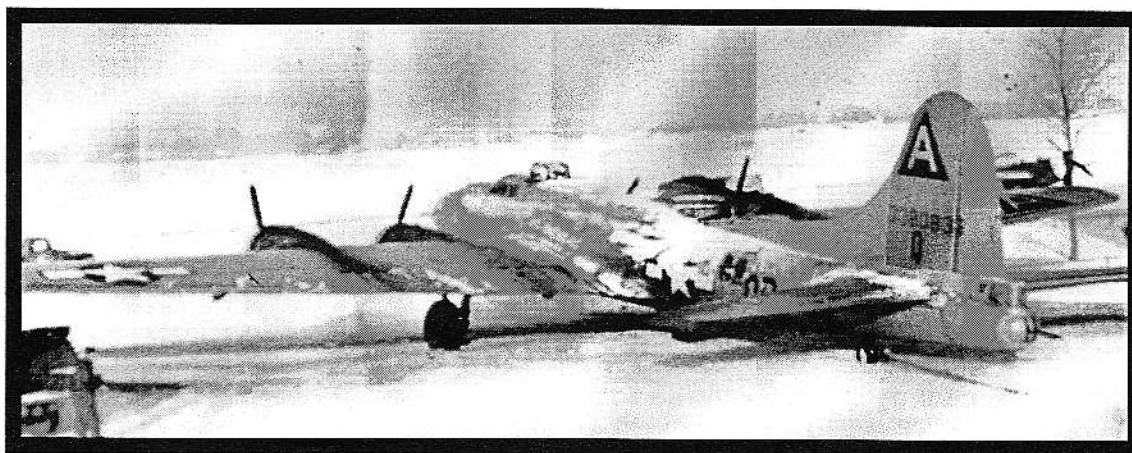


401<sup>st</sup> Bomb Sq..

Vol. 38 No. 1

91<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H)

January 2005



## THE MISSION ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944

By mid-December, Patton's army had broken loose and was driving across France. To all appearances the Germans were in full retreat and defeat appeared imminent. To everyone's surprise, just before Christmas the Germans mounted a major counter attack in the Ardennes sector of Belgium, during incredibly bad weather. The attack completely caught the Allies by surprise. Because of the Allied bombing of German oil refineries, German oil was in critically short supply.

While the Germans had ample mechanized divisions of tanks and artillery, the high command of the Allies did not believe the German army capable of a major counter attack due to a shortage of oil. Unbeknown to the Allied commanders, the Germans had hoarded a substantial supply of the scarce commodity in preparation for a major offensive which would, covered by extremely bad weather grounding the Allied tactical air support, attempt to break through the thin Allied lines, march to the coast of Europe and conquer Antwerp. This would surround all the Allied troops north of Antwerp making the surrounded men easy prey to the German army.

The weather cooperated with the enemy and effectively grounded the Allied air forces' tactical air arm. For this reason the Eighth Air Force, the strategic arm of the United States Army Air Force, was pressed into the tactical support of the front line soldiers. By the week before Christmas, the German forces had broken through the thin allied lines and had surrounded Bastogne on their way to Antwerp. In Bastogne, the vastly outnumbered American troops were valiantly holding the city and refusing to surrender, bringing to a halt the German army's advance towards Antwerp. (continued on Page 9)

## **The Presidents Corner:**

On 13 November 2004, your Board held its first Conference Call since the Reunion in Virginia and dutifully applauded all of you who were able to attend - especially our Associate Members. Many of you actively participated and we are most grateful. As Steve and Nancy headlined in The Ragged Irregular in October,

### **"What a Time We Had!"**

On to the more mundane business of your BGMA in our Conference Call. We reviewed the "quiet period" at the 91st Space Wing since the departure of Gen. Mark Owens and agreed to explore more contacts in the New Year when the new base commander has had a chance to settle into his priorities. I contacted the American Battle Monuments on identifying one of our own who Vince Hemmings noted as not being recorded as a member of the 91st Bomb Group, when he did his wonderful job of photographing inscriptions.

I reviewed for the Board a recent letter that I sent to Peter Roberts, Chairman of the East Anglia Aviation Society, regarding our reunion and our appreciation of their continuing efforts to preserve the Tower Museum and the artifacts that it enshrines relative to the 91st Bomb Group.

Earl Pate has followed up on communication I had with the Memphis Belle Committee regarding the marker that the 91st placed on Mud Island. Our proposal is that they relocate it to some spot where it would continue our association with Memphis, for example, at Memphis State University which has an AFROTC. We will also be exploring the intentions of the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson if they decide to move the Belle to Dayton as they proposed.

Ace Johnson reported that we are in sound financial condition after a profitable Reunion. I hope you liked the idea of including a PX coupon in the Welcome Bags as much as we did; it generated a lot of interest in the PX and contributed to over \$4000 in sales.

Steve reported that plans to apply for a non-profit mailing permit are proceeding and we hope to have approval soon, which would cut our costs by half. Since that is our largest recurring expense, it would help solidify our long-term finances. We are waiting until we have it before we mail out the proposed changes to the By-Laws.

If you approve, the proposed By-Laws will restructure the BGMA into a Board-managed organization with the President as the Chief Operating Officer. They will provide for emergency replacement if I get too cranky or go off the deep

end more than normal; at our age it seems prudent to plan for such an event. Also, hopefully our Associate Members will be encouraged to be candidates for office in the near future.

Since the PX is now our biggest money raiser some more formal rules will be proposed in the By Laws for the future. Please consider them when you receive them in April. If you have any comments on the draft copy that was available at the Business Meeting at Reunion 2004, please let me or any of our officers know.

