

# THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322<sup>nd</sup> BS



323<sup>rd</sup> BS



Supporting Units



324<sup>th</sup> BS



401<sup>st</sup> BS

Vol. 42 No. 1

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

January 2009

## Madingley American Cemetery Remembrance Day Ceremony, November 12, 2008 Remarks by Brigadier General Kevin Henabray, Mobilization Assistant to the Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Force

Vice-Lord Lieutenant, distinguished guests, all veterans and their families, ladies and gentleman.

Good morning and welcome. It is my great honor and privilege today to represent the men and women of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Force and the United States Air Forces in Europe. Thank you for attending today's ceremony. I would also like to thank Mr. David Bedford, the cemetery superintendent, for the loving care he and his staff provide to these beautiful grounds.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge, and sincerely thank the World War II Veterans here today. To these warriors – heroes all – we owe our way of life! We are indebted to these veterans for their service, their sacrifice, and for the liberties that we enjoy today. Indeed, as Tom Brokaw stated, they are "The Greatest Generation."

The 11<sup>th</sup> hour, of the 11<sup>th</sup> day, of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, 1918 marked the conclusion of "The Great War" – "The war to end all wars." Yesterday was "Remembrance Day", AKA "Armistice Day" or "Poppy Day." A day dedicated to another generation, the "Lost Generation," those who fought and died in World War I. In America, we call it "Veteran's Day," and Madingley is just one of 24 American cemeteries located on foreign soil, where we honor nearly 125,000 U.S. war dead.

WWII was truly a global war fought in the deserts of North Africa, the frigid waters of the North Atlantic, the steaming jungles of Asia, and across the vast expanse of the Pacific. But, unique in the theater of battle was the air war over occupied Europe. It was a cold,

inhospitable place, etched with the lingering contrails of Flying Fortresses, Lancasters and Liberators; Spitfires, Thunderbolts, and Mustangs; deadly Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts; withering flak; unforgiving weather; and very long odds. It was death in the sky. Defined by a rising tide of bombers and fighters stretching across the continent, with thousands of airmen engaged in a

desperate struggle. Since I am a lifelong airman, surrounded by 30 historic, hallowed acres of East Anglia, I would like to focus my comments today on the Allied airmen who gave their lives fighting in the European Theater of Operations.

In a ceremony much like this one, General Patton declared: "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived." I believe Patton was right, so let us thank God and celebrate the achievements of the fallen heroes of the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Corps.

In the dark days of 1940, RAF Bomber Command was the only offensive the Allies could muster against Nazi occupied Europe. The 8<sup>th</sup>

Air Force arrived in 1942 and formed an alliance with the RAF which became known as the "Allied Strategic Bombing Campaign." At first, it was a fledgling effort, but with hard earned experience, forged in the crucible of combat, and the industrial might of America, the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force arose to the challenge of the Luftwaffe, eventually earning the reputation as a great war fighting organization known as "The Mighty Eighth." By D-Day, 1944, the over 200,000 "Yanks" stationed in England could muster an armada or more than a thousand bombers and over 800 fighters to conduct raids



Brigadier General Kevin Henabray  
(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt.  
Chad E. Chisholm)

throughout Germany and occupied Europe. Ladies and gentlemen, those are numbers we can't even fathom today, nor are we likely to ever see again.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force fought mostly from here – East Anglia. From airfields such as Polebrook, Molesworth, Bassingbourn, Grafton Underwood, Debden, Thorpe Abbots (Home to “The Bloody Hundredth”), and Roughham (near Bury St. Edmunds), where my father, a B-17 bombardier, flew and survived 35 missions with the 94<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The RAF fought from Lincolnshire, and bases throughout the UK – Mildenhall, Tangemere, Lossiemouth, Biggen Hill, Kenley, Scampton (home to 617 squadron, the famous “Dam Busters”), and Waddington, a base which suffered the loss of 345 bombers, the most in bomber command.

Historians estimate that over one million enemy defenders opposed the Allied Strategic Bombing Campaign. The casualty figures would certainly support that estimate. Bomber Command suffered more than 55,000 killed and missing in action. “The Mighty Eighth” was never turned back by enemy action, but that record was achieved at a terrible cost, suffering over 26,000 killed and 33,000 MIA, of which 23,000 eventually became prisoners of war. More than 18,000 Allied bombers and fighters were lost. The brave crews of Bomber Command and the 8<sup>th</sup> AF earned 19 Victoria Crosses and 17 Medals of Honor, respectively. In all, approximately 82,000 British, American and Commonwealth airmen gave their lives fighting the air war over Europe. Together, they suffered a casualty rate which exceeded 50%. Very long odds indeed!

Sir Winston Churchill once described courage, as, “the quality which guarantees all other.” For their part, it was

the undaunted courage and relentless determination of airmen which allowed the Allies to dominate the skies over the continent, thus enabling the successful invasion of Normandy, and ultimately victory in Europe.

For this Remembrance Day, let us first remember Billy Fiske, an RAF pilot and the first American pilot killed in WWII. Let us remember too those who led these brave airmen. Great men such as Spaatz, Eaker, Doolittle, Lemay, Zemke, Blakeslee and Brigadier General Fred Castle, Medal of Honor winner and former commander of the 94<sup>th</sup> BG. From the RAF, we must cherish the great courage, inspiration, and leadership of Air Chief Marshall Dowding and “Bomber” Harris, Air Vice-Marshal Park and Leigh Mallory, Johnny Johnson, Sailor Malan, Group Captain Leonard Chesire, Wing Commander Guy Gibson. Ladies and gentlemen, we must never forget the sacrifice and many hard fought victories achieved by Allied airmen during WWII.

