

THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322nd BS



323rd BS



Supporting Units



324th BS



401st BS

Vol. 45 No. 2

91st Bombardment Group (H)

April 2012

Who Dat? The Ninety First, Dat Who!

The Big Easy, NOLA, N'awlins or just New Orleans. Whatever you call it, mark your calendars to attend the 2012 91st Bomb Group Reunion in New Orleans September 11 – 16!

The National WWII Museum will surely be a highlight of our stay. The museum opened as the National D-Day Museum on June 6, 2000. The museum found its home in New Orleans as the amphibious landing craft which played a vital role in the D-Day invasion were designed and produced by local Higgins Industries.

Over the past decade, the museum has expanded beyond D-Day and it's goal is to spotlight the American experience in WWII.

The other reunion events are listed in this issue and will be covered more thoroughly in the July issue.

You must make your own hotel reservations before August 13th. Contact information for the hotel is listed on the application on page 7. Be sure to mention you are with the 91st Bomb Group Reunion in order to get our group rate.

If you need an extra copy of the Reunion Application, please contact Gary Hall at 651-260-2397 or by email: raggedirregular@gmail.com.

Hope to see you in New Orleans!



Oak Alley Plantation



National WWII Museum



Wyndham Riverfront



Dixieland River Cruise

President's Corner

Jim Shepherd

The 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association will make its first trip ever to New Orleans this September. The main attraction there will be "The National World War II Museum". It is said to be the most complete display of WWII historical artifacts ever assembled and is guaranteed to be a moving experience. We are having dinner and a Dixieland Band on the "Natchez" steamboat going down the Mississippi and a visit to the famous "Oak Alley Plantation". The dates are September 11 to September 16, with rooms at the Wyndham Riverfront, New Orleans. All the information available on the Reunion application is enclosed in the Ragged Irregular. An application will also be placed on the web page under "UPCOMING EVENTS".



Current plans are being made to move the 323rd Memorial Plaque from its current isolated location, "Off Base", to some place near the Tower Museum, "On Base". This is an excellent idea since it will be protected from damage and vandalism. You might check the web page, under Memorials. We have added several, including names and locations to persons who have adopted graves of 91st members buried in Europe. There continues to be a great interest in the history of WWII and the brave men who made the supreme sacrifice.

The PX has not been profitable the past year, so Suzi has taken the show on the road. We had a booth at the Riverside (California) Airport during an Air Show, March 31, 2012. We need help in the future with the PX. Someone with computer knowledge and an interest in helping the 91st raise money should contact Mick Hanou to perhaps take over the PX duties. It was suggested that an Amazon account be established to sell the PX items. All that is needed is a willingness to help and we need your help to continue the association financial strength into the future if it is to survive.

In February, I attended a reunion for the 100th Bomb Group in Palm Springs California. The veteran turnout was about 50 and the speaker was the daughter of General Curtis LeMay. I've received many pictures through the years for the web page and several scratch art drawings. The 91st scratch art drawing is of *Destiny's Child*, and the nose artist was the late Jack Gaffney. I presented them with a Scratch Art drawing, by Steve Ridgeway, of one of their nose art planes, *SHE HASTA*. One crew member from this plane was there and was very pleased with the drawing.



Join our group on Facebook

A compliment to the 91st Bomb Group website and Mike Banta's E-mail Ring, the 91st Bomb Group is on Facebook. Facebook allows you to share your pictures and stories with friends, family and other 91sters. Sign up and join the 150+ people talking about the 91st online! Search Facebook using "91st Bomb Group" or link www.facebook.com/groups/91bgma.

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Please send Folded Wings information to Jody Kelly.

July R/I submissions need to be received by **June 15th**.

91st BG E-mail Ring

b17banta@aol.com

91st on the Web

www.91stbombgroup.com
www.bombsqd323rd.com
www.facebook.com/groups/91bgma

Veeps Views

Mick Hanou

Hello 91ST'ers.

May is generally the start of airshow season and I am excited to be participating in many of them. I mention this in the hopes of possibly seeing some of you. It starts with the Chino air show the weekend of May 5 - 6 at the Chino airport, near Ontario in southern California. I'll be there early, so feel free to call on me if you are there (925-200-8962). On the weekend, I will be in front, working security on the fence line. Chino is where we are (slowly) establishing a larger exhibit to the 91st Bomb Group.

Memorial Day weekend, May 27 - 29, I am sponsoring a visit of the Collings Foundation at Livermore airport, northern California. I have been doing this for 20 years now and this is how I first got involved with the 91st Bomb Group. The B-17 *Nine-O-Nine* will be in attendance along with the only flying B-24, a dual-control P-51 B/C, and quite possibly a flying ME262! We will also have numerous local warbirds – P-51, P-40, trainers, birddogs, and some post-war aircraft. I would love to have you visit. All WWII veterans are admitted for free and we have numerous WWII veterans there as volunteers. So call any WWII friend you have in the San Francisco area and come on out. The crowds are enthusiastic and pleasant and it is usually a great time for all. Monday mid-day, we will also have a group of lady singers belting out contemporary songs. See the column to the right for other stops.