Jake Howland, our new Historian, stressed the desire to have your input to the Library of Congress project on memoirs of WW II. He can supply you with the "kit" prepared by the Library. It is a labor of love. It is a reminder of the monumental effort that "Bud" Evers made in our behalf to get the basic information of our 91st history in order when we were younger and - at least some of you - had slightly more accurate memories.

Finally, we discussed Reunion 2006 in Colorado Springs. Ace will be making a visit to the area in early 2005. Your Board's consensus was that we should schedule the Reunion so that we could take advantage of Sam Newton's offer to try to obtain a block of tickets for an Air Force Academy football game; that would probably mean that we would aim for the weekend of either 16 Sep or 30 Sep. We have already received contacts from more than a half dozen hotels and accommodations will be \$89 or less including full breakfast. If you tentatively plan to attend the Reunion it would help if you would let me or Ace know if you would like to attend an Air Force Academy football game and which date you might prefer, if we have a choice.

We did all that in under an hour on the phone. We are improving. 'Nuf said.

Ed Gates, your Newly re-elected President, for the next 2 years.

**Material for publication should be sent to the Editor, STEVE PERRI**

**12750 Kelly Greens Blvd., Ft. Myers FL 33908.**

**"Time-value" items must be received on or before the 15<sup>th</sup> day preceding the month of publication to permit necessary priority consideration for inclusion in that issue. We publish issues in January, April, July & October. Every effort will be made to utilize other submitted material in later RI issues.**

**2006 Reunion  
COLORADO SPRINGS CO**

**91<sup>st</sup> BGMA****Officers****President Ed Gates**

13311 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. Ct. S  
Tacoma WA 98444  
Tel: (253) 535-4246  
[gainmutual@yahoo.com](mailto:gainmutual@yahoo.com)

**1<sup>st</sup> Vice President****Marvin M. Goldberg**

437 Narragansett St. NE  
Palm Bay FL 32907-1332  
Tel: (321) 953-3694  
[mmarvgold@aol.com](mailto:mmarvgold@aol.com)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President****Earl Pate, Jr.**

104 Skyview Drive  
Hendersonville TN 37075  
Tel: (615) 824-7909  
[Eo91bg@mindspring.com](mailto:Eo91bg@mindspring.com)

**Secretary/Treasurer****Asay B. Johnson**

590 Aloha Drive  
Lake Havasu City AZ  
86406-4559  
Tel: (928) 453-3114  
FAX (928) 453-6370  
[ace91bgma@mindspring.com](mailto:ace91bgma@mindspring.com)

**Historian, Jake Howland**

191 Parker Lane  
Carthage TX 75633  
Tel: (903) 693-233  
[howland5@sbcglobal.net](mailto:howland5@sbcglobal.net)

**Editor, Steve Perri**

12750 Kelly Greens Blvd.  
Ft. Myers FL 33908  
Tel: (239) 454-5838  
[deltareb@aol.com](mailto:deltareb@aol.com)

**Please send all Obituaries  
to:**

**ACE JOHNSON**  
(with photo if possible)

Any articles for the RI  
Should be sent to:  
**STEVE PERRI - EDITOR**

**WEBSITES:**

[www.91stbombgroup.com](http://www.91stbombgroup.com)  
[www.bombsqd323rd.com](http://www.bombsqd323rd.com)

**GROUP PHOTOS** – If anyone wants any of the group or cover photos from the last issue – You can contact Leonard Contreras at:

Phone 559-276-0743 or by mail at:

**LEONARD CONTRERAS - 2635 North Bendel, Fresno California 93722**  
\$4.00 per print covers the cost for the print and shipping. If more than one print is going to the same address, \$2.00 will cover each additional print.

**VETERAN'S HISTORY PROJECT –****By Jake Howland – Historian of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG**

The challenge facing me as the new Historian of the 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA causes me to pause to reflect. There is no way that I can hope to rewrite the history of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG. This is a story that must be told by the men who were there. The flight crews and the ground crews put it all together. They are the ones who created the history of our Group. It is my firm conviction; they are the ones who should tell the story. The Veteran's History project collects and preserves personal stories and other documents from American War Veterans and those American civilians who worked in support of them. Many veterans are now computerized and have stored their memoirs and pictures on the hard drives of their computers. It is very easy to put a label on a CD and download this material and send it off to the Library of Congress.

Since returning from the reunion, I downloaded my memoirs (240 pages) complete with pictures, captions and charts. I then filled out the data in a Field Kit supplied by the Library of Congress and sent it off by UPS to the Library of Congress. They insist on sending mailed-in material by UPS or Fed-Ex since all incoming US mail is subject to intense radiation that is harmful to plastic cassettes. In addition to the CD Text of the memoirs, I also sent nine CDs, each containing an oral account of subjects such as Operation Revival, Gee as a Homing Device, D-Day Attack by the 381<sup>st</sup> BG; Oboe, Gee-H and H2X Radar etc. Everyone who was associated with the 91<sup>st</sup> BG has a story to tell. Unless you tell it soon, it is going to be too late. If you contact me at my e-mail address (see left column), I will send you a "FIELD KIT" of the Library of Congress and you can get started on your contribution to the history of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG.

**If any of our Members** have any friends, relatives (children-grandchildren etc.), old war buddies, that do not know about us, please let them know that if they want to subscribe they will get the next 3 issues of this years "Ragged Irregular" for only \$7.50. If we all, as members, can get one other person to subscribe, we will be able to make our Editor Steve and his wife Nancy very tired and very happy.