And for all veterans, let us remember with grateful hearts, those who are honored on this day. Let us embrace, and remember the legacy of hope and their gift of freedom to all future generations.

President Reagan once said, “Most of those who die in defense of our country were boys when they died, and they gave up two lives. The one they were living, and the one they would have lived. They gave up everything for their country and for us. All we can do is remember.”

May God continue to bless both our great nations, all our soldier, sailors, airmen, and marines. And those who risk their lives to protect our freedoms today.

Thank you and God bless you all.

---

## President's Corner

**Jim Shepherd**

I wish to express my appreciation for the Veterans of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, who gave so much, and for those that returned asking little for themselves. They returned and built America as we know it today. It is now over 66 years since the start of WWII and the loss of so many of the boys who served.

We are looking ahead to the future of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Association. I would like some suggestions from the Veterans of the 91<sup>st</sup> as to what you think needs to be accomplished in the next few years. We will have a reunion in 2010 in Dayton, Ohio to see the Memphis Belle, but what else can we do or make happen in the interest of history or the 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA?

For those of you on the Ring, Mike Banta is doing much better after his back surgery and he convinced the doctors to give him a new hip. For those of you that do not know about the Mike Banta Ring, you should have a friend, family member or even a stranger show you the web page: [www.91stbombgroup.com](http://www.91stbombgroup.com) and add your story to the history that has already been placed on the web page.

We now have two new full members voted in on November 8, 2008. They are Charles R. Davis and Thomas L. Davis. They qualified because they have been an associate member for more than three years and are willing to help at future events. A list of all full members will be in the April Ragged Irregular.

Thank you to those who donated money to the Web Page Fund. This money will be used to pay for outside help so we can continue to add new items to the web page. The information presented on the web page is the most detailed information available on the internet. Your story is of interest to much of the world; much more than you could ever imagine. We have hundreds of pictures, stories, crew photos and other items. We want to make certain they are published on the web page.

As noted above, Mike Banta is recovering from his back and hip problem. Now it seems to be my turn. I may be having back surgery after the first of the year and this has already restricted my time on the computer.

Jim Shepherd

## Veeps Views

**Mick Hanou**

The family tradition is to watch White Christmas (Bing Crosby 1954) on Christmas Eve. The movie starts with soldiers on Christmas Eve, 1944, in a forward area. This made me think about the mission you flew on that Christmas Eve when you got a break in the weather. You were part of a force of 2,046 bombers and 853 fighters sent to relieve the pressure on troops in the Battle of the Bulge. This was the largest airborne armada ever in history. I cannot imagine what it must have been like to see hundreds of aircraft around you, well protected by fighters, and not see the enemy that day. Then returning to England, the Christmas repast and reflecting on what had happened that day.

Then, I realized that you would be reading this in January. I noted that it was less than two years before that Christmas Eve raid that you undertook your first foray into Germany - January 27, 1943, to Wilhelmshaven. On the Hamm raid of March 4, 1943, the only 16 aircraft from the 8<sup>th</sup> AF that raided the Reich were from the 91<sup>st</sup> - against formidable Luftwaffe resistance, without Allied escort.

What now seems a short 23 months must have been interminable to you, especially those ground crew and POWs who were there the entire time. And what a difference you made - the growth of airpower from dozens of aircraft in four original groups to thousands of aircraft is a testament to your perseverance and dedication to the task. Despite the odds, despite the weather, despite the difficult logistics involved, you, the Greatest Generation built an organization that eventually saw the liberation of Occupied Europe.

So, I leave you with these thoughts: having not been in combat, I cannot imagine what you went through, but I can appreciate the effort and horrors you were subject to; I thank you once again for liberating my Dutch parents; I remember my departed friends like Col. Birdsong, who was on the Hamm mission; and I give thanks that I have been so fortunate to make many new friends from your organization. So, a belated Merry Christmas and I wish you all a happy and especially healthy 2009.

Best regards, Mick

## **91<sup>st</sup> BGMA Officers**

### **President**

**Jim Shepherd**

20670 Via Augusto  
Yorba Linda, CA 92887-3102  
Tel: (714) 970-5540  
jshep91@earthlink.net

### **1<sup>st</sup> Vice President**

**Mick Hanou**

2398 Sandpiper Way  
Pleasanton, CA 94566-5323  
Tel: (925) 425-3220  
mhanou@comcast.net

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President**

**Bob Friedman**

6015 Valkeith Dr  
Houston, TX 77096-3832

### **Secretary / Treasurer**

**Jody Kelly**

3829 Sunset Ln  
Oxnard, CA 93035-4135  
Tel: (805) 984-7706  
njkelly@roadrunner.com

### **Historian**

**Steve Perri**

12750 Kelly Greens Blvd  
Fort Myers, FL 33908-5970  
deltareb@aol.com

### **Editor**

**Gary Hall**

1054 Sunrise Dr  
Woodbury, MN 55125-9282  
Tel: (651) 260-2397  
raggedirregular@gmail.com

Please send obituaries to Jody Kelly.

Deadline for submissions to the RI is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to publication.

### **91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group E-mail Ring**

b17banta@aol.com

### **91<sup>st</sup> on the Web**

www.91stbombgroup.com  
www.bombsqd323rd.com

## 2010 – 2012 Officer Elections Nominations Needed!

Our Bylaws define the 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA Board as six principal officers: President, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Presidents, Secretary-Treasurer, R/I Editor and Historian. If you are a full member in good standing and are interested in being a 2010 – 2012 term candidate for one of those positions, please submit your name to Tom Freer, the Nomination Committee Chairman, for publication in the April 2010 R/I.