Duxford, Cambridgeshire, England, June 30 - July 1: I will be working flight line security for one of the greatest airshows in the world. For those of you in England, I would enjoy meeting you. Email me (mhanou@comcast.net) beforehand and we can arrange something at a local pub. As usual, I will make my annual visit to Bassingbourn Tower Museum and Prop Memorial, where Chris and Amy Murphy have been doing an outstanding job on your behalf. They have moved / secured the 323rd Memorial and the 441st sub depot marker to preserve them, gotten a couple genuine Nissan huts from the 303rd base, and made numerous improvements in the Tower.



Associate Life Member Jose Gonzales exiting *Nine-O-Nine*

Wings of Freedom Tour

The Collings Foundations' Wings of Freedom Tour is coming to an airport near you! For information, call 978-562-9182 or visit them on the web at www.collingsfoundation.org. Take a tour or book a flight in their B-17, B-24 or P-51 at any of the stops listed below.

5/2 – 5/4	Murrieta, CA French Valley Airport
5/4 – 5/6	Burbank, CA Bob Hope Airport
5/7 – 5/9	Camarillo, CA Camarillo Airport
5/9 – 5/11	Long Beach, CA Long Beach Airport
5/11 – 5/13	Santa Ana, CA Orange County/John Wayne Airport
5/14 – 5/16	Santa Barbara, CA Santa Barbara Municipal Airport
5/16 – 5/18	San Luis Obispo, CA San Luis County Regional Airport
5/18 – 5/26	Mountain View, CA Moffett Federal Airfield
5/27 – 5/29	Livermore, CA Livermore Municipal Airport
5/29 – 6/1	Concord, CA Buchanan Field
6/1 – 6/4	Sacramento, CA McClellan Air Park
6/4 – 6/6	Napa, CA Napa County Airport
6/6 – 6/8	Arcata/Eureka, CA Arcata Airport

Mike Banta's Web Ring

Contact Mike Banta to join or ask questions of the Ring at email: B17banta@aol.com. If you'd like to comment on or answer any of the following and do not have email access, simply drop a line to the Ragged Irregular (address on page 2) and the information will be forwarded to Mike and the Ring.

Communication between B-17s and Fighters



"The Movie" Memphis Belle with little friend

I was taking a look at your videos on YouTube regarding the 8th AF's Schweinfurt Mission on 10/14/43. I just wanted to say thanks for posting the videos; they are very informative and tell the real story of that mission as it happened that day.

I was wondering if you were familiar with radio communication protocol during that period. Were any of the bombers able to communicate with fighter escort groups during their missions? Or were fighters only able to contact other fighters in their groups, etc. Just curious... I've always wondered if the fighters and bombers were able to communicate directly via VHF radio while on these missions. Thanks in advance for the feedback and thanks again for posting the videos!

- Eddie Dixon Jr

I don't remember if there was an official protocol regarding radio communication between individual group aircraft or fighter aircraft but it was certainly discouraged. However on several occasions I personally ignored it. On the Nov. 26, 1944 Altenbeken mission, I spotted a very large group of enemy aircraft climbing up to attack us from about a low one o'clock direction so I used our air to air radio frequency to warn the group. The enemy aircraft continued to climb and then circle to our rear to form many waves of about 10 planes across our rear and then attacking our formation. I had been able to give the warning a few minutes before the actual attack but was chastised by someone on the radio for unnecessary chatter.

On the Nov. 2, 1944 mission to Merseburg, our aircraft lost one engine as we approached the IP and we fell

behind and out of formation as the group proceeded to leave us behind. Our pilot called for fighter support using the radio VHF channel to communicate with fighters. A P-51 showed up within in minutes and stayed with us while we dropped our load on a target of opportunity and left us at the English Channel. No words were exchanged.

On Dec. 5, 1944 on a mission over Berlin, my aircraft received a direct Flak hit on the No.3 engine removing most of the engine and causing two other engines to fail.

One ran away and another started to windmill. Neither responded to all attempts to correct the problem, we could not release our bombs; there was severe shrapnel damage throughout the aircraft causing some smoke and fire as well as significant fuel and oil leaks. Several crew members were wounded.

While all this was going on, I called for fighter support on the VHF fighter channel and a red nosed P-51 almost immediately planted himself like glue to our right wing. He stayed with us until the bitter end and after everyone else had jumped, I finally followed. After falling to a much lower altitude I was able to wave goodbye to the P-51 pilot as he finally headed for home. That was our only direct communication because no words were exchanged on the radio between the two of us.

- Don Freer

Jake's YouTube videos about Gee navigation

Jake Howland has asked me to pass on these links on YouTube that his son Johnny made and posted for him. They are a great explanation of some of the navigation work he did during the war in his role as a pathfinder navigator. There are 4 parts on the Gee navigation system that Jake was so good at, and helped to use to defeat the Nazis. There are also some interesting links on Jake's life and times in Venezuela.

Thanks, Jake, and thanks Johnny, for putting it all together for all of us to share.

