

# THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322nd BS



323rd BS



Supporting Units



324th BS



401st BS

Vol. 49 No. 2

91st Bombardment Group (H)

April 2016



Ground crew refuel a B-17 Flying Fortress (DF-G, serial number 42-5069) nicknamed *Our Gang*.

*Photo from the Roger Freeman Collection*

**President's Corner****Mick Hanou**

As I mentioned in the fall issue of the RI, the dates of the 2016 Reunion were originally aimed for September 21 - October 15. By the January 2016 issue, I was targeting for October 12 - 15 subject to hotel availability. Charleston is a popular place, especially in the fall. The final dates are October 14 - 17 [with checkout on Tuesday the 18th], which were the best we could get. These are not the usual Wednesday-Saturday but none of those weekends were available.

Current plan is to have arrivals and the evening icebreaker reception on Friday, October 14. Saturday will include a trip to Savannah Eighth Air Force Museum and a bit of sightseeing. The business meeting, a local harbor cruise and the banquet will be on Sunday, October 16. Monday, October 17 will have sightseeing of historic Charleston Plantation / Mansions, history, and possibly a museum. Ft. Sumter will be visited one of the days. Further details and registration will be in the July Ragged Irregular.

The venue is the Embassy Suites Hilton Hotel Airport. There is free shuttle from the airport, free parking, and the room rate of \$139 includes two breakfasts. All are 2-room suites. They include King, Double, and "MOBILITY ACCESS" suites. (Google it for more)

Hotel Rooms can be booked at the Charleston Airport Embassy Suites Hotel in one of two ways. You can call Reservations at 1-800-362-2779. When you do, be sure to mention the code "91B" and that this is part of a group reservation. This is important as the 91st BGMA is committed to a certain number of room-nights.

The second method is via the website [tinyurl.com/91HotelSC](http://tinyurl.com/91HotelSC).

If you encounter any problems, our contact there for reservations is Andrea Harvey 843-747-1882.

Rates are good three days before and three days after in case you want some more sightseeing time in Charleston. I will be arriving a day or two early to finalize logistics. Booking soon will secure a room, but definitely no later than September 15. But don't leave it until the last minute as we could only contract a certain number of room-nights.

It is important to me to know when you book so I can keep track of attendees. Please contact me at [mhanou@comcast.net](mailto:mhanou@comcast.net) with your room-night details, number of attendees and contact numbers. That worked exceptionally well at San Francisco in 2014. Together we make good reunion experiences.

Lastly, elections are due this year. I need two Full Member volunteers to be on the Nominating Committee. Please help by contacting me on this.

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Please send Folded Wings information to Jody Kelly.

July Ragged Irregular submissions must be received by **June 15th**.

**91st BG E-mail Ring**[b17banta@aol.com](mailto:b17banta@aol.com)**91st on the Web**

[www.91stbombgroup.com](http://www.91stbombgroup.com)  
[www.facebook.com/groups/91stBGMA](http://www.facebook.com/groups/91stBGMA)

**DYERSBURG ARMY AIR FIELD, TN**

Tim Bivens of The Veterans' Museum at the Dyersburg Army Air Field, TN is seeking any veterans or families of veterans, who trained at the base.

This was a B-17 final phase training base from 1943 to 1945. The museum is especially interested in any photos taken at Dyersburg Army Air Field, such as crew photos and of the field's B-17's.

Tim can be reached by phone 731-571-3636 or via email: [tbivensb17@cablone.net](mailto:tbivensb17@cablone.net).



## They'll Always Remember...

### Memorial Day at the Netherlands American Cemetery 2015

by Janet Larocco

On a sparkling, beautiful day, thousands attended the two-hour annual Memorial Day commemoration at the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten on Sunday, May 24, 2015. It was deeply moving to see the gratitude and appreciation expressed by the Dutch people in attendance, and touching to view the attention lavished on the graves, by people of all ages.



Dutch citizens visited the cemetery on Memorial Day, May 30, 1945. The tradition of honoring America's fallen is carried on today.



Over 10,000 American dead of World War II are buried at Netherlands American Cemetery, or memorialized on the Wall of the Missing. Included in that number are over 100 men of the 91st Bomb Group. Every person buried or memorialized at the Netherlands American cemetery has been adopted by a local person, family, or group. There is a waiting list for adoption opportunities. In the days leading up to the Memorial Day celebration, thousands came to pay respects and place flowers on the graves. Every grave was also decorated with an American flag and a Dutch flag.

In his remarks to the assembled throng, Arthur Chotin, representing nearly sixty American World War II Orphans, stated:

"What would cause a nation recovering from losses and trauma of their own to adopt the sons and daughters of another nation? And what would keep that commitment alive for all of these years, when the memory of that war has begun to fade? It speaks to the character of the Netherlands and its people that every single grave in this cemetery and virtually every single name on that wall has been adopted. It is a unique occurrence in the history of civilization. And it deserves of recognition, and of thanks."