No form is required. Simply send your name, address, position of interest, squadron or unit in which you served (if applicable) and any information you consider appropriate for a brief profile to be published in support of your candidacy.

Your information may be mailed or emailed to:

Tom Freer  
6380 Winstead Ct  
Lisle, IL 60532  
Email: [tmf1108@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tmf1108@sbcglobal.net)

## Collings Foundation Wings of Freedom

The Wings of Freedom Tour brings historic aviation to your community! Tour through the authentically restored aircraft or take a flight aboard for the ultimate immersion in history! For more information call (978)562-9182 or visit: [www.collingsfoundation.org](http://www.collingsfoundation.org).

1/16 - 1/19	Ocala, FL
1/19 - 1/21	Zephyrhills, FL
1/21 - 1/23	Venice, FL
1/23 - 1/26	Clearwater, FL
1/26 - 1/28	Fort Myers, FL
1/28 - 2/1	Boca Raton, FL
2/2 - 2/4	Vero Beach, FL
2/4 - 2/6	Pompano Beach, FL
2/6 - 2/8	Fort Lauderdale, FL
2/9 - 2/19	Maintenance Break
2/20 - 2/23	Keystone Heights, FL
2/23 - 2/25	Panama City, FL
2/25 - 2/27	Hattiesburg, MS
2/27 - 3/2	New Orleans, LA
3/2 - 3/4	New Iberia, LA
3/4 - 3/6	Lake Charles, LA
3/6 - 3/9	Sugarland, TX
3/9 - 3/11	Beaumont, TX
3/11 - 3/13	Houston, TX
3/13 - 3/16	Tomball, TX

## July Rally Round - Minneapolis, MN

A rally round is being organized for either the weekend of July 10 – 12 or July 17 – 19 in Minneapolis, MN. The final date is dependant upon securing a tour stop on the Collings Foundation's Wings of Freedom Tour.

Events will be highlighted by the appearance of either the Collings Foundation's B-17 *Nine-O-Nine* or the Yankee Air Museum's B-17 *Yankee Lady* and will include a sunset dinner cruise on the Mississippi River, a tour of the Minnesota Air Guard Museum and dinner at the Mall of America.

If you'd like more information as it is available, please contact Gary Hall by mail at 1054 Sunrise Drive, Woodbury, MN 55125; phone (651)260-2397; or email [raggedirregular@gmail.com](mailto:raggedirregular@gmail.com).

Final details will be published in the April R/I.

## News from Across the Pond

As the current Mayor of Royston, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all members of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group who were stationed at RAF Bassingbourn during the Second World War.

As a town, we are pleased to have helped such a distinguished and hard working unit perform its duty in difficult conditions and are proud to continue to honour the memory of those aircrew who did not come home.

We continue to maintain the war memorial to those members of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group who gave their lives in the name of freedom, and hope that by doing so, the memory of the Group and its sacrifice will live on.

I am too young to have experienced the horror of such a catastrophic armed conflict and can only begin to imagine what these brave air crews and their families back home must have gone through in those dark days.

The very fact that the 91<sup>st</sup> and its constituent squadrons suffered greater losses than any other heavy bomb group is a testament to the bravery of those crews in continually taking on the toughest of missions over France and deep into Germany despite the very obvious risks.

I wish you all well for your reunion this month and look forward to the next visit that you make to the town. You will always receive a warm and hospitable welcome from the townspeople, even if the weather does not always oblige.

Yours faithfully, Councillor Paul Grimes



**Veteran's Day Ceremony 12<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

Once again I am happy to report that the numbers attending this service was an increase on last year, so much so that Margaret and I found there was no room in the small marquee. The person in charge was Colonel Kimberly Toney, the Commander of the 501<sup>st</sup> Combat Support Wing, RAF Alconbury and I must say she did a splendid job in organising the Ceremony. In the thirty years I have been going to Madingley for the Memorial Services I have seen many formats over the years, not in the service itself, but in other ways and this year we thought it was one of the best. For a change the weather was kind and the autumnal colours at this time of the year were a joy to see.

Two Generals were present, Major General Jack Egginton, Vice Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Force and Brigadier General Kevin Henabray, Mobilization Assistant to the Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Force, Ramstein Air Base, Germany. This is the first time I can recall two Generals attending and coming from Germany. The number of wreaths laid this year was possibly more than last year. I counted over forty laid at the Wall of the Missing and after I had laid the Group's wreath I looked up and there was the name of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Milton L. Pike from the 323<sup>rd</sup> BS.

I must mention that the wreath was paid for by Paul Limm and was the standard Royal British Legion wreath of red poppies made in their workshops by ex-servicemen who have been injured. I blew up one of the decals you sent me Jim and laminated it so the rain will not spoil it. It was an honour and a privilege to lay the wreath on behalf of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG (H) Memorial Association.

Kind regards, Vince Hemmings

**Memorial Service 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May a fellow member from the Royal Air Force Association phoned to tell me that a 91ster was visiting the museum at RAF Horham formerly the home of the 95<sup>th</sup> BG (H) along with five other veterans on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May. His name was Robert Ball, a Bombardier who was shot down on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1943 on the mission to Gelsenkirchen and was flying with 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Robert. C. Heller crew. They were flying B-17F 42-29587 *Jolly Roger* from the 401<sup>st</sup> BS. I met Robert and the rest of the party and asked Robert if he would like to lay the Groups wreath at Madingley. He was lost for words and told one of his colleagues that he was laying a wreath on behalf of his old Group. We duly met up at Madingley Cemetery, on a very wet and very windy morning. Fortunately Robert had a raincoat over his maroon blazer but two of his colleagues had just jackets. They became very cold during the Service.