All they have to do is send a \$7.50 check to our Treasurer:

**Ace Johnson, 590 Aloha Drive, Lake Havasu City, AZ 86406-4559**  
and he will put them on our mailing list.

**Donation from Bill McCarty:**

Find enclosed check as a memorial to William C. (Dub) Butler. My Brother, Capt. Martin Winston McCarty, Dub Butler and Larry (Zero) Ott were roommates at Bassingbourn and crewed on Vertigo and Eagles Wrath. Members of the group of the first nine aircraft flown to England, they truly were Wray's irregulars.

**Book Review****"Journey to Freedom and Beyond."**

By Colonel Robert M Slane.

Reviewed by: Merle Choffel

Bob Slane was just nineteen years old when he became first pilot of a B-17 crew in March, 1943. Most B-17 first pilots at that time were at least 21 years old when they were assigned those duties. And he had just celebrated his twentieth birthday when the crew departed for England on August 26, 1943 where they were assigned to the 401<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group.

Bob Slane's book covers his more than 32 years of active duty with the Army Air Forces and the US Air Force. However, most of the book is a first person narrative about the shoot down of his B-17 on the Schweinfurt Mission on October 14, 1943, his fourth mission, and his subsequent time as a German Prisoner of War. One fascinating incident in Bob's story includes his attempted escape from Stalag Luft III. He also describes several escapes during a forced march of prisoners from the German prison at Stalag 13B in Nuremberg to the Stalag at Mooseberg, Germany.

Another exciting portion of this book is Col Slane's ejection from a malfunctioning B-47 over Canada in November 1956.

I found this book to be well written and an exciting read. It may be ordered directly from Bob Slane at the following address for \$25 which includes shipping and handling. 1510 Carmel Dr, Shreveport, LA 71105

**"P.O.W. - A Kriegie's Story"**

A book written by Frank Farr

is available from Frank himself for \$15  
(covers the cost of the book and shipping)

PO Box 839, Jamestown NM 87347

Phone (505) 488-5608

**Colonel George Birdsong, Jr.'s book:  
"OFF WE GO A Pilot's Journal"**

is available through Atlas books.

1 (800) 247-6553

A brief summary of the book, as well as price  
and shipping details can be viewed on:

<http://www.atlasbooks.com/marktpl/>
**91<sup>st</sup> BGMA  
Profit & Loss**

January 1 through November 29, 2004

**Ordinary Income/Expense****Income**

Membership Dues	8,098.00
Memorial Fund	3,880.00
PX Sales	<u>5,150.50</u>

**Total Income****17,128.50****Expense**

2004 Dues	224.43
2004 Reunion	4,359.49
2004 Reunion Income	- 5,878.00
Computer Repairs	729.32
Memorial Fund Expenses	1,764.00
Office Expense	1,774.61
Office Supplies	468.00
Postage & Delivery	401.78
PX Expense	46.74
PX Inventory	8,000.43
Ragged Irregular	5,703.70
Telephone	227.29
Uncategorized Expenses	<u>0.00</u>

**Total Expense****18,820.79****Net Ordinary Income****-1,692.79****Other Income/Expense**

Other Income	950.00
Interest Income	<u>92.36</u>

**Net Other Income****1,042.79****Net Income****\$ - 649.93****Balance Sheet-As of November 29, 2004****Assets****Current Assets**

Savings	20,913.87
Wells Fargo	<u>6,351.43</u>

**Total Checking/Savings****27,265.30****Other Current Assets**

Putnam Investments	<u>5,657.25</u>
--------------------	-----------------

**Total Current Assets****32,922.55****Liabilities & Equity****Equity**

Opening Balance Equity	28,098.13
Retained Earnings	5,474.35
Net Income	<u>- 649.93</u>

**Total Equity****\$32,922.55****TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY****\$32,922.55**

## Memorial Service at the American Military Cemetery, Madingley.

By Vince Hemmings

Thursday, 11th November 2004.

The days prior to the Service had been cold, wet and miserable, typical weather for England in November. Yet, on Thursday the sun shone. As Margaret and I walked into the Cemeteries reception hall we were warmly greeted by the new Superintendent Mr. Robert Bell. Two charming ladies also introduced themselves. One I believe was, Lady Penny Ash and the other lady was, Marie Warren, the new Deputy Superintendent at the Cemetery.

As we left the reception an escort took us down to a small marque where we were shown to our seats. The marque held 50 people. In another similar size marque on the other side of the Cemeteries water feature, the band of RAF Wyton was playing. I sat next to CMSGT Norman Thierolf from RAF Fairford. It was his first visit to Madingley as he had only been in England since July. The principal guests were Colonel James "JR" Smith, Commander, 423rd Air Base, RAF Alconbury and Air Marshall G A "Black" Robertson, CBE, Co-ordinator of the British-American Community Relations at the Ministry of Defense in London. The following guests were introduced to the congregation, Deputy Mayor of Cambridge City, Councillor John. Hipkins, Vice Chairman of South Cambridgeshire District Council, Councillor Cicely Murphy, Councillor Robin Driver represented Cambridgeshire County Council and Councillor John Eddy represented Huntingdon District Council. The Commanding Officer of RAF Brampton, Wyton and Henlow, Group Captain Nigel Beet.

The Words of Remembrance from both the principal guests were very well received. Colonel Smith told of an American lady who this year visited Northern France to see the grave of the father she never saw. The local Mayor, took her to her fathers grave and afterwards she was the guest of the Mayor and local dignitaries. Colonel Smith then told the congregation how Veterans Day came about. A small town in Kansas, Emporia held a service at the 11 hour on the 11 day of the 11 month to remember their war dead. A Kansas Senator then put the idea to American Government and it became law.