- Gordy Alton.

www.youtube.com/user/JakesB17Memories

www.youtube.com/user/JakesVenezuela

The American fighter pilot who avenged the loss of Pandora's Box, B-17 shot down on Nov 23, 1942

Closure comes in strange ways.

On an early 91st Bombardment Group raid over the submarine pens of St. Nazaire, France, on November 23, 1942, the small group of bombers was intercepted by German fighters led by Egon Mayer, Gruppenkommandeur of III./JG2, who is credited with shooting down two 91st bombers that day, one of which was Pandora's Box. My father, Major Harold C. Smelser, was along on Pandora's Box as squadron commander. His plane, mortally hit and in flames, was last seen descending off the French coast and never heard from again.



Major Harold C Smelser

Egon Mayer had a distinguished career as a German ace both before and after this mission. Seeing photos of Mayer aroused mixed emotions. Sometimes hatred, sometimes sorrow. There was some comfort in that his fellow officers later opposed and came to despise Hitler.



Capt. Walter Gresham

Mayer, in his turn, was shot down on March 2, 1944 by a fighter pilot whose name I never knew, always wondered about. Now approaching seventy myself, I finally I found him on the Internet. He was Captain Walter Gresham, Commander of the 358th Fighter Squadron of the 355th Fighter Group.

Today, I talked with his son Walter, thanking him for his father's service and for taking down a distinguished enemy. Egon Mayer rests now in German war cemetery in northeast France. The crew of *Pandora's Box* are lost somewhere off the coast of France.

- Larry Smelser

Author, John Steinbeck's visit to the 91st BG

Hello Mike,

A book has been found in a Charity shop in Norwich called "Once there was a War". The author was a gentleman called John Steinbeck who was I believe a War Correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and interviewed USAAF aircrew and ground crew experiences in England during WW II for his book.

The gentleman who has found the book believes he came to Bassingbourn but is not sure when. I wonder if one of your ring members knows the date(s)?

Trust you are both well.

Kind regards, Vince.

Hi Vince and 91sters,

Vince, yes, author John Steinbeck serving as a war correspondent did visit Bassingbourn during the war and intended to write a 25 article series about our B-17 named *Mary Ruth - Memories of Mobile*. When this 401st B-17 failed to return from the mission of 22 June 1943, the series was cut short.

Steinbeck was one of the USA's most prolific authors. Prior to the war he had written many books often about the Great Depression. Probably his best known book is named "The Grapes of Wrath." It was made into a movie and is one of the best films of all time. Other titles were "Of Mice and Men," "Tortillas Flats," "To a God Unknown," "Cannery Row," etc.

Concerning John Steinbeck's visit to Bassingbourn, Lowell Getz' book, "'Mary Ruth' Memories of Mobile" which is on our web page has the following information on his visit.

Mary Ruth - Memories of Mobile and her crew flirted briefly with fame from time to time over the years. John Steinbeck, a prewar friend of Sgt Crain, visited Bassingbourn long enough to write nine newspaper articles about day-to-day life in VIII Bomber Command. These were based on the crew of the *Mary Ruth*. His projected 25-article series would be cut short when the *Mary Ruth* failed to return from Huls. Six of these articles would find their way into Steinbeck's 1958 book, 'Once There Was a War'."

This book is available through Barnes and Noble and other Book sellers.

- Mike Banta, 91st Ring

Thank you for your donations!

Donations totaling \$3,340.60 were received by the 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association. Thank you for helping us keep the memory of the 91st Bomb Group alive! *Never Forgotten, Forever Honored.*

Hilde Keneley	600.00	Dr John B O'Leary	30.00
In Memory of Frank Keneley 401st		Arvin Battersby	25.00
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In Memory of Col. Robert M. Slane		C P Chima	25.00
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Frank S Ripa	40.00	Dominic Zurella	10.00
Rick Tierney	40.00	Glen Crumbless	5.00
John Zajac Jr	40.00		

91st Bomb Group Memorial Association - New Orleans Louisiana Reunion 11 Sept to 16, 2012

Registration Fee (for each person) Adult/Child _____ x \$35.00 = _____
 Registration starts 2:00 PM 11 Sept in the Hotel Lobby.
 (Includes \$10 gift certificate for 91st BGMA PX during reunion (no cash back).

Activity: Wednesday 12 Sept 9:00 am to 1:00 pm - Oak Alley Plantation Tour, lunch and Bus included.
 Adult/Child _____ x \$72.00 = _____

Activity: Thursday 13 Sept 9:00 am to 4:00 pm - World War 2 Museum - bus, admission, lunch and movie, *Beyond All Boundaries*.
 Adult/Child _____ x \$46.00 = _____
 Senior _____ x \$40.00 = _____
 WWII Veterans _____ x \$24.00 = _____

Activity: Friday 14 Sept 9:00 am to 1:00 pm - Swamp Tour - lunch included.
 Adult/Child _____ x \$59.50 = _____

Activity: Friday 14 Sept 5:30 pm to 9:00 pm - Dinner cruise: Dixieland Jazz.
 Adult/Child _____ x \$63.00 = _____