Chaplain, Captain Thomas Searle, 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, RAF Lakenheath was Master of Ceremonies. The first speaker was your Ambassador to the Court of St James, The Honourable Robert. H. Tuttle and after the Invocation Mr. Herbert Duberly, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire spoke.

Then we had the pleasure to welcome all the veterans attending and after that it was time to lay the wreath. After the wreath carry's brought on the wreaths I joined Robert to receive the 91<sup>st</sup> BG (H) MA wreath. Then I stood back as Robert moved forward to lay the Groups wreath. It was a memorable moment for Robert I am sure.

The Fly-By was different this year. A Dutch Mitchell B-25 was due to lead a KC-135 and the four F-15C's. Firstly we were told the B-25 had a problem in Holland so the other five aircraft did their Fly-By, then all of a sudden there is the B-25 flying over the congregation. A wonderful sight and sound to hear those two radials. The Dutch pilot gave a very spirited display.

I was pleased to able to introduce Robert to Mike Killaspy, former secretary of the Tower Museum as the party was going to visit Bassingbourn Barracks on the following day (Tuesday).

It was sad that the weather was so bad, but not as bad as last year.

Kind regards, Vince Hemmings



Robert Ball and Vince Hemmings with 91<sup>st</sup> Wreath

**MERSEBURG: Blood, Flak & Oil****The 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Missions**

by Ray Bowden

ISBN: 9781898575047

Published by Design Oracle Partnership  
in association with USAAF Nose Art Research Project

18 USAAF daylight missions covered.  
The target, the defences and the reasons for the attacks.  
Listing of losses for more than 150 heavy bombers - almost all of them covered in the text.  
Archive material from US and German sources reveal the results, often previously officially described simply as "unobserved".  
Veterans and survivors tell their stories.  
Summary of the 3 major RAF night raids against Leuna.

Soft cover, page size 210x297mm (8.27x11.7 inches)  
160 pages, 150 black & white photographs, diagrams and maps, UK Price: £18.00 (GB Pounds) plus postage.

For further information and ordering check the web page at:  
[www.usaaf-noseart.co.uk/merseburg-bfo.htm](http://www.usaaf-noseart.co.uk/merseburg-bfo.htm)



**MERSEBURG** and its Leuna synthetic oil plant - was one of the most feared targets in Germany. The USAAF's 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force began an 18 mission campaign against the Nazis most important synthetic oil production site in May 1944 as part of the wider Oil Plan. Initial attacks were successful but as the Germans began to realise the magnitude of the threat to their vital supply of valuable fuel and specialist oils the defences at Merseburg were expanded to become the most feared of all - surpassing even Berlin.

Prior to the spring of 1944, few of the US 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force air crews had ever heard of Merseburg and its huge synthetic oil plant but that soon changed. The remnants of the Luftwaffe bolstered by the newly arrived jet fighters and the enormous number of flak batteries which blossomed around Merseburg reaped a vicious harvest of US heavies, almost exclusively B17 Flying Fortresses.

Veterans and survivors from both sides tell their stories, through recollection, diary notes, reports and official records. Target damage analysis from USAAF and German files and detailed post war studies reveal the results of the raids. The destruction is revealed and the human cost - to friend and foe alike.

For further information please contact  
Ray Bowden  
Design Oracle Partnership, 98 West Bay Road, Bridport, Dorset DT6 4AX  
or visit : [www.usaaf-noseart.co.uk/merseburg-bfo.htm](http://www.usaaf-noseart.co.uk/merseburg-bfo.htm)

*Other titles available:*

Plane Names & Fancy Noses - 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group  
Plane Names & Bloody Noses - 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
Tales to Noses over Berlin - The 8AF missions



## Merseburg: Blood, Flak & Oil Book Review by Ed Gates

Ray Bowden's latest publication once again makes a great contribution to historians and especially to the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. As I wrote in the May 2008 issue of *The Ragged Irregular* he held up publication at some added cost and considerable hassle (due to the international financial situation) in order to include my contribution from the Archives II records which were summarized in the July issue. In detail he has "corrected" some of the errors that have persisted about our action on 2 Nov 44 - a mission that cost us a record 13 aircraft shot down over Germany. The cover pictures a 91<sup>st</sup> B-17 over Merseburg and the back cover shows 7 of ours in good formation somewhere. Our 6 missions to the target ranked us 16<sup>th</sup> in number of missions flown among the 31 bomb groups that sent their aircraft there, but our losses of 15 crews on these missions (two on 21 Nov 44) put us in the unenviable company of the 92<sup>nd</sup> BG which lost 16 and the "Bloody 100<sup>th</sup>" which lost 14.

This is a wonderful addition to any collection of WW II books for its readability and extensive coverage of the target and the missions from all sides - planners, bomber crews, fighter escort, defenders manning the flak defences and GAF pilots, and damage repair and production people at the Leuna plant near Merseburg. It is hard to find a two-page spread that does not contain at least one photo - and all well-coordinated with the narrative. All of the information from German sources about flak batteries and fighter units makes fascinating reading.