Air Marshall Robertson Words of Remembrance dealt with the story of the poppies in Flanders fields and the subsequent poem, "*In Flanders Fields*", written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae. I thought it was rather a nice touch when Colonel Smith and Air Marshall Robertson laid a joint wreath. The missing man formation was flown by SEPECAT Jaguars from 44 Squadron based RAF Cottishall. Missing man aircraft from the formation was flown by an American exchange pilot. They were flying at 250 ft, a bit lower than normal. Their timing over the Cemetery was perfect. Before we left Mr. Bell, introduced Margaret and I to his wife. A very friendly person. Mr. Bell told us he was enjoying his stay in Cambridgeshire.

So another November 11th Memorial Service came to an end. Slightly different from previous years but still the same thoughts. Remembering all those brave young men and women who gave their lives so we that are left can live in peace.

### IN MEMORIUM PETER ROBERTS, CHAIRMAN OF THE East Anglia Aviation Society

**December 29, 2004**  
**Our Sincere Condolences to his family**  
**From the Members of the 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA**

### From Steve Pena, Curator Tower Museum, Basingbourn

I am deeply saddened to contact you with the news of the death of Peter Roberts, long-serving Chairman of the EAAS. Peter was admitted to Addenbrooke's Hospital Cambridge a week or two before Christmas after a short illness where he was diagnosed with cancer of the liver.

Peter worked tirelessly to keep the EAAS & Tower Museum in good shape for many, many years and will be sorely missed.

He leaves his wife Mary and three grown children.

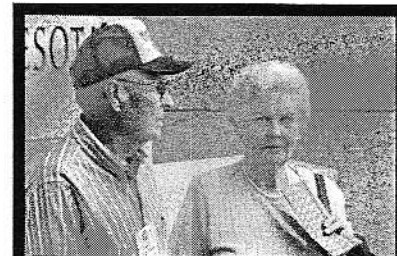
Photos provided by Bonnie Selje



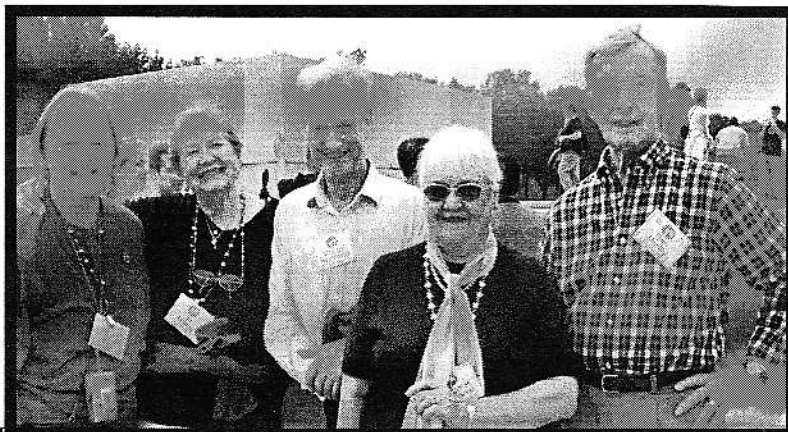
Barbara Bergum, Jenny Harlick, Judy Williams, Bonnie Selje



Betty & Don Almon



Allen & Betty Maginnes



Bonnie, Jo Murray, Vince & Margaret Hemmings, Don Murray



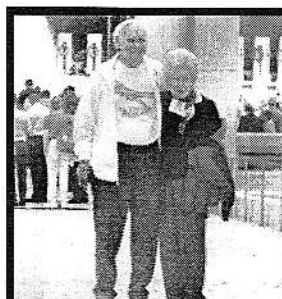
Conrad & Stephanie Lohoefer

WASHINGTON D.C. REUNION 2004

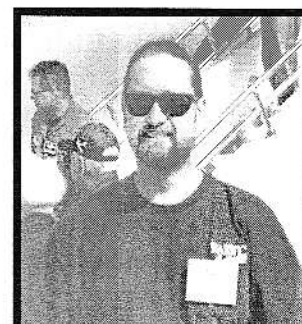
"What a time we had"