Activity: Saturday 15 Sept 9:00 am to 11:00 am - Business Meeting Lunch.
 Meeting Attendees _____ x \$20.00 = _____

Activity: Saturday 15 Sept 9:00 am to 11:00 am - French Quarter walk and city bus tour with lunch at Bubba Gump Shrimp (for those not attending the business meeting).
 Adult/Child _____ x \$60.00 = _____

Banquet: Saturday 15 Sept 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm - at Hotel.
 Chicken Breast Adult/Child _____ x \$50.00 = _____
 Filet Mignon Adult/Child _____ x \$55.00 = _____

***** Number of Attendees and Total Paid: # _____ \$ _____

Send application to the Treasurer, Jody Kelly, 3829 Sunset Lane, Oxnard, CA 93035.
 Make check payable to: **91st BGMA**

Hotel reservations at the **Wyndham Riverfront New Orleans**.
 701 Convention Center Blvd, New Orleans, LA 70130
 Phone **504-524-8200** - Reservation request must state 91st Bomb Group Reunion
 The rate is \$99.00 (\$109.00 Fri & Sat) per night.
Reservations must be made before 13 August 2012

REUNION APPLICATION IS ON PAGE 7

**IF YOU ARE ATTENDING THE REUNION
PLEASE FILL OUT, CUT OUT AND MAIL
PAGE 7 TO JODY KELLY**

THE TOWER MUSEUM BASSINGBOURN PROUDLY PRESENTS

“SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND”

WWII 1940's War-Time Weekend
& Musical Extravaganza

Saturday 12 & Sunday 13 May 2012
Bassingbourn Airfield - Cambridgeshire

Gates Open - 1000hrs

- ★ WWII Vintage & Military vehicles
- ★ Allied Forces Living History Groups
- ★ Highland Pipes & Drums (Sun only)
- ★ Dan & Laura Curtis -
The Great American Songbook (Sat only)
- ★ Large Model Association WWII R/C
Aircraft displays
- ★ B17 Cockpit
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Entertainer

"SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND"

WWII & 1940's War-Time Weekend & Musical Extravaganza
The Tower Museum's major fund-raising event for 2012

Special Request from the National WWII Museum

The National WWII Museum in New Orleans is working on an exhibit focusing on the air war. The exhibit is slated to be open on 11/11/2012 and they are looking for men to interview in person who were on these missions:

11/9/42	Saint-Nazaire
1/23/43	Lorient
1/27/43	Wilhelmshaven
8/17/43	Schweinfurt/Regensburg
9/6/43	Stuttgart
10/8/43	Bremen
10/9/43	Gdynia/Marienburg
10/10/43	Munster
10/14/43	2nd Schweinfurt
3/6/44	Berlin

Please contact:

Seth Paridon
 Manager of Research Services
 The National WWII Museum
 945 Magazine St.
 New Orleans, LA 70130
 (504)528-1944 ext. 312
 Toll Free: (877)813-3329 ext. 312
seth.paridon@nationalww2museum.org

Warbird Community Rises to Meet Threat

'Title 10 Amendment' could devastate historic aircraft fleet

April 18, 2012 - EAA and the Warbirds of America are joining with the Commemorative Air Force, Collings Foundation, and other warbird groups in opposition of a proposed amendment to the House National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4310) that could have a devastating effect on the fleet of civilian-operated historic military aircraft.

imperative and is currently being couched as a move to supposedly 'preserve' rare military aircraft. We can be assured that the U.S. military has neither the funding nor the mandate to preserve these aircraft in flying condition, which would leave the only option for them to be used as static museum displays. That would truly be a tragedy and a loss of our aviation and military heritage."

The amendment introduced by Rep. Michael Turner (R-OH) would bar the Department of Defense from loaning or gifting any U.S. military aircraft or parts to any entity except those that would put the aircraft on static display, such as in a museum. The amendment would preclude the aircraft from being loaned to private individuals, associations, or museums where there is any intent of flying the historic vintage warbirds, even at air shows or demonstrations of support for veterans.



EAA's B-17 *Aluminum Overcast*

Military branches such as the U.S. Air Force often do not donate aircraft to private groups outright; they instead "loan" them under a Defense Department provision, Section 2572 of Title 10, to individuals and groups for indefinite periods. These private individuals and groups usually restore and operate the aircraft at their own expense to demonstrate these pieces of flying history to events such as EAA AirVenture Oshkosh.

"The Department of Defense has made numerous attempts through the years to preclude any former military aircraft from being flown in civilian hands," said Doug Macnair, EAA's vice president of government relations. "This view has never been supported by any safety or security

Rep. Turner's district includes Dayton, Ohio, home of the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, which has been adamant in its attempts to ground former U.S. military aircraft. Ironically, Dayton is the same site where this week more than 20 B-25 bombers - preserved and flown by private groups and individuals - are gathering in a public spectacle to honor the 70th anniversary of the famed Doolittle Raid on Japan.