He includes copious quotes and pictures from his extensive files collected over a few decades. The first 13 pages address the flak defences and the target itself - "the beast that would not die" - in spite of 18 bombings by the USAAF from 12 May to 12 Dec 44 and four by the RAF from 6 Dec 44 to 4 April 45. The next 136 pages report mission by mission. Nine pages are devoted to the 91<sup>st</sup> actions and losses on 2 Nov 44, partially because the records that I was able to provide to him from the Archives II in Adelphi, Md. are far more complete than those of most other bomb groups. Eleven pages of appendices complete the book including a listing of all aircraft lost on missions to the Leuna plant near Merseburg, lives lost, Andy Caswell's POW I.D., bomb loads and altitudes and other details gleaned from 8<sup>th</sup> AF mission reports and a detailed time line for the 91<sup>st</sup> on 2 Nov 44 from just before midnight to 1717 when Mullins finally landed in his beat up *Ramblin' Rebel*. Ray includes the latter (to which I contributed numerous extracts from the mission documents at Archives II) because he anticipates many arguments from U.S. - and German - historians about

the route and reasons for the heavy losses by the 91<sup>st</sup>. Long ago Wayne "Tex" Frye tried to convince Roger Freeman to no avail that we were on-course in-bound.

All of us like to see our name in print and 91sters and their descendants have ample opportunity. There are over 30 direct quotes from our comrades either from Ray's past files or taken from the mission reports from Archives II including A.J. Sinibaldo from our second visit on 28 Jul 44 through Frank Farr, Bob Friedman, Harold Lasch, Paul Limm, Ken Smith, Andy Caswell, Ace Johnson to Mike Banta on our last mission to Leuna on 12 Dec 44 when he described Merseburg as "a paper tiger." Sure, Mike, we had already done all the heavy lifting.

Readers - especially veterans of the attacks - may be tempted to set the book aside by a quick look at the first few pages with the bitter feeling that it is another criticism of our inability to hit the target or knock it out. Read on my fellow warriors. Ray has done a grand job of telling the story in its agony, frustration and learning curve. On page 4 Ray quotes the US Strategic Bombing Survey published post-war reporting that due to an estimated 16% of our bombs that did not explode, "One in every six bombers sent on these attacks might just as effectively have loaded its bomb bays with scrap iron. Missions were wasted and lives of airmen lost flying junk to Germany." On page 7 we are reminded how accurate we were with Bombing Survey statistics that less than 3% of bombs dropped at Merseburg hit buildings and equipment within the plant, 8% landed in open spaces damaging nothing, 3% hit decoy targets of cardboard and wood and the rest missed the target.

Don't despair! Ray quotes the Bombing Survey (p. 6) "Winning a war with small bombs requires a tremendous air force, but this is possibly the only choice open if visual sighting is not possible or if vital aiming points are not chosen." Ray builds the case that our efforts were not in vain. On page 17 he quotes Reichminister for War Production Albert Speer writing to Hitler after the May attacks on Merseburg/Leuna, "The enemy has struck us at one of our weakest points. If they persist at it ... we will soon no longer have any fuel production worth mentioning. Our one hope is that the other side has an air force general staff as scatter-brained as ours!" (It seems unlikely he sent a copy to Goering.) By page 144 Ray is quoting from an unidentified reconstruction worker at Leuna, "Today we have finished our repairs, tomorrow the bombers will come again." By the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> AF missions in November and December Speer was reporting "... even if the repair and production during the first quarter of 1945 were to proceed undisturbed, the planned production, which during the last quarter of last year (1944) seemed possible, can no longer be achieved." The RAF attacks in 1945 with bombs of 4000# to



12,000# made sure that repair was not undisturbed. (Except for some 1000 pounders in September 1944 we delivered 500# or less bombs.) German Field Marshall Erhard Milch commented in May 1945, "The British inflicted grievous and bloody injuries upon us, but the Americans stabbed us in the heart."

For purists it is possible to find a couple of reasons to complain. Frequent allusions are made to the 8<sup>th</sup> AF attacks scheduled to other targets in Germany on days in which the 1<sup>st</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup> Division went to Merseburg/Leuna. But, it reminds those of us who went to the briefings that we would be told that the B-24's of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were going to the Ruhr or dropping fuel to our front lines before the briefing officer pulled the curtain to show us that long, long strand of yarn pointing east as far as our fuel load would carry us to Merseburg. Ray is also careful to explain the impact on the GAF fighter defenses and our escort of multiple targets.

Some may find fault with referring to Group formations as "combat wings." Reading that "fifteen combat wings ... were directed to attack the plant" (on 29 July) grates a bit since the 8<sup>th</sup> AF had only 12 Combat Bomber Wings composed usually of 3 Bomb Groups - like the 1<sup>st</sup> CBW of which the 91<sup>st</sup> and the 398<sup>th</sup> were a part. Ray contends that 8<sup>th</sup> AF material and many other historians refer to the Group formations we flew as "combat wings" because the written tasking messages referred, for example, to 1CBW (A); I put in my two cents worth that we never thought of our formation as a "wing" when it came from 8<sup>th</sup> AF because they were tasking the 1<sup>st</sup> CBW to assign a Group which the 1CBW would have to select when it tasked one of its three Groups based on available aircraft and crews.