Janet Larocco & Rebecca Belmont

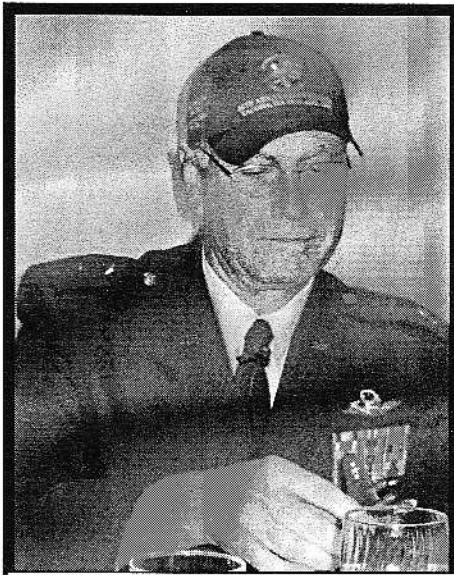


Verne & Onie Wood



Gary Hall

Photos provided by Lenny Contreras



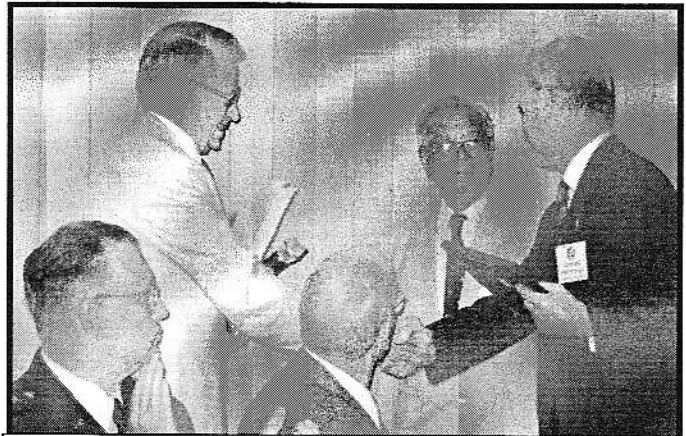
Major General Ron Bath

## WASHINGTON D.C.

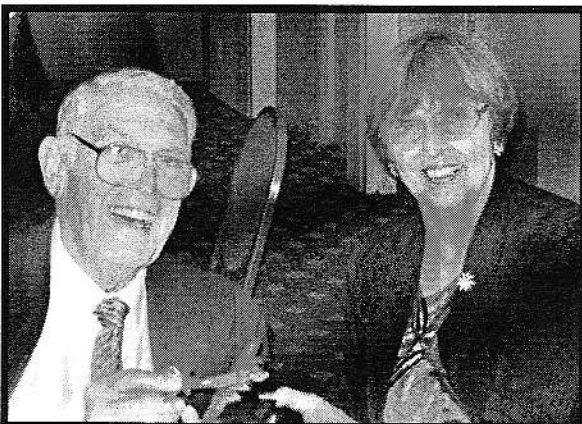
### Reunion 2004



Jim and Suzi Shepherd



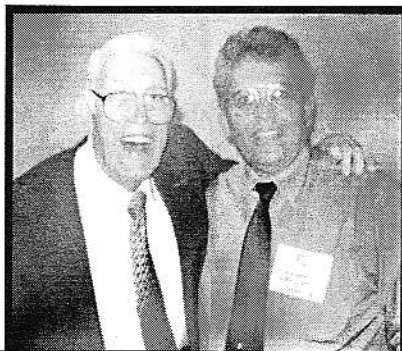
President Ed Gates, Paul Limm, Vince Hemmings



A.J. & Norma Sinibaldo



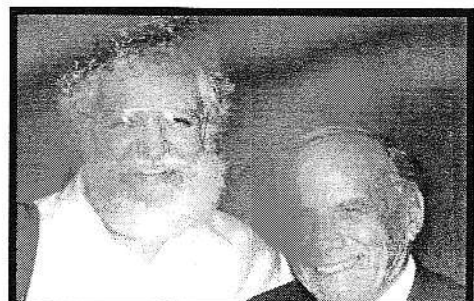
Birdsong Family with Steve Perri



A.J. & Lenny



Marilyn Rustand

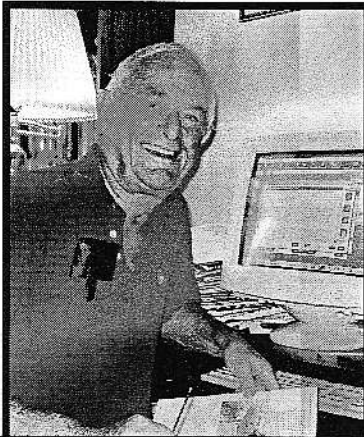


Mick Hanou & Steve Perri

## STORY'S from Mike Banta's Ring

### VETERAN'S DAY 2004

The following was written by Delmer Spears  
Granddaughter, - Ms. Bobbi Dunn



**MIKE BANTA-Ringmaster**

Spears was the radio operator on Thomas P. Smith Jr's crew that was flying B 17 Fifinella when it was shot down Aug. 13, 1944. Spears is now suffering Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and is immobile.

"Since today is Veteran's day, I wanted to take a moment to tell you all a little bit about the

very special Veteran in my life, my grandpa.

My grandpa, Delmer Spears is a very brave and courageous man. On April 19, 1944, the B-17 that he and his crew were flying in caught fire during a training mission and crashed into the Porcupine Mountains in Ontonagon, MI. Fortunately, no one was injured. They never knew just how important that day would be later in their lives. When they were flying their 26<sup>th</sup> mission over France (you got to go home after 27 missions), their plane was bombed and crashed. The pilot was killed, the engineer, Mr. Charles Sturgeon was severely burned and my grandpa was knocked unconscious and was found by the German soldiers. The rest of the crew escaped. Mr. Sturgeon and my grandpa spent the next 10 months in a POW camp in Germany. When they were captured Mr. Sturgeon's flight suit had been burned off of him. My grandpa had been wearing 2 because it was so cold. He took one off and gave it to Mr. Sturgeon. After 10 long months, they were finally released when the war was over. Each man went his separate way, thinking he'd never see his comrade again.

Well, as fate would have it, in the summer of 1990, my grandparents and I had taken a trip up to Ontonagon, MI so we could see the mountains where the plane had crashed.