EAA and the other warbird groups are working with staff in the House's Armed Services Committee and Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, as well as the House General Aviation Caucus as the Defense Authorization Bill goes into initial committee review next week and to the House floor in early May. Although the exact language of the amendment has not been shared with the aviation community or widely on Capitol Hill, Rep. Turner plans to push the amendment despite initial congressional opposition.

EAA and Warbirds of America recommend that members contact their congressional representatives, urging them to voice their opposition to the Turner amendment and in support of maintaining the private ability to restore and fly these historic aircraft.

Finding Sergeant MacDonald

By Gordon Johnson

The-Press-Enterprise

Like looking for a needle in a bunch of needles.

So says Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) in 'Saving Private Ryan' when faced with the prospect of locating one soldier, James F Ryan of Iowa, amid the thousands mobilized for D-Day, the massive invasion of Normandy in World War II.

In the movie, the eight men sent to find Ryan behind German lines consider the mission insane.

Edgar "Neil" MacDonald thought his father Wilbert MacDonald was crazy too, for going to look for him when he was shot down in Italy behind enemy lines.



Neil MacDonald
2nd BG Waist Gunner

Yet, more than 50 years later, Neil, 75 now and living in Riverside [CA], can still envision his father on the deck of a Liberty ship the night of their reunion on the Mediterranean Sea. His father had crossed the Atlantic to fetch his wounded son home. What were the odds his dad would have found him?

Train-yard target

Aug. 19, 1943. It was Tech. Sgt. Neil MacDonald's 36th bombing mission for the U.S. Army Air Force. It didn't feel any different from the other 35. He stepped into his heated flight suit, adjusted his oxygen mask and checked his radio gear. He double-checked the operation of his .50-caliber machine gun and his ammo supply.

The engines of the great B-17 Flying Fortress fired up, the props whirled, and the plane, carrying a dozen 500-pound bombs, lifted off the desert airstrip in Tunisia, North Africa. More than 100 other bombers took off, too, for the day's target – a train yard in Foggia, Italy.

Neil found a seat behind the radio room, not far from his waist-gunner's post. His job was to shoot down enemy fighter plans, usually (Messerschmitt 109s) trying to flank the *C-Batt*, the name of Neil's ship.

There was plenty of time to think in the belly of the plane on the flight over. Neil tried not to fret over the dangers sure to come. "I wasn't scared really. You don't get scared until they start shooting at you," Neil says.

Several months before, the *C-Batt* had taken a big hit in the tail from a 20 mm cannon. A close call, but all hands made it back to base safely.

Yes, he'd seen his share of the action. He'd heard the machine gun bullets slap into the bomber's skin. He'd felt the rumble of flak bursting nearby. He'd heard and seen too much. Fifteen more bombing runs and he would fill his quota. Just 15 more and he could go home.

Home, sweet home.



Glenn MacDonald
91st BG Radio Operator

Meeting Ruth

Scottish by ancestry, the MacDonalds were a Connecticut farming family of eight children who eventually moved to Jersey City, NJ so Neil's dad Wilbert could work the tugboats.

Tug boating up and down the East Coast for months at a time. Wilbert missed out on much of his children's growing up. But Neil warmly remembered the times he was home. He was a kind father, and Neil loved him very much.

At the onset of World War II, Glenn, the brother closest in age to Neil, talked to Neil about enlisting. They visited the recruiting office and signed up together. Two older brothers, Malcolm and Hector, enlisted shortly thereafter. All four figured they'd be drafted soon anyway; they might as well join. Two other brothers worked in defense industries. Two sisters helped Mom out at home.

After aptitude testing, Glenn and Neil were assigned to the Army Air Force. Malcolm went to the Navy, Hector the Army.



MacDonald brothers
together in Miami

Glenn and Neil, always close as kids, went through basic training together, and took flight training in Miami for a time. They posed for snapshots in front of a backdrop of palms, two smiling brothers, confident in gaze and posture.

Neil was assigned to the 2nd Bombardment Group, 20th Squadron. Glenn, a radioman, went to a different [91st] bomber group.

While training in Kearney, Neb., instead of drinking with the boys, Neil spent his free hours riding

horseback in the open countryside. After all, he'd been raised on horseback as a farm boy.

One day he rode past a house where a fellow was out chopping wood.

"Hey soldier," he called out. "Where's your girlfriend?"

"Haven't got one," Neil replied.

"I've got three or four sisters if you'd like to meet them," he said before stepping into the house and coming out with one of them.

The chemistry wasn't there for Neil. "Can't you do better than that?" Neil said.

So he returned with Ruth. Now she was more like it.

That's how Ruth's picture came to be taped near Neil's machine gun. They wrote V-mail to each other nearly every day. She was the woman he wanted to come home to.

Shot in the leg

Other bombers from the other bases joined the bombers from Neil's base at a rallying point over the Mediterranean. He looked out the hole in the side of the plane, his gun port, and saw bombers, hundreds of them, flying in formation.

Cold air blasted through the gun port. It was always cold at 20,000 feet. Cold and noisy.

And then the time arrived. Ground fire from ack-ack guns exploded in puffs of black smoke, sending lethal shrapnel in all directions. A dozen or so Me-109s attacked, knocking out five bombers.