If those are the only differences you can find then I think you will agree that this is a great addition to your library especially because Ray builds the case for three significant conclusions. First, the reasons for the heavy losses to the 91<sup>st</sup> on 2 Nov 44 were the result of a "perfect storm." We were separated from the rest of the bomber stream because the 457<sup>th</sup> and 398<sup>th</sup> BG deviated from course - not because we were off course - leaving us alone; an attack (probably on the 398<sup>th</sup>) called off our fighter cover leaving us unescorted over

the target. We had many aircraft without guns because of various "experiments" and mission modifications. Life had been very good to us since July at Leipzig and we had no combat losses in the prior month perhaps contributing to inexperience and some over-confidence. The PFF navigation equipment was lost in all three Squadrons; the 323<sup>rd</sup>'s "blew a fuse" two hours from the target, the 401<sup>st</sup> Lead aircraft began to malfunction inbound from the IP to the target and the 322<sup>nd</sup> Squadron leader was shot down just after the target. The turn to the north off target avoided the flak over Merseburg and Leipzig but could not shake the GAF 4<sup>th</sup> fighter unit who had been shadowing us from the target. The report that went to 8<sup>th</sup> AF saying that we were attacked by "upwards of 25" enemy aircraft was clearly wrong since the surviving 23 B-17's claimed more than 50 destroyed, probable and damaged GAF fighters. German scramble and loss reports support this.

Second, if one recognizes that the purpose of attacking Merseburg was to limit the GAF ability to engage our air and ground forces, then 2 Nov was a smashing success with 70 pilots killed in action and at least 28 wounded. It was the first of four days in November in which the GAF losses were significant. Ray includes a reference (p. 88) to a conference in Rastenburg on 6 Nov in which Hitler "ranted that it would take '2000 fighters to knock down just 200 bombers' at the rate achieved on 2<sup>nd</sup> November." We had been used before as "decoys," e.g. at Anklam, but it appears we inadvertently performed the same service on 2 Nov 44 - and very effectively. Did this first of the four November losses contribute to the GAF inability to support the December Battle of the Bulge?

Third, there can hardly be any question that our success in limiting Merseburg production even with only 3% of our munitions landing in the target area had a dramatic impact on future aircraft design and tactics. The USAF and US industry recognized the need to provide "stand off" capability, precision and effective munitions and protection of crews and their costly and time-consuming training (think stealth and drones). We were the guinea pigs, but we were good at our jobs. Thanks, Ray, for reminding us of the contributions we made through blood, flak and oil.

---

## Veteran recalls bombing missions during WW II

By JESSICA SIEFF / Niles Daily Star – Originally published September 19, 2008 – Used with permission

Saturday morning the Experimental Aircraft Association, Niles [Michigan] Chapter will hold a fly-in and breakfast at Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport and Bob Baird, president of the Niles Chapter, said that this fly-in is especially for veterans.

One very special veteran, Charles 'Charlie' Hudson, is scheduled to be there. The former bombardier was just

30 years old when he ended his service with the United States Air Force. But the four years he spent running missions in Europe 67 years ago seem to be as clear to him as if they were just yesterday. And there's a chance - he might even get back into an airplane.

Hudson now resides at Silverbrook Manor in Niles. He was born in Taft, Calif. in 1915. At the age of around



eight or nine, he said, he would find his way to the local airport and watch, as the airplanes would take off and land.

"And then," he said. "I got a guy to take me for a ride." And the rest, as they say, is history.

One might say, an impressive history. A history that reaches out across the Atlantic Ocean and back those 60 years to when Hudson was a young man, a bombardier facing the second world war.

He was 26 when he began flying for the United States Air Force. "And that was old," he said.

By the time he entered the service he'd already logged 441 hours of flight time and was able to gain special rating with the air force for his ability to master aircraft instruments. Something he said, "was a pretty tough thing in those days" since the instruments weren't "that good to begin with."

During the war, Hudson flew the famed "Flying Fortress," a B-17 bomber, in a remarkable 37 missions during the war.

Most bombardiers, Hudson said, would fly a total of only 25 missions and return home. "I flew 25 missions," he said. "And they were going to send me home ... I said what are you going to do with me?" He was told by his superiors that he'd likely end up in some form of training command.

"Well, I said to hell with that," he said.

Even now, Hudson said he could hear the sound of the engines and the roar of the bomber itself. Unlike what some may see at Air Force hangars across the country these days, sleekly designed fighter planes with technologically advanced controls - the B-17 wasn't just a plane, but a grand and massive heavy bomber. A "ship" as he refers to it.

During the war, Hudson said he met a number of "wonderful people" while based in England with the eighth Air Force, 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group.

According to his book, "Missions With Charlie," Hudson's first mission was Sept. 23, 1943 in Nantes, France. He would go on to fly missions in Bordeaux and Troyes - also in France and throughout Germany - including Berlin.

"We bombed the hell out of that thing," he said.

He can remember a total of 1,200 planes in the wave that washed over the city, he said at 170 mph - a nonstop barrage of bombings that lasted 45 minutes.

Though Hudson struck at numerous targets and battled countless enemies in missions that could last 11 to 12 hours at a time, the structure of the B-17 created some

challenges for the crews that mastered them back in the days of the Second World War.

"Our biggest enemy was the frost bite," Hudson said.

Various positions inside the ship, including the waist gunner, he said, left men susceptible to the freezing temperatures and made handling the danger of their missions even more difficult.

Hudson recalls, as well as writes in his book, about a mission over Bremen, Germany on Oct. 8, 1943, in which one of the men with him inside the B-17 manning the ball turret had somehow swung the gun right side up - and in doing so - scalped himself.

Hudson said he managed to get himself inside the space where the man was sitting, with his scalp from the forehead to the ears was "down the back of his neck," he said. "Blood was running down his face and turning to ice." Hudson was able to stabilize him. "It took about 45 minutes for all this to happen," he said. "But we got him out alive."