Just as the Dutch have not forgotten, and continue to honor, the sacrifices of these Americans, I am sure I will never forget the very moving experience of Memorial Day at the Netherlands American Cemetery. A heartfelt 'thank you' to the people of the Netherlands!



George Wong died aboard *Times A-Wastin'* April 8, 1945 – just a month before the War in Europe ended. That is Conrad Lohoefer's tiny B-17 on the gravestone. Someone left a large bouquet of pink carnations.

## The Last of *The Heavyweight Annihilators*

by Rebecca Y. Vaughn

Daughter of Rufus W. Youngblood, waist-gunner, 324BS, Crumm's crew, *Jack the Ripper*.



[standing] Lt. Don C. Bader, Pilot; Lt. Cavaneau, Co-Pilot; Lt. Jack Adkins, Navigator; S/Sgt. William C. Gray, Waist Gunner/Assistant Engineer; [seated] T/Sgt. Glen L. Kessler, Radio Operator; T/Sgt. Earnest L. Piepho, Engineer/top turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Walter C. Budzisz, Ball Turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Thomas J. Hansbury, Tail Gunner; S/Sgt. Arnold L. Burton, Waist Gunner. Not Shown: Lt. Jim Hensley, Bombardier

Typical of Wray's Ragged Irregulars, the tenacious crew of *The Heavyweight Annihilators* required the use of several planes, as they were repetitively war-torn, before they could complete their tour of duty. Amongst the first crews of the 91st Bomb Group, this combat team was piloted by the skilled Donald Clifton Bader as they forged their way through twenty-five missions. Former radio operator and Distinguished Flying Cross recipient, Glenn L. Kessler, the last surviving member, recalls his experiences with this crew.

Raised on a dairy farm in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Kessler states clearly, "It was the cows," that drove him to volunteer in the Army Air Corps on October 7, 1941. The eighteen-year-old high school graduate, finally rid of the stench of cow's milk on his hands, had only been in radio school at Scott AFB, Illinois for two months when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor thrusting the United States into war.

After twenty weeks of Radio School, he completed six weeks of Gunnery School at Tyndall AFB in Panama City, Florida. Then, at MacDill AFB in Tampa, Florida, in May 1942, he was assigned to the newly created 91st Bomb Group, 322nd Bomb Squadron, Bader's crew. Also assigned to the 322nd were fellow radio operators and friends Ernest J. Kiss and Marshal B. Haugen who trained with him in both radio and gunnery school. They were all then transferred to Walla Walla AAB in Washington to complete their final phase of training.

While the roster would change, Bader's earliest crew included 1Lt. Don C. Bader, Pilot; Lt. Bert W. Humphries, Co-Pilot; Lt. Jim Hensley, Bombardier; Lt. Jack Adkins, Navigator; S/Sgt. William C. Gray, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Arnold L. Burton, Waist Gunner; T/Sgt. Glen L. Kessler, Radio Operator; T/Sgt. Earnest L. Piepho, Top Turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Walter C. Budzisz, Ball Turret Gunner; and S/Sgt. Thomas J. Hansbury, Tail Gunner. Kessler recalls their team as a compatible one with a good leader. "Bader was an easy-going, respectable man with good Christian values."

The 91st began mobilizing for the European Theater Operation (ETO), and in September 1942, the 322nd were assigned nine new B-17F planes, fresh from assembly, in Bangor, Maine. Amongst them, plane No. 41-24482 was designated to Bader's crew. They named it, *The Heavyweight Annihilators*.

Sadly, all of these new planes would be destroyed or lost within a year's time. More tragically, many of the men who served on them would be wounded, imprisoned, or killed during that time.

### 91st BG, 322nd BS EARLY B-17F's

124499 LG-P	<i>Fury</i> (11/18/42 mid-air collision, SAL)
124479 LG-R	<i>Sad Sack</i> (11/23/42, MIA)
124439 LG-Q	<i>Chief Sly</i> (12/20/42, SAL)
124482 LG-S	<i>Heavyweight Annihilators</i> (1/3/43, SAL)
124512 LG-N	<i>Rose O'Day</i> (3/4/43, MIA)
124545 LG-T	<i>Motsie, Luftwaffe's Waterloo</i> (3/23/43, SAL)
124481 LG-M	<i>Hells Angels</i> (5/14/43, MIA)
124483 LG-U	<i>Spirit of Alcohol</i> (5/19/43, MIA)
124453 LG-O	<i>The Bearded Beauty/Mizpah</i> (8/17/43, MIA)

Compiled from 322nd Dailies and Havelaar's, *The Ragged Irregulars of Bassingbourn*. SAL salvaged, MIA missing in action.