"The flak was so thick, it seemed impossible to fly through it," Neil says.

But they reached their target and Neil heard the bombardier yell "Bombs away" over the intercom.

Neil watched as the bombs hit. He could see the flashes and the smoke.

But the ack-acks kept pumping. Woomph! Woomph! Woomph! The shells exploded everywhere. The No. 2 engine took a hit. Then the No. 4 engine.

Crippled, the *C-Batt* lost speed and altitude. It dropped out of formation and German fighter pilots licked their chops. They swarmed.

Neil fired bursts at 800 rounds per minute as the planes swooped in to strafe the *C-Batt* with machine gun fire then darted out of range.

Don't heat the barrel. Lead the fighters the way you throw a pass to a crossing receiver. "Everything happens quick

and fast. No time to think, just act. Follow your training," Neil says.

Neil took a hit in the shoulder from shrapnel, but it didn't penetrate his flesh. The force of it knocked him to the deck though, and his oxygen mask flew off. Weakened from lack of oxygen, he struggled back to his gun.

The interior of the plane crackled with gunfire. Bullet holes riddled the fuselage and he could see the ground below.

He heard a piercing scream. He looked for a moment and saw the other waist gunner, his buddy, with most of his leg blown off. The wounded man still tried to reach the gun triggers, but couldn't.



Neil's B-17 Crewmembers

Neil got clipped in the heel. Again, not too seriously. But then a 20 mm slug ripped through his leg just above the ankle. A bad hit.

"I panicked, I ran to the back of the plane ready to bail out. But I immediately ran back to my gun and began blasting away. Why, I do not know," He says.

By this time, the No. 3 engine caught fire. Neil asked a turret gunner to shoot him with morphine, but the gunner was too busy strapping on his parachute. The parachute bell clanged, it was time to bail.

At first, the emergency door couldn't open. "Hysterically, I began clawing at it, but with no success." Then someone kicked it open, and Neil and the rest rolled out of the dying plane.

He waited to pull his chute cord.

Open it too early and he'd be target practice for the German fighters.

As he floated downward, he tore open his first-aid kit and shot himself in the arm with morphine. He counted nine chutes, including his own. There were 10 in his crew. Someone didn't make it. The *C-Batt* crashed in flames into

a mountainside. A shot-up German fighter plane crashed nearby.

Hidden by doctor

Neil hit the ground, unable to move. Within minutes, Italian townspeople, at that time the enemy, were on him, kicking and hitting him trying to steal his boots and his parachute. A patrol of Italian soldiers shooed the people away, and took him as a prisoner of war to a small hospital in San Angelo, in southern Italy. He met up with his tail gunner, wounded in the head, and the other waist gunner, his leg hanging on by a thin piece of flesh.

They took the tail gunner to a prison camp. The waist gunner went with Neil to the hospital, but he died on the operating table soon after.

Shell fragments were removed from Neil's leg by an Italian doctor. After the operation, he ate macaroni and then slept.

German soldiers wanted to take Neil to a prison camp, but the doctor, a kindly man, hid Neil. He taught Neil some Italian, enough to scream out with cries of appendicitis so maybe he could pass as Italian if the Germans should show up. In exchange, Neil taught the doctor English.

Four days after his capture, Italy surrendered to the Allies. But Neil had to remain 40 or so more days before he was recovered enough to find his outfit, which had moved from North Africa to Italy. All the while, Germans fought the advancing Allies, and American bombs dropped nearby. However, none landed on the hospital with the Red Cross painted on its roof. Finally, American GIs took the town.

Neil caught a ride on a half-track that chased the Germans for a while to find out their positions. They survived fire from 88s, the heavy German artillery, and he eventually caught a ride on a truck to an evacuation hospital behind the front.

He rode at night, in the cold rain, sitting atop empty five-gallon gas cans used to fuel tanks, but at least he was out of the action for a time.

Italy to Tunisia

Back at home, Wilbert MacDonald received the news about his son Glenn. Glenn had been shot down in June, killed in action over Germany.

Not long after that, he was notified that Neil, his youngest son, had been shot down and taken prisoner in Italy.

"Maybe the shock of losing Glenn was too much for him. But for some crazy reason, he decided to come and look for me," Neil says.

Wilbert, then about 58, took a billet aboard a cargo ship, one of the famous Liberty Ships, as chief first officer. His ship and others in the convoy that had sailed from New York anchored just outside of Bizerte, a seaport in Tunisia.

On the evening of Dec. 23, 1943, Capt. Edwin Bergin, a member of Neil's 20th Bomber Squadron, encountered Chief Wilbert MacDonald wandering through camps inquiring about his son who had been missing since August.

Bergin pulled strings and got word to Neil, still in an evacuation hospital in Italy, that his father was looking for him.

Neil explained the situation to the base commander and got a pass to fly to North Africa on the next plane out. Neil found Bergin, and together they cruised the harbor, looking for the right ship.

Even though there was a blackout, Bergin had arranged for a small light to be left aboard Wilbert's ship.

They found it and climbed a rope ladder to the deck.

A seaman was sent to get the chief, who was eating dinner.