In another incident, he recalls a mission in which his pilot and co-pilot were both shot and killed. Hudson took control of the B-17, getting the 'Flying Fortress' and himself back on the ground.

"The odds were when you took off," Hudson said. "The odds were three to one you weren't coming back." But Hudson - did come back. And his efforts serving the United States Air Force during World War II left him highly decorated - including what he estimated as seven medals of the Distinguished Flying Cross. But when that fact is mentioned to him, Hudson just shrugs rather humbly.

I was at the center of the action all the time," he said. "Everything seemed to happen to me."

When he left the Air Force, Hudson said he went on to play professional golf. "Oh yeah," he said. "I played with Nicklaus and Palmer and all those guys.

"It was a great life," he said.

It's not over yet, Charlie.

The EAA Niles Chapter will hold their fly-in breakfast Saturday, Sept. 20 from 7 to 11 a.m. Flights will be given for donation. Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport is located at 2018 Lake St., Niles.

Whether driving or flying, you can also visit Dowagiac. EAA Dowagiac Chapter is also hosting a fly-in Saturday, at the Dowagiac's Municipal Airport from 7 to 11 a.m. Dowagiac Lions Club cooks the pancake breakfast. Vintage vehicles and antique tractors will be on display, in addition to aircraft.

[Note: The EAA fly-in was this past September]

## 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA Board Meeting November 8, 2008, 9:00 – 10:00 AM PST

Attendees: Jim Shepherd, Jody Kelly, Gary Hall, Ed Gates, Steve Perri and Bob Friedman.

*Memphis Bell* Restoration: Steve

- Visited the *Memphis Belle* restoration in Dayton, OH.
- Is concerned regarding the progress as no one was working on the plane during his two visits.

Life Member address verification: Gary

- Attempted to validate all life member addresses. 65% ok, 20% no longer valid and 15% undetermined.
- Will send post cards in the first quarter of 2009 to the 15% in order to see if they are deliverable.

Emailing Ragged Irregular: Gary / Jim

- Gather email addresses of interested members and set up a trial for 2009.

Treasurer's Report: Jody

- Working to place PX inventory in Quickbooks.
- All financial information has been received from Ace.
- 716 Members (276 Full, 208 Full Life, 149 Associate Life, 68 Associate and 15 Public Relation)

Reunion: Ed

- Jody - Survey indicated preference of late September early October.
- Reunion Committee working on transportation issues voiced in survey.
- George Bruckett's reenactment group would like to perform a mission briefing.
- Discussion about honoring the Four Horsemen (91<sup>st</sup>, 303<sup>rd</sup>, 305<sup>th</sup> and 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups) at the *Memphis Belle* rollout in Dayton.
- Steve will inquire regarding the *Memphis Belle's* restoration deadline.

Miscellaneous: All

- Ed – McChord AFB displayed and sold our 909 caps.
- Jim – No more 909 caps – Need new 91<sup>st</sup> caps.
- Ed – Concerned who will monitor the Ring while Mike Banta is recovering. The three pillars of our organization are: 1) Ring; 2) Website; and 3) RI.
- Bob – Discussed officially naming the Ring “Mike Banta's Ring” and finding people to maintain in Mike's absence.
- Jim – Transferring Ring data to CD's. Mike Banta can't wait to get back to his computer.
- Jim – Discussed special fund to cover the expense of hiring young people interested in history to update and maintain 91<sup>st</sup> website.

- Ed – Vince Hemmings is working on a Hamm Mission display at Madingley. It should be ready by March.
- Ed – Vince is also working to correct Corporal Ford's tombstone acknowledging his attachment to the 91<sup>st</sup>.
- Ed – Next officer nominations are 2 years from now.
- Bob – Suggested note in the RI asking for volunteers.
- Jim – Need to know how many members are veterans. Jody is adding that information to the member database.
- Ed – We need to get sons & daughters interested and encourage them to become members.
- Jim – Working with Planes of Fame Air Museum at Chino to have the “Triangle A” painted on the tail of their B-17 currently under restoration.
- Gary - 2009 dues notice to go in January RI.
- Unanimous vote to extend Full Member status as requested by Charles Davis and Thomas Davis.

---

## 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA Donations

Verne & Onie Woods	\$500
George Jacobs	\$150
In memory of John Guyer (see tribute on page 11)	
Peter Fullerton	\$100
Douglas Gibson	\$10

---

## 2009 Dues are Due by March 1st

A yellow dues form is included in this quarter's R/I. If you wish to continue your 91<sup>st</sup> BGMA membership, please fill out and return the form so it is received before March 1<sup>st</sup>.

---

## Receive the R/I by email?

With the world going “green”, the Ragged Irregular is looking to do its part. You may elect to receive the newsletter via email beginning with the April 2009 issue. If you choose the email option, your 2009 paper copies will be sent as they are now in addition to receiving an email copy. In 2010 you will be given a choice of email only, paper only or both.

If you wish to have the R/I delivered to your computer, please make the appropriate note on your dues notice or send an email to [raggedirregular@gmail.com](mailto:raggedirregular@gmail.com).