The new squadron flew across the Atlantic together to Kimbolton, England on October 2, 1942, which would have been their final destination had the tarmacs withstood the weight of the mighty Fortresses. Instead, in his historic move, the opportunistic Colonel Wray hastily relocated the group to Bassingbourn outside of Cambridge, England.

Kessler remembers the facilities there to be far superior to any he occupied during training, and, of course, much more comfortable than Kimbolton. His barrack, "with steam heat," was constructed "like a house." They had the luxury of bathrooms with showers accessible in the same building and the mess hall just a quick walk away. He remembers the



food as “good.” No complaints about powdered milk from the former dairy farmer!

While awaiting America’s delivery of enough B-17’s to complete the group, the squadrons continued training. Then, on November 7, 1942, accompanied by the 306th and 301st Fort groups, and the 93rd Liberator group, the 91st participated in its first mission to the submarine base at Brest, France. *The Heavyweight Annihilators* was amongst those first Forts to fly in this attack.

And so it began! But it was all so new, and the bombers were only accompanied by short-range fighter-planes which couldn’t accompany them for the entirety of their raids. Thus, their losses were high. Before the month was over, they had lost their first crew: Capt. Thomas B. McCormick’s crew on No. 479, *Sad Sack*, with CO Major Zienowicz aboard, during the disastrous mission on November 23, 1942 to St. Nazaire, France. While statistics vary, Lowell Getz’s thorough analysis of the 91st’s states the “first 35 crews (350 crewman), 42.6% were either killed in action or shot down and became POWs; another 3.4% died of non-combat causes, for a total of 46.0% (149 crewmen) who did not survive their 25 missions.”

The casualty rate was even higher for the Squadron Commanders. Within the first two months, three of the four squadron commanders were lost: 322nd’s CO Major Victor B. Zienowicz, 324th’s CO Major Harold C. Smelser, and 401st CO Major E.P. Myers were all lost by January 1943. These commanders, the best of the best, were not leaders who delegated from behind the lines but ones who bravely exposed and, ultimately, sacrificed themselves.

Kessler recalls these events, “It was very sad.” Yet, he denies a reluctance to fly. “We were so young, and we just wanted to do our job.” Most of his crew shared this commitment and voiced frustration when they were grounded due to plane malfunctions or bad weather. Tail gunner Hansbury of his crew outlined these sentiments in his memoirs. In fact, both Hansbury and Kessler’s friend, Haugen, voluntarily returned and completed a second tour of duty. “Kiss and I wanted to do the same,” states Kessler, “but we were newly married, and our wives didn’t want us to go.”

That is not to say that he was never frightened. His January 3, 1943, mission to St. Nazaire, France, the nemesis of the 91st’s early campaign, would remain his most memorable one. “I thought we were goners, for sure,” he relates.

It was Kessler’s sixth mission and the group’s fifth attack on this coastal port nicknamed “Flak City.” The U-boat pens, constructed by astute German engineers, seemed almost indestructible. Col. LeMay’s new tactics, employed to improve bombing effectiveness, were used on this mission. While the accuracy of bombing was indeed improved, the planes took a beating as they straight-lined it to the target with strong winds against them prolonging the bomb run. This mission would be the most costly to date for the VIII

Bomber Command (BC) with seven bombers, seventy men, lost in action. Of these, the 91st group lost one ship, *Panhandle Dogey*, piloted by Lt. William M. Anderson of the 323rd. In addition, two men were killed in action with six wounded and eleven planes damaged of the group.

As *The Heavyweight Annihilators*’s last bomb was released, it was hit by flak on the right wing. Engine number four was engulfed in flames while number three was malfunctioning. Unable to keep up, the wounded plane fell out of formation, and the Luftwaffe immediately descended upon it. Bader and Humphries skillfully evaded the attacks as best they could, but the FW-190’s just kept raining down on them. Fervently, the gunners fought back shooting down six of the enemy planes. The battle was intense, and a frontal attack left Bader, Hensley, and Adkins injured. They were nearly defeated, but their luck turned as the engine fire was extinguished, and No. 481, *Hell’s Angels*, with Capt. Robert B. Campbell circled back to their aid.

As they worked their way back to England, their rugged but battered Fort was flying on just two engines. They fell further behind the formation until they lost sight of it. With a ditching imminent, Bader flew the plane close to the water while the men threw out anything they could to lighten the load. Kessler recalls seeing the turbulent swells close beneath them through the open bomb doors.

They were lost. At this low altitude hugging the sea, their destiny looming over the frigid water, Bader informed Kessler of their plight over the interphone. “Glen,” Bader calmly directed, “bring us home.” Those last three words are forever seared into Kessler’s memory. “I will take those three words to my grave,” he says.