"My dad almost fell overboard when he saw me there on the deck. We hugged a bit. Cried a bit. We talked most of the night. It felt great," Neil says.

Bergin, overstepping authority, issued orders allowing Neil to take the Liberty ship home with his father. They shared a cabin on the trip home. Submarines sank a couple of ships, including the one next to theirs. Mines got another. They made it home.

Neil spent the duration training other gunners on a B-29. A month before he got out of the service, he married Ruth. They've been together ever since. Both retired from the Pacific Telephone Co. Both have shared in the raising of three daughters, a son, six grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

Through the years, although they lived on opposite coasts, Neil remained close to his dad until Wilbert died May 12, 1972, at age 87.

On Sunday, Neil and his wife went to see "Saving Private Ryan." It was his third time in a movie theater since 1943.

"I had to see this one. They were four brothers. We were four brothers. Three of us came back, though."

He watched the movie. And a lot of the old feelings came back.



91st BGMA Board Meeting Minutes – February 2012

Meeting held February 4, 2012 via Skype and conference call in.

In attendance: Jim Shepherd, Mick Hanou, Jody Kelly, Janet Larocco, Gary Hall. Chris and Amy Murphy joined briefly but had to disconnect due to bad Skype connection.

Treasurer report - Jody

- Currently there are 651 members made up of 160 life, 179 full, 172 associate life, 108 associate, 19 associate full and 13 press memberships.
- The group has \$31,953.08 in funds. \$24,370.17 with Wells Fargo, \$7,425.63 in our Putnam account and \$157.28 on PayPal.
- 2011 year was a break even. Incoming funds were just enough to cover the outgoing funds.

Ragged Irregular – Gary

- It costs approximately \$2,700 to print and send the newsletter each year. \$1,800 used for printing, \$600 to send domestic bulk mail, \$300 for foreign postage and first class domestic.
- Costs have been cut in half over the past four years. Printing costs have decreased due to a decrease in membership and we are receiving a large discount from FedEx on printing.
- 69 Ragged Irregulars are now being sent via e-mail.

Election of Officers for 2012 reunion.

- Secretary/Treasurer remains open but discussion was made on a couple of possible candidates.

2012 Reunion. New Orleans

- Jim working on final dates for the reunion. Mick cannot do May or last week of June but would like summer months so kids can attend. Jim is looking at possible date in mid-September to avoid August heat.

Historian - Janet

- POW database project is almost complete. 3,000 MACR reports have been obtained and will be used to complete the POW database project.
- A request will be placed in the next newsletter asking Veterans and families of Veterans send in air force portrait to use on the website. Jim and Janet discussion on requesting permission from the families to use the photos on the website.

Tower Museum

- Chris and Amy have been concerned about the 323rd memorial. They have requested permission to move it from its current location on the Avenue to a secure location within the wire where the Tower stands. Chris and Amy urge to 91st BGMA Board to grant them permission to make this move as the UK is experiencing many thefts of WWII memorials for their metal. Mick made a motion to grant permission to move the memorial and Janet seconded the motion. Permission is granted.

- "Somewhere in England" event in May. (see page 9)

PX - Jim

- Need to find someone new to handle the PX.
- Discussion regarding possible new sources of income for the PX such as selling on Amazon.com.

Texas Agent for Corporation

- Discussion on need to find resident of Texas to represent the 91st as registered agent following Bob Freidman's death. Jody said she would make contact with Texas members.
- Texas requires a Corporation to have a Registered Agent. The Registered Agent address is the address that will be used by the state of Texas for any official legal and tax correspondence. The Registered Agent address must be a physical, in-state street address; P.O. Boxes are not acceptable.

Folded Wings (continued from page 12)

✪ Jack S Bowen 401st Age 84

Weimar, TX, June 11, 2008



Jack served his country in the United States Air Force during World War II and the Korean War, attaining the rank of Master Sergeant. During World War II, He was captured by the Germans and became a POW. He married Lucille Porter on September 21, 1945.

Jack is survived by two sons, Jack (Cris) Bowen and Ronald Ray (Linda) Bowen; three daughters, Deborah Jean Bradshaw, Edythe J. (Douglas) Smith, and Rebecca Sue Bowen; eleven grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

✪ C A Theodore Lundberg 323rd Age 94

Jamestown, NY, February 23, 2012



Reported by his son Carl C.A. enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force on Oct. 1, 1941. He served for 2 1/2 years in the 323rd Squadron as an aircraft mechanic and electrician on B-17 bombers. He was honorably discharged on Sept. 15, 1945.

He is survived by his wife, Eunice Jacobson Lundberg, whom he married June 24, 1945; three sons: Carl (Karen) Lundberg, Brian (Mary) Lundberg, Thomas (Gail) Lundberg; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

✪ **Burt A Stieler 401st Age 91**

Hartland, VT, September 22, 2011



Born in Frankfurt, Germany, Bert was a veteran of World War II, serving in the 91st Bomb Group, 8th Air Force and was a POW in Stalag 17B. He was a proud member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Bert was the husband of the late Gertrude Bedard Stieler; father of Paul Stieler, and the late Laura Susan Briere; grandfather of four; great-grandfather of one.