As fate would have it, we stopped at a gift shop along the way. There was an airplane propeller outside. My grandpa said, "I wonder if that's the propeller from my plane?" Being a sarcastic teenager, I was like "yea, right!" To all of our surprise when we walked into the gift shop, there was a newspaper clipping hanging on the wall of

the plane crash on April 19, 1944 with a picture of the crew. We got the owners attention and my grandpa pointed to a very handsome man in the picture and said, "See that fellar. That's me." They kept in touch with the couple that owned that shop and a reunion was planned. On April 19, 1991, the surviving crewmembers of that B-17 plane crash and their wives were reunited in Ontonagon, MI and were able to go into the woods to retrieve parts of their burned airplane. I was a junior in high school that year. One of the best history lessons I ever had was when my grandpa came to school right after that trip, brought back some of the things he had picked up and shared his story of a fiery crash, war and the POW camp with me and my classmates. He cried, I cried and so did many of my classmates. We remain in touch with many of those men who were reunited that day. In fact a few years ago when my grandpa finally decided to apply for VA benefits but because of dementia couldn't remember much, Mr. Sturgeon, the engineer from their crew who spent time in the POW camp with my grandpa wrote a letter to the VA on behalf of my grandpa explaining the things they had been through. My grandpa, 54 years after being discharged was given declared disabled from the VA for suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder. He is now an 81-year-old man who spends his time laying on his back or sitting in a chair in a nursing home that fortunately the VA pays for. Alzheimer's and Parkinson's have robbed his mind and his mobility. He is not the same man I knew growing up but I thank god every day that he has been such a huge part of my life, the father I always needed, and that he instilled a sense of patriotism in me that I hope to pass on to my children. I want my children to know about their great-grandfather and the sacrifices he made so that they can live in a country that is free. I am so very, very proud of Papa and I love him very much!

By the way, I just spoke to my grandma. She said some Veterans were at the nursing home today and had a sign on his door saying thank you for his service. They also gave him a flag and pinned a carnation on his shirt. I am so very glad that he is still being honored even though he may not realize what is going on."

**Written in honor of Delmer C. Spears on  
Veteran's Day, Thursday, November 11, 2004**

Become a member of the Ring by E-Mailing  
Mike at : [B-17banta@aol.com](mailto:B-17banta@aol.com)

(Continued from Page 1)

### **THE MISSION ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944**

England was also in the grip of the great storm covering the battlefield. In an attempt to provide our troops with every support possible, the Eighth Air Force was putting every available plane in the air from bases so socked-in by bad weather that under normal conditions they would be closed for take-offs or landings. Instrument flying in those days was hazardous under the best of circumstances, but incredibly more so when fielding hundreds of planes within a small area in zero-zero visibility.

These were the conditions at the 91st Bomb Group field at Bassingborn, England, on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944. By the necessity of helping our surrounded troops at Bastogne, the group was obligated to get its aircraft into the air for tactical support. John and I were both alerted that we would fly a checkout mission on Christmas Eve in tactical support of our beleaguered troops. This day we would both be flying in the same B-17, "*Mah Idee!*", with Lt. Raisin as Pilot.

The fog was so thick, it was hard to see the second B-17 ahead of us on the taxi strip on the way to the runway. When we pulled onto the runway for take-off the fog was so bad that the green beacon light flashed by the control tower at the pilot to tell him to take-off was barely visible. Lt. Raisin and I were doubly careful as we went through our pre-flight check list. He straightened the aircraft as directly down the runway as was possible under the extreme conditions, made sure the tail wheel was locked, the controls were unlocked and the flight instruments were uncaged, opened the throttles to full military power and safely took off into the zero-zero weather. We climbed through the fog to an altitude of about fifteen hundred feet and broke out into a beautifully clear morning with the first light of dawn breaking in the east.

As I looked around for the two red and one green Very pistol flares, I saw several bright explosions in the fog layer followed by a rising ball of flame that looked like a small edition of the mushroom cloud we now recognize as the signature of an atomic bomb. There was no question in my mind as to what I was observing. Each flash and ball of flame was a heavy bomber and crew crashing on take-off.

When our squadron had formed, we had only eleven aircraft instead of twelve. I was to learn later that one of our aircraft, an unnamed B-17 piloted by Lt. Bowlan, had crashed. Later I learned from Seymour Gold, the tail gunner on Lt. Bowlans's

crew, that Elmer Gettis, the navigator, had his leg broken and that Harold Burts, the crew's bombardier, had his ear cut off but Roy Bertrand, the ball turret gunner, found the ear in the wreckage and the doctor reattached it. The rest of the crew was shaken up and bruised as the B-17 broke in half at the radio room. They had crash-landed in a farm near Shepworth and bombs were scattered all over the farm with some broken in half.

When the group had formed in combat box formation we noticed that one other squadron was short one B-17. The crew of that aircraft had not been so lucky and all nine men had been killed in the crash on take-off. This was my third mission and the first loss of life and aircraft to occur on my tour of duty. Many brave airmen died not as a result of enemy action but through the incredibly bad conditions we were expected to endure in fielding our aircraft in defense of our brave ground troops holding their surrounded positions in spite of impossible odds.

After the take-off under impossible conditions with the loss of two aircraft, with one airman wounded in action and nine airmen killed in action, the mission was a milk run. The return to base was a different story. On our return to England, we were to discover that all bases were closed for landing because of zero-zero weather except three. The entire Eighth Air Force was forced to land all its aircraft on three fields! Each group had to await its turn in line to land at one of these three bases.

Our group landed at a base named Bury St. Edmunds. When we landed, we found B-17s lined up wingtip to wingtip by the hundreds. The Luftwaffe could have decimated the Eighth Air Force by destroying three bases but fortunately their aircraft were also grounded by the fierce winter storm.

We went to the mess hall as we were famished after the raid only to find that we had to wait in line for hours as the cooks tried to feed over one hundred crews they had not expected. We asked where we would sleep and were told there was no room for all these extra airmen and that we should try to catch some sleep in our aircraft as a mission was scheduled for the next day. The night was bitterly cold with temperatures in the teens, the coldest snap to occur in England in years. Oh, how John and I wished we had worn our leather fleece lined flying clothes for now they told us not to use the B-17's electrical system to heat our electrically heated flying suits. Without the engines running, the electricity would be quickly drained.