Using the rice-paper flimsy with the two-letter mission codes given to him that morning, Kessler sent out his SOS repeatedly until the British Air Sea Rescue picked it up. They gave him the heading to the RAF coastal station, St. Eval Aerodrome, which Kessler delivered to Bader.

By the time they approached the base, their plane was operating on only one engine. Peppered with holes and lacking brakes, it hit the ground and spun upon landing. But, they had made it home. Their faithful ship, *The Heavyweight Annihilators*, however, would never fly again. It was salvaged for much needed parts after that mission.

Bader and Hensley were rushed to Headland Military Hospital by ambulance. Adkin’s wounds were, fortunately, not severe. Bader would recover from his leg wound and resume flying in two months, but Hensley’s fractured knee prevented him from flying with them again. However, in the post-war years, Kessler would maintain friendly contact with their stellar bombardier periodically throughout his life. Interestingly, Hensley would become the successful proprietor of the Arizona beer distributing company, Hensley Beverage Company. He would have two daughters, one of whom, Cindy, would marry Senator John McCain, a war-hero himself.

While waiting for their pilot to recover, Kessler served with Lt. Charles "Red" Cliburn's crew of the 324th squadron. On February 4, 1943, they headed to Hamm, Germany's railway yards on *The Bad Penny*. Kessler was shot in the shoulder during this mission, earning his purple heart. He spent a week at Dittington Hospital brightened by visits from friends including Haugen, Kiss, Walloch, Burton, Piepho, and Budzisz. To this day, he still carries that bullet wedged in his shoulder.

Gloomy English winter weather set in, grounding many missions. In their spare time, Kessler and his buddies would either walk to Royston to a "good basement restaurant there," or venture the short train ride to London to sightsee or attend USO dances. But it was the Old-English town of Cambridge that Kessler sought most often. The university town was charming, and the people very hospitable. Easily accessible by a free, fifteen-minute truck ride, he and his friends would frequent the quintessential English pub there known as The Eagle Pub. "I can still remember Lily and Ethel, the bartenders there. They were very nice people," he recalls fondly. As the weeks progressed and the loss of their comrades escalated, The Eagle Pub became somewhat of a shrine to their fallen friends. Names of young men, whose lives had been extinguished too soon, were etched on the ceiling.

The 322nd Squadron lost another plane and crew during the March 4, 1943 mission to Hamm, Germany, where the 91st had forged to the target alone. Lt. Ralph Felton's crew of No. 512, *Rose O'Day*, suffered fierce attacks from the Luftwaffe and went down with only three survivors.

Finally, in March, Bader's crew was assigned ship, No. 42-5712, *The Heavyweight Annihilators Number Two*. Replacements for co-pilot Humphries, who became the 322nd Operations Officer, and injured bombardier Hensley were F/O Winston M. Cavaneau, formerly of the Canadian Air Force, and 2/Lt. Wilfred A. Bouchard, respectively. By this time, the group was embarking on deeper penetrations into Germany with a much larger strike force. Bader's crew diligently plowed through these missions, working well together.

The mission to Bremen, April 17, 1943, was costly for the group with heavy opposition from the Luftwaffe, and it was also another tough one for Bader's crew. Once again, their plane took a hit resulting in an engine fire. Shortly after that, Budzisz almost fell out of the ball turret when its door opened. They pulled him to safety, extinguished the fire, and completed their mission with only three engines.

By May 1943, the casualty rate was escalating in the ETO with the chance of surviving the twenty-five mission quota projected as one in three. In two separate missions to Kiel, Germany, the 322nd lost 1Lt. William H. Broley's crew on No. 481, *Hell's Angels*, on May 14, 1943; then 1Lt. Edwin L. Baxely's crew on No. 483, *Spirit of Alcohol*, on May 19, 1943. Bader's men flew on both of these raids, as well as on four others that month borrowing planes intermittently while No. 712 was grounded for repairs. During this time, *The Memphis Belle*, sister ship to *The Heavyweight Annihilators*, and her crew had completed their mission quota and were, thus, selected by director Major William Wyler to be featured in a documentary movie of the air campaign. Photographers had been filming at Basingbourn for several months in anticipation, and even the king and queen of England visited the base to honor the event before the crew returned to the States for a war bond tour.



Kessler 1952

June was another very active month with Bader's crew flying seven sorties. Their team began transforming as original members fulfilled their required missions and were replaced with new recruits. Finally, on June 28, 1943, both pilot and radio operator finished together, as Bader and Kessler completed their

twenty-fifth mission that day. This grand finale was to none other than St. Nazaire. Kessler states that he had never been so nervous. "That last mission is so dramatic, and for it to be to St. Nazaire just made me all the more nervous," he said.