✪ **Millard H "Matt" Rader 323rd Age 81**

Columbia, SC, August 12, 2004



Reported by his son Rick
Matt was a decorated veteran of the United States Army Air Corps and served with the 8th Air Corps Bomber group during WWII.

He is survived by his children, Connie (Larry) Clark, Carole Carter, Rick (Jeanette) Rader and wife Linda; 10 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

✪ **Andrew W Anderson Jr 322nd Age 88**

Northridge, CA, March 16, 2012

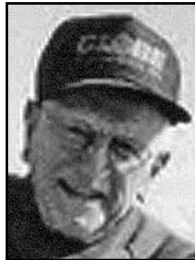


Reported by his daughter Kim
Andy entered the Air Force at age 17 after finishing high school. He flew 15 missions until on September 5, 1944 the plane he was piloting was shot down over Germany. He parachuted to safety and didn't say much about the trauma for fifty years until he published his memoirs in his best-selling book "One Pilot's Story".

He is survived by his wife Virginia, daughters Kim and Lisa and four grandchildren.

✪ **Frank M "Buddy" Pungercar 323rd Age 83**

Sheboygan, WI, November 19, 2006



Reported by his son Mike
Frank, a radio operator, flew 30 missions with the 91st, most of them with the 323rd. He flew as lead radio operator on his last 15 missions. After the war he returned to Sheboygan and worked for over 30 years at the Edgewater Power Plant on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Frank was preceded in death by his first wife Connie, second wife Gertrude, and a son, Todd.

Frank's story is shared in a book written his son Mike titled "The Promise Kept".

✪ **Vincent A Fonke 401st Age 90**

Fayetteville, NC, November 16, 2011



Reported by his wife Belle
Vincent was a pilot of a B-17 during WWII. He was shot down on his 11th mission over Leipzig, Germany, taken prisoner and held for almost a year. In 2007, Col. Fonke was awarded the DFC as a result of that mission. He piloted a B-36 long range bomber while assigned to SAC during the Korean War. He served three tours in Vietnam and one

PCS receiving the bronze star for heroic action.

Vincent spent 30 years in the USAF and retired in 1970. Afterward, he became involved in the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) Program was active in the SERE Program until his death.

Survivors are his wife, Belle of 64 years; children, David, Daniel (Victoria), Jerry (Carolina), Joan Fonke (Jim) Hurst, Janet Fonke Campbell, Donna Fonke (Mek) Araghi, and Steve (Jolena); 17 grandchildren; and 2 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his son and daughter-in-law Donald and his wife Linda who were killed in the crash of an EC-135 in 1981.

✪ **Daniel S Abeles 401st Age 97**

Buffalo, NY, March 10, 2012



Reported by Charles Walker
Daniel served in the Army Air Forces during World War II and was assigned to the 91st Bomb Group of the 401st Squadron in England. On his 19th mission as an airplane radio operator and gunner, he was shot down over Germany and was held as prisoner of war from April 1944 to May 1945, when he was liberated after a 30 day, 350

mile hike through the forest in Austria.

His wife of 64 years, Esther Polowin Abeles, died in 2010. He is survived by a daughter, Patricia, and a son, Michael.

✪ **Edward E Hoevet 324th Age 88**

Tampa, FL, March 20, 2012

Reported by Julie Scott
Edward completed 19 missions with the 91st as a bombardier.

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 91st 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

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THE RAGGED IRREGULAR

April 2012

Folded Wings:

✪ George J Cameron Sr 324th Age 90

Edison, NJ March 13, 2012



Reported by his son George

George joined the U.S. Army in 1942 at age 20. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the FAME with three Bronze Stars for his service as a ball turret gunner in the B-17 bomber nicknamed the *Pist'l Packin' Mama*, surviving 26 missions over Nazi-

occupied Europe. On one mission, the ball turret was hit by German flak, and he was exposed to sub-zero air temperatures, dangling in mid-air, with only a harness connecting him to his plane. In September 2011, George received the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal, the state's highest honor, from U.S. Senator Robert Menendez.

George is survived by his dearly loved wife of 69 years, Muriel Caroline (Cochrane); his beloved children, George Jr., Janet (Hamilton) and Nancy (Sloan); nine grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

✪ Roy H Fratz 401st Age 91

Atlantis, FL, February 22, 2012



Reported by his son Tom

Roy joined the Army Air Force in October 1941. After training in the States he served as a Crew Chief on B-17s of the 401st Squadron. He separated from the service in September 1945 and reenlisted in September 1946. He was stationed at Morrison field with the 54th and 514th Weather Recon Squadron. He left for the Pacific in June 1947 where he was stationed at North Field on Guam. While in the Pacific he was involved in B-29 weather missions and also participated in the atomic bomb tests in Operation Sandstone. He retired from the Air Force in August 1949.

Roy was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 64 years, Lois Ellen Walkden. Roy is survived by son Tom (Nancy) Fratz.

Folded Wings continued on page 14