(Continued on Page 10)

**Continued from Page 9:**

In talking about that night later, John and I both agreed we had never in our lives been as miserable as we were that night trying to sleep in the freezing weather because the thin aluminum skin of the aircraft offered no insulation from the cold. I'm sure I didn't sleep thirty minutes all night.

At dawn a staff car came up to the aircraft and told us to get breakfast as a mission was on for Christmas day. I looked around and ice covered everything. The runway was iced over and they were spreading sand and salt on it. The telephone and electric lines looked like mile long icicles. The wings of the B-17s were completely iced over.

"How in the world are they going to de-ice all these aircraft," I asked Lt. Raisin. "Beats me," he replied. "Let's go to breakfast."

When we got back to the aircraft after breakfast, the de-icing truck was moving from plane to plane spreading about a pint of de-icing fluid on each wing. They didn't have a sufficient supply to properly do the job. "Well," I thought, "after the first two or three B-17s crash on take-off from icing on the wings, they'll call this mission off."

Fortunately, the brass saw that what they were trying to do was impossible and the mission was scrubbed. Since the aircraft were not air-worthy till the ice had melted, they brought dozens of army trucks to take us back to our respective bases. Around noon of Christmas day we returned to our barracks and John and I collapsed into our bunks and slept the rest of Christmas day. This was our Christmas in England. A Christmas John and I would never forget.

While the group was at Burry Saint Edmunds, the base at Bassingbourn, home of the 91st Bomb Group, was virtually deserted and those few men who had remained on the base wondered what had happened to all the aircraft in the group that had taken off that morning. I was told by a good friend, Dale Darling, who was on the deserted base that Christmas Eve, that men unashamedly wept at the loneliness of being one of the few remaining on the base that night before Christmas and not knowing what had happened to all their comrades.

**Submitted by Dale Darling**

PS: I'll never forget that Christmas Eve in 1944 that was spent wondering what had happened to all our friends that we had watched get up and get dressed for the mission that foggy winter morning.

## **HUGGING THE CATWALK** **AT 25,000 FEET**

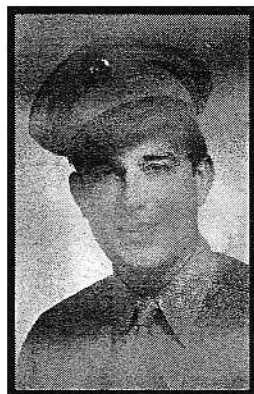
**By Charles Corson, 323<sup>rd</sup> BS**

When flying on my 16th mission, to Berlin Germany, March 28, 1945 (on the now famous "909") during WWII, we B-17 crewmen knew that there were certain inherent dangers that we should expect to face. One of my closest brushes with death, however, unfolded in a completely unexpected manner.

During that mission, one of several targeting Berlin, events had unfolded in a seemingly "routine" manner until we started our bomb run. When the bombardier activated the switch that opened the bomb-bay doors, he noted that the doors did not fully open, and asked me to finish cranking them down by hand. I re-positioned my top turret so I could slip down out of it easily, and allow me some leeway with my oxygen line connection. Once out of the turret, and firmly footed in the Pilot's Compartment, I retrieved the manual bomb-bay door crank from its storage position, inserted it in the cranking gear box and started the arduous turning of the big crank. Without warning, the manual crank handle suddenly started spinning on its own (had I worked it thru a "binding" point?), struck me down with a stunning blow on the head, and knocked off my oxygen mask. I found myself hugging the catwalk, watching the doors moving to their full open position. By training (aided, perhaps, by instinct), I recovered my oxygen mask, switched it to "emergency" flow rate, regained my footing, and climbed back into the top turret in time to see the bombs released. Only then, after I had a few seconds to reflect on the preceding events, did the full impact of my precarious position settle in on my psyche. I could have been knocked out completely and died of anoxia, or slipped, unconscious, off the catwalk while the bomb-bay-doors-were open. I commenced an emotional shaking, still unsure to this day, whether it was belated fear of what might have happened, or thankful elation that I was still alive.



**Charles Corson (Standing 2nd from left)**

**Folded Wings cont'd:**★ **BZ Byrd, 323<sup>rd</sup> BS, Age 85****Long Beach MS, October 3, 2004**

Reported by Bertha Herrington During World War 2, was a Radio Operator, Gunner, on a B-17 Flying Fortress, the "Delta Rebel #2" The pilot of the this Bomber was George Birdsong from Clarksdale, MS. A retired Baptist minister, he had served in the USAD (ret.) and was a member of Faith Chapel Baptist

Church. He was a Mason and a Shriner. He is survived by his wife Cammie L. Byrd, his son, Don Ulmer; his daughters Joyce Rowell, Barbara Key, Betty Altom, his brothers, Joe Byrd and Mack Byrd, his sisters Lorena Yarbrough, Dot Rustin, Bertha Herrington and Audie Herrington, 11 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

★ **Daniel M. Ganz, 324<sup>th</sup>, Age 85****Boca Raton FL, Nov. 6, 2004**

As reported by Robert Stevens Copilot on Emersons Crew



He was a native New Yorker. He flew 26 operational missions as a Waist Gunner on the original Frank Emerson crew. He was an accomplished Magician and Card Player and was later assigned to Special Services by Col. Henry Terry for

recreation & entertainment of wounded veterans at various Hospitals. After the war, he became an accomplished Gourmet Chef; Contract Bridge Player, Tennis Player and Entertainer. His wife Beverly, one son and one daughter survive him.