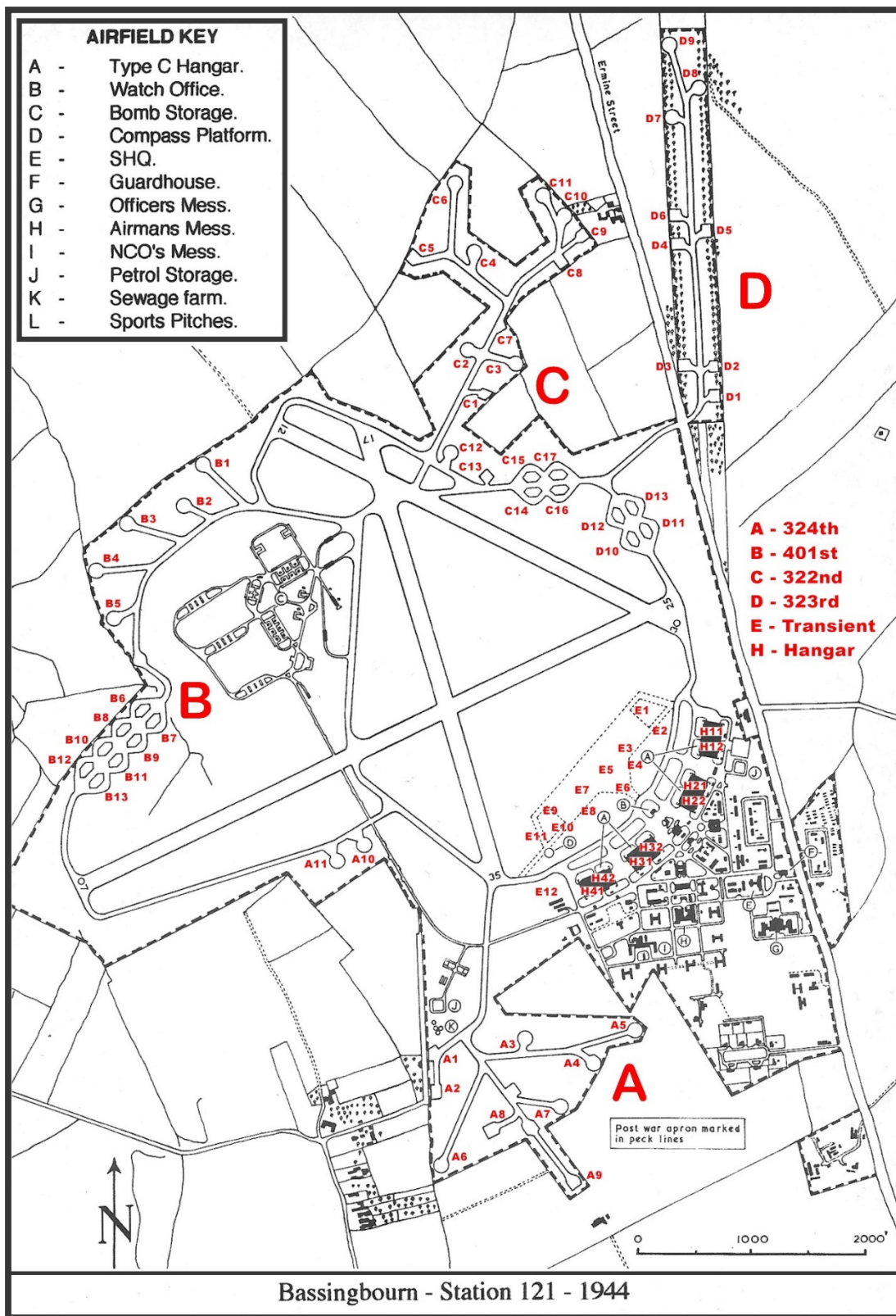
Having earned his Purple Heart, Air Medal, three Oak Leaf Clusters, and his DFC, it was time for the deserving young soldier to return to the "Zone of the Interior." Shortly after his return to Scott AFB, he met Leona Helen McDonnell who would be the love of his life and wife of sixty-five years. They married on October 7, 1944, exactly three years to the day from his enlistment. Together they raised five children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Kessler went on to serve in the Korean war completing thirty-two years in the Air-Force (twenty active, twelve civil service) retiring as a Master Sergeant... but that's another chapter in the life of this great American.

Over the years, the 91st BGMA has enabled Kessler to maintain communication with many of his comrades, and he cherishes those friendships greatly. As the last of *The Heavyweight Annihilators*, Kessler, now age 92, shares his memories with the generations that have followed, thereby keeping alive the selfless sacrifices and bravery of our forefathers.