---

## Special Folded Wings

### ✪ John H Gayer USAF (Ret) Age 89

Denver, CO, September 8, 2008

Reported by George Jacobs

While John was neither a flier nor a member of the 91<sup>st</sup> BG, shortly after Pearl Harbor he interrupted his studies at the Univ. of Nebraska to join the USAAF as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. He served with distinction for those of us who did fly as an administrative and logistics Officer during WWII. He remained in the USAF (Res.) and retired as a Lt. Col. In 1975. In post war life he was a Diplomat where he and his family served in Berlin, during the early years of occupation. His next diplomatic position was to the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, Switzerland where he served in a top level managerial position protecting U.S. interests in the field of International Communications. It was in Geneva that I and my family first met John, his lovely wife Dorothy Griswold Gayer and their family. This family relationship has remained very close for the past fifty years. After his diplomatic service, John became a successful satellite engineer, banker and an entrepreneur in broadcasting, having owned several radio stations. But, his first love was always the Air Force, with great admiration for us "fly boys". John was a very active, vocal supporter for sufficient Congressional funding to make the USAF the strongest in the world, and for the establishment of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

There is much for me to remember about John which will always bring a big smile to my face, and will keep him alive in my memory.

## Folded Wings (continued from page 12)

### ✪ Lee J Fuller 322<sup>nd</sup> Age 88

Reno, NV, December 11, 2008

Reported by Steve Perri



Lee passed away peacefully after a brief illness. Lee was born in New Baltimore, MI, on July 27, 1920. He was a proud veteran of WWII, serving in the Army Air Corps, 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group as a B-17 flight engineer where he flew in the European Campaign over Germany.

He was preceded in death by his loving wife of 32 years, Norma Fuller and his son, Terry Fuller. He is survived by his daughters Joann Bell and Leah Earle, along with several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

### ✪ Robert W Langston 323<sup>rd</sup> Age 85

Paducah, KY, November 29, 2008

Reported by his son-in-law Ed Layman



Bob into his eternal life on Saturday, November 29, 2008, at Western Baptist Hospital.

Bob was a veteran of WWII as a radio operator in the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H) of the United States Army Air Forces.

He was preceded in death by his parents, James W. Langston and

Anna Schrader Langston; a stepmother, Gertrude Johnson Langston; and his brother, James F. Langston of Alexandria, Va.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Irene Kallstrom Langston; a son, David Langston (Ellen); and daughter, Diane Langston-Layman (Ed).

### ✪ Arnold O Williams 401<sup>st</sup> Age 87

Hahira, GA, December 8, 2008

Reported by John Adams

Mr. Williams was born in Lake City, Florida on October 24th, 1921. He was a Veteran of WWII serving in the Army Air Corps as a B-17 bomber pilot. On a mission over Germany was shot down, captured and imprisoned in the infamous German prison camp Stalag Luft I. After the war Mr. Williams returned to Hahira and married Patricia.

Mr. Williams is survived by two daughters, Patrice (John) and Kim (Bob), seven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, two sisters, Ruthie Mashburn and Vera Vick, three brothers, Roy Williams, Dale Williams and Doug Williams.

### ✪ Daniel J Gannon 322<sup>nd</sup> Age 82

Lowell, MA, November 21, 2008

Reported by his son Jim Gannon

Daniel died after an extended illness, surrounded by his family. He was the husband of Theresa P. (Belanger) Gannon with whom he celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on September 26, 2008. A lifetime resident of Lowell, he was born March 14, 1926.

He served in the Army Corps during WWII in the European Theater of Operations, serving with the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. He received several decorations.

He is survived by his wife, Terry, five sons, two daughters, two brothers, four sisters, and 16 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews.



THE RAGGED IRREGULAR is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. The purpose of the newsletter is to keep alive the Spirit of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb 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. Editor Gary Hall

Ragged Irregular  
1054 Sunrise Drive  
Woodbury, MN 55125

NONPROFIT  
ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
MPLS MN  
PERMIT NO:  
32027

LET US KNOW BEFORE YOU MOVE

Folded Wings:

☛ **Nelson Hillock 322<sup>nd</sup> Age 86**

Stuart, FL, October 11, 2008

Reported by Lois Fratz

Nelson was born in Brooklyn, NY. He joined the 29<sup>th</sup> Division of the United States Army, then later transferred to the Army Air Corps, serving from Feb. 18, 1942 - Sept. 15, 1945. Nelson completed 27 combat missions while in the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group. He flew in *Texas Chubby - The J'ville Jolter* with pilot Ray Ward, and co-pilot Les Duggan, both now deceased. Nelson was a Tech. Sgt. and a radio operator-gunner. Citations included: Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 3 clusters, ETO Ribbon w/star, Distinguished Unit Citation w/Cluster - 8<sup>th</sup> AF, ATO Ribbon, Victory Medal.

He was also a member of the Florida 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS and an Editor of their Newsletter for 5 or 6 years as well as serving on their Board of Directors.

He is survived by his wife Louise, and his children, Donna Browne, Lynda Gregorio, Nelson Hillock III, and Greg Hillock.

☛ **Charles Hitchcock 322<sup>nd</sup> Age 84**

Carpentersville, IL, December 15, 2008

Reported by his wife Marion Hitchcock

Charles was born November 17, 1924. He was a ball turret gunner on the B-17 *Miss Slipstream* in the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, 322<sup>nd</sup> Squadron. He retired from the Air Force in July 1968 after serving 22½ years.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Marion, daughter Carla (Jerry), son Paul (Rebecca), Granddaughter Amy and Great Granddaughter Charlotte.

☛ **William G Reid 322<sup>nd</sup> Age 85**

Eagle, ID, November 11, 2008

Reported by his wife Marjorie Reid

He flew on *Man O War* among other planes.

He was a Captain with Capital Airlines for 29 years.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years Marjorie, daughter Martha, son Matthew and granddaughter Taylor.