★ **Charles E. Cliburn, 324<sup>th</sup> BS****Ada OK, October 4, 2004**

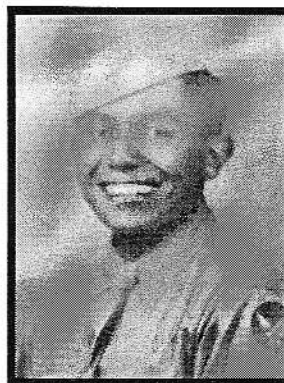
As reported by his Nephew, Curtis L. Putnam My "Uncle" was always quiet about his time over Germany, but after I went to visit him after I started working on Recon planes at E-Systems in TX, he told me a lot about his experience.

He flew four B-17's during his time in the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, 324<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, and never failed to return to English soil. His planes carried the names

"QuitUrBitchin" and "Bad Penny". He flew right wing for the Memphis Belle for part of his service and the old movie footage of the Memphis Belle was filmed from his plane. He also was noted as the youngest B-17 pilot in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and was referred to as "Red" Cliburn, and the first Pilot to complete 25 missions

★ **Manuel P. Nunez, 323<sup>rd</sup> BS, Age 80****October 16, 2004**

As reported by his Nephew, Leonard Contreras "a proud nephew and member of the 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA, in his honor."



It is with deep sadness that I report the passing of my uncle. He was a Radio Operator on John C. Pullen's crew. A. J. Sinibaldo was the Navigator on 17 of my uncle's 29 missions. My uncle arrived at Basingbourn, June 5, 1944 and flew his missions between June 13 and October 9, 1944, his last

eight were in the group lead plane.

My uncle chose not to talk about the war, he said he wanted to look to the future instead of something that happened many years ago and that he would just as soon forget. The Nunez family will sorely miss his wise-cracking jokes, his "pepsodent" smile and hardy laughter. Replacing him as the cook at the annual Nunez family reunion will not be easy, although, I suspect that both of his sons, Peter and Tony, will step into the position. The reunion will not be the same without such a big icon of the Nunez family "missing in action".

★ **Lauren H. Mummert, 324<sup>th</sup> BS, Age 85****Topeka KS, January 28, 2004**

As reported by Dale Darling



Lauren Mummert was born in Topeka KS and graduated from Topeka HS and served in the Army Air Corps as a Crew Chief. He received the bronze star and he never lost any crewmember on any of his 17's. He was stationed in England from 1942-1945.

He worked 29 years for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. before retiring in 1980.

He is survived by his wife Dorothy, daughter Kathryn, sister Glenda Oquillkuk and a grandson.

# Folded Wings

## ★ Richard W. "Dick" McCoy, 323rd Lynden, WA, May 27, 2004, Age 84



As reported by his daughter Nancy McCoy

Dick McCoy was born on October 27, 1919 in Brooklyn NY. He grew up in Detroit, MI and graduated from Cass Technical High School. McCoy enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corp in October 1941 and took his basic training at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, MO and Air

Mechanics School at Kessler Field, Biloxi, MS. In April 1942. He was assigned to the 91<sup>st</sup> BG at McDill AFB, May 16, 1942. McCoy departed Fort Dix, N.J. in September 1942 with 14,700 Air Corp personnel aboard the "Queen Mary" for Glasgow, Scotland. He was a member of the ground crew maintaining B-17's in Bassingbourn, England. Dick returned to the U.S. and was discharged September 11, 1945 at Camp Blanding, FL. (continued below)

He was active in the 91<sup>st</sup> BG regularly attending its national reunions; was a 25 year member of Kiwanis and active in the American Legion. McCoy passed away May 27, 2004 after two years of kidney dialysis treatment. His wife Margaret passed away shortly after his death on June 25th, their 59th wedding anniversary. Dick and Margaret are survived by their children Bill, Nancy, Marilyn and her husband Patrick Jones and Patty and husband Oral Keen, 6 grandchildren and 2 great-grandsons.

## ★ Michael H. Zabiaka, 322nd, Age 81 Ocean Shores, WA, July 16, 2004

He was born July 26, 1922 at Fork River, Manitoba, Canada. He was inducted into the Army in September, 1942 and served in the 248th Coastal Artillery until 1943, when he went to flight training. He was commissioned as a pilot in the Army Air Forces the following year. He was co-pilot on 24 missions over occupied Europe in a B-17, including two missions over Berlin. He was awarded four air medals, along with many other decorations.

On May 19, 1978, he married Irene Klabo in Aberdeen. Mr. Zabiaka retired from Sony Superscope as a technical representative and salesman in 1978 and settled in Ocean Shores. In addition to his wife, he is survived by a sister, Anne Burnside eight stepchildren and seven stepgrandchildren. A brother, Phillip died in 1980.

### FIRST CLASS MAIL

91<sup>ST</sup> BG Memorial Assn.  
590 Aloha Dr.  
Lake Havasu City AZ 86403

FORWARDING AND ADDRESS  
CORRECTION REQUESTED

LET US KNOW BEFORE YOU MOVE!

### 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 91<sup>st</sup> 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

Dick married Margaret Boerhave in Lynden, WA on June 25, 1945. He worked as an electrician and was a 51-year member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union. In retirement, he volunteered his electrical skills building affordable housing for the Lopez Island. WA Community Land Trust and the Barn Youth Center of Linden. (cont'd next column)

## DON'T FORGET

### YOUR DUES ARE DUE

Please send in your dues before  
March of 2005 to avoid missing an issue