## Bassingbourn Dispersal Area Answer

Thank you to everyone who responded to the dispersal area question posed in the January Ragged Irregular. Several veterans contacted us with their memories of hardstand locations. Vince Hemmings and Graham

Simons researched the locations in 1980 which validated the other responses received. This is an updated map of Bassingbourn with all hardstands and parking identified based the information received.





## ***Chow-hound* Memorial for New Generations of U.S. Service Personnel**

by Janet Larocco



*Chow-hound* over Berlin on March 8, 1944

On August 8, 2015, a dedication of a wing section of the 91st Bomb Group B-17 42-31367 *Chow-hound* marked the 71st anniversary of the loss of plane and crew in combat over France in 1944. Over one hundred "gold star" family members of the crew attended the event hosted by the 514th and 305th Air Mobility Wings at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey.



*Chow-hound* display at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Airfield, New Jersey.

The section of *Chow-hound* wing was rescued from a farmer's field in Lonlay L'Abbaye, Normandy, in 2011, by a mission from the 514th Air Mobility Wing based at Joint

Base MDL. Col. Dennis P. Duffy, Vice Commander of the 514th AMW, led the squadron which retrieved the wing from France.

The wing section, a propeller blade, photographs, a plaque and other memorabilia constitute a memorial to *Chow-hound* and the nine-man Jack Thompson crew which perished when the plane crashed in 1944. The memorial is mounted in Joint Base MDL departure hall, where, as Col. Duffy explained, it will be one of the last things troops will see in the US before heading overseas for deployment.

The final *Chow-hound* crew included: 1st Lt. Jack R. Thompson, 2nd Lt. David J. Nelson, 2nd Lt. Charles F. Bacigalupa, 2nd Lt. Charles F. Sherrill, T/Sgt. Henry F. Kortebein, T/Sgt. Blake A. Treece, Sgt. Richard R. Collins, Sgt. Gerald F. Gillies, and Sgt. Warren D. Godsey.

Bodies of six members of the crew were recovered in 1944, while three remained with the wreckage and MIA until the crash site was excavated in 2004. The remains of Tech Sgt. Henry Kortebein, 2nd Lt. David J. Nelson, and Tech Sgt. Blake Treece, Jr. were identified, and accorded burial with full honors at Arlington National Cemetery in 2006.

John Collins, nephew of Richard Collins, delivered a touching eulogy. He stated:

"Although I don't know all the stories of Uncle Richard's mates on the *Chow-hound*, they were all young men, in their early 20's with their whole lives in front of them.

"We should thank them each and every day for the liberties that we all enjoy. It was a miracle that these heroes sacrificed their lives at such a young age to protect our liberties."

He quoted from a letter written by his Uncle Richard August 8, 1944, the day *Chow-hound* was lost. No doubt many of the men of the 91st wrote similar letters, and will understand the reassuring note to mother – and the request for goodies from home.



Letter from Richard Collins, Bassingbourn, England.

Dear Mother;

I just received your last letter and also the second package, the one with the shoes. Thanks very much for the shoes—they are very nice...

Well mother, everything is fine over here and if things go like they're going, I'll surely be home for your birthday.

Mother please if you want to send something, make it something to eat since I have enough gum. Anything like cake, crackers, and cheese are all good.

Well Mother I'll close now. Write soon and God bless you.

Your loving son,

Richard

John Collins concluded with remarks from the Eulogy of Father Charles Merand, at a memorial ceremony for the crew at Lonlay Abbey, France, on the 60th anniversary of the crash, August 8, 2004.

"A few days after the liberation, a little girl of Lonlay came to your graves and laid a bouquet of flowers to pay tribute to you. You were acknowledged heroes of liberty without being aware of it..."



Niece and nephews of *Chow-hound* crew member Richard R. Collins. Eulogy presenter John Collins, right.

"Thank you, Henry, Blake, Warren, Richard, Gerald, Jack, Charles, David and Charles. We haven't known you but your courage has liberated us. Your names are engraved on a plaque in the center of our village. They will remain engraved in our hearts and mentioned always in our

prayers. We will ever remember the message of peace and freedom you brought us. AMEN"

Co-hosts Col. John F. Price, Jr., Commander, 305th Air Mobility Wing, and Col. Michael J. Underkofler, Commander, 514th AMW both conveyed a deep reverence for the crew lost so long ago, but never forgotten.

In his remarks, Col. Price quoted the "U.S. Air Force Song" (Formerly Army Air Corps song), by Robert Crawford, focusing on the "bridge" verse, which honors "those who gave their all..."

"Here's a toast to the host

Of those who love the vastness of the sky,

To a friend we send a message of his brother men who fly.

We drink to those who gave their all of old,

Then down we roar to score the rainbow's pot of gold.

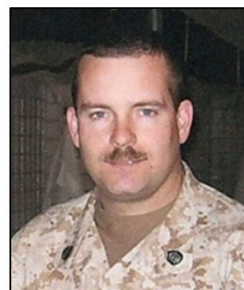
A toast to the host of men we boast, the U.S. Air Force!"



Col. Price (left) and Col. Underkofler stand at attention for the ceremonial flag-folding.

For additional photographs and information, see the website dedicated to the *Chow-hound* story: [www.chow-hound.org](http://www.chow-hound.org).

Interment events for Kortebein, Nelson and Treece were covered in the October 2006 edition of The Ragged Irregular available here: [tinyurl.com/RI2006Oct](http://tinyurl.com/RI2006Oct).



#### Another Gold-Star Family: Heartaches Across the Generations

Marine S/Sgt. Kenneth B. "Blake" Pospisil was an explosives expert who defused the six intact 250-pound bombs at the *Chow-hound* crash site in France in 2004. A Minnesota native, Pospisil died December 14, 2005, aged 35, while attempting to dispose of a bomb near Ramadi, Iraq.



Basil Hackleman piloting *Nine-O-Nine* in 2015. Basil flew the original *Nine-O-Nine* on its first mission and was a Wings of Freedom regular when the tour stopped in the Midwest. He is greatly missed!

*Photo by Ryan Keough.*

## Wings of Freedom Tour

The Collings Foundation is working their way up the west coast and then heading east. For more information on future tour stops, please call 978-562-9182 or visit [www.collingsfoundation.org](http://www.collingsfoundation.org).

April 18 - 20	San Diego, CA
April 20 - 22	Ramona, CA
April 22 - 25	Torrance, CA
April 26 - 28	Murrieta, CA
April 28 - May 1	Carlsbad, CA
May 2 - 4	Riverside, CA
May 4 - 8	Santa Ana, CA
May 9 - 11	Van Nuys, CA
May 11 - 13	Camarillo, CA
May 13 - 15	Santa Barbara, CA
May 16 - 18	Santa Maria, CA
May 18 - 20	Monterey, CA
May 20 - 28	Mountain View, CA
May 29 - 31	Livermore, CA
June 3 - 5	Sacramento, CA
June 8 - 12	Concord, CA
June 16 - 19	Minden, NV
June 24 - 26	Pasco, WA
June 29 - July 1	Walla Walla, WA
July 1 - 4	Seattle, WA
July 8 - 10	Casper, WY
July 15 - 17	Ft. Collins, CO
July 22 - 24	Omaha, NE
July 29 - 31	Chicago, IL
August 5 - 7	Valparaiso, IN
August 8 - 10	Lafayette, IN

## Folded Wings (continued from page 12)

### ✪ Basil F Hackleman 323rd Age 94

February 26, 2016, Springfield, MO

Reported by his son Jerry



Basil enlisted in the Army in December 1940 and then transferred to the Air Corps. He earned the rank of Second Lieutenant while completing flight training. He piloted B-17s on 30 bombing missions and was assigned to train new flight crews when he returned to the states. As the

war ended, Basil transferred to the Air Forces Reserves and returned to civilian life as a TWA pilot flying DC-3 passenger planes. He attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before retiring from service in 1981.

During his military career he earned the awards of Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters; Distinguished Flying Cross; Presidential Unit Citation, Issued to the 91st Bomb Group for the Bombing Raid on Oschersleben, Germany, January 11, 1944.

Basil is survived by a son, Jerry (Phyllis) Hackleman; two granddaughters; and a great-grandson.

### ✪ Raphael "Zep" H Czepkiewicz 322nd Age 92

July 29, 2015, Ontario, CA



Raphael completed 21 missions as a navigator with the 91st Bomb Group. He bailed out of B-17 *My Baby II* on his 22nd mission after a fighter attack left the right wing and radio room ablaze. He was held as a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft III (Sagan) and was part of the forced march to Stalag VIIA (Moosburg).

### ✪ Alvar B Platt 323rd Age 96

February 27, 2016, Indio, CA

Reported by his wife Leona



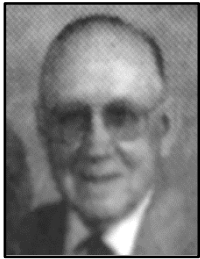
On Alvar's 17th mission, his plane was shot down over the English Channel. He and four other survivors floated in a dingy for 30 hours before being picked up by the Germans. He was hospitalized in Paris for a month, sent to Stalag 7A, and then to Stalag 17B where he remained until liberated two years later.

Alvar is survived by his wife Leona of 23 years; one daughter; two grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.



### ✪ Marion C Hoffman 323rd Age 93

March 25, 2016, Centerville, OH



Reported by his son-in-law Paul Graham Marion was a tail gunner. Flying deputy lead January 6, 1945, he and his crew were shot on their twenty-fifth mission. He became a Prisoner of War and was part of a 345 mile forced march across Germany.

Marion was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Bernita Lucille (Shelton) Hoffman. He is survived by their daughter Sheila Jacqueline Graham (Paul); and two grandsons.

### ✪ John "Jack" L Frencho 324th Age 92

February 25, 2016, Columbus, OH



Reported by his daughter Lorraine Jack was a proud Veteran of WWII U.S. Army Air Corps. He was 2nd Lt. Navigator with the 91st Bomb Group, 324th Squadron, 8th Air Force stationed in Bassingbourn. Jack served as the navigator on a B-17G named *Lady Freda* as a member of William P. Steffens' crew. Jack flew on

16 Missions. His most memorable non-combat missions were the retrieval of American and British Aircrew POWs from Stalag-Luft One at Barth, Germany on two separate flights returning the British to England, then a return trip to pick up the Americans and take them to an airfield near Paris.

Jack is survived by his loving wife of 69 years, Nicki Frencho. Son, John (Candy) Frencho, daughters Lorraine (Bob) Curtin, and Jane (Joe) DeCenzo, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

### ✪ George A Fredrickson Jr 401st Age 93

October 29, 2015, Concordia, KS



Reported by his son Ric George was a First Lieutenant and a bombardier on *Little Patches*. He flew 35 missions with his last mission over Merzhauser Germany on December 24, 1944.

He is survived by his wife Wanda, two sons, Steven and Ric, daughter Debra, step-son Greg, step-daughter Brita, ten grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Arlene.

### ✪ George A Parrish 401st Age 92

February 20, 2016, Burlington, NC



Reported by his son Robert

George arrived at Bassingbourn in October of 1943. He flew half his missions as a waist gunner, and replaced their wounded flight engineer to finish his 32 missions. Upon return to the states, he spent 3 months in a convalescent hospital for a "severe Flak Happy condition, as was common in those days." He later

trained on B-29s.

George is survived by his wife Lovenia Swink Parrish; a daughter, Anita Parrish James (John); a son, Robert Lester Parrish (Barbara); four grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

### ✪ Rudolf "Rudy" B Lehmann 322nd Age 91

February 20, 2016, Buna, TX



Reported by his grandson Jeremy Lehmann Rudy completed 35 missions as a radio operator / gunner on Dudley Mather's crew.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 70-1/2 years, Eva Marie Price Lehmann. He is survived by daughter Patricia Chapman (Dave), son R.B. Lehmann (Elaine), daughter Elaine

Fitz (Michael), son Joe Lehmann (Mimi), eleven grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren.

### ✪ Gerald E Thompson 324th Age 92

March 4, 2016, West Des Moines, IA



Reported by his nephew Rick Tett

Gerald enlisted in the Army Air Forces on his 19th birthday. He became a B-17 pilot, and ultimately attained the rank of First Lieutenant by war's end.

Following his military service, Gerald enrolled at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. In 1947, he appeared on the cover of Life Magazine as a part of

a feature article on returning US veterans studying on college campuses.

Gerald is survived by his wife, Betty; and son David F. Thompson.

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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## Folded Wings:

### ✧ Robert C Heller 401st Age 94

July 1, 2015, West Chester, PA



Bob was a pilot in the Army Air force, 91st Bomb Group, 401st Squadron, flying a B-17 Fortress. His plane was shot down on August 12, 1943 over Germany, and he was taken to Dulag Luft, Frankfort, Stalag Luft III, Sagan, as a POW. In January 1945 he endured a long march to Stalag VII A, Mooseburg, where the POW's were

liberated by General Patton. He left active duty in September 1945 and remained in the Air Force Reserve until 1953. He received a Unit Award, three Air Medals, and a POW medal.

He is survived by his daughter, Patricia A. Heller (David Mowl), two sons, Robert C. Heller and Thomas W. Heller (Carol), and three grandchildren. His wife of 55 years, Ruth R. Heller, passed away in December of 2000.

### ✧ Laverne "Verne" E Woods 324th Age 95

March 12, 2016, Lexington, MA



Reported by Wes Lundsberg

Verne was the co-pilot on Stuart Mendelsohn's crew aboard the *Duke of Paducah*. December 30, 1943, he was flying as pilot on *The Black Swan* with Mendelsohn as co-pilot. After the bomb run, they encountered two German FW-190s. They were hit by several shells and Mendelsohn was killed instantly. Verne continued to fly

for some time, but he signaled for everyone to evacuate. He evaded German troops for over a week, but was eventually captured and spent the remainder of the war as a POW in Stalag Luft I.

Verne was preceded in death by his wife of 72 years, Onie in November of 2014.