

THE RAGGED IRREGULAR



322nd BS



323rd BS



Supporting Units



324th BS



401st BS

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91st Bombardment Group (H)

July 2017

REMEMBERING

By George Kesselring

Reprinted from the July 1995 *Ragged Irregular*

Recently two WWII Bombers came to Fort Smith to be viewed by the public. One of those planes was a replica of a plane called *Nine-O-Nine*. Having flown *Nine-O-Nine* one time, while my B17 was in maintenance for repairs, the showing caught my interest. My wife had never seen or been inside a B17 Bomber. I felt that she should be interested, so we went to see these relics of the past.

The exterior of the plane was as I remembered, and I realized that it was a long way from Basingbourn, England, and a long time between then and now. This twenty year old Iowa farm boy matured very rapidly as a pilot of such Flying Fortresses while making thirty-five missions over Germany with the 91st Bomb Group.

As I went through this B17 I could see my crewmen, each one at his combat station. The inside of the aircraft was smaller than I remembered, or maybe fifty years had made me larger, but there was room in my mind for memories.



[back row] Harley A. Russell, Engineer; Eugene L. Cruse, Waist Gunner; Robert W. Langston, Radio Operator; Donald W. Pubentz, Ball Turret Gunner; Earl R. Roach, Waist Gunner; Richard O. Pridemore, Tail Gunner. [front row] John J. Flynn III, Pilot; George M. Kesselring, Co-Pilot; Sheldon J. Sternberg, Navigator; Joseph M. McPhie, Bombardier (replaced by Russel C. Curtis – not pictured).

Lt John Flynn and I were the pilots. We flew for fifteen minutes each so that we would not become "fixated" and not able to hold our distance from the other planes in our tight formations. Those formations were our protection against the German fighter planes. There was a lot of contrast between the personalities of the kid from Boston and a Midwestern farm boy, but we were a fine flying team.

The faces of Lt McPhie and Lt Curtis, the bombardier and navigator, were seen in the nose section, taking care of the business at hand. Sgt Harley Russel, the Arkansasan and flight engineer stood behind the pilots making sure the aircraft was operating properly. That is, when he wasn't in the upper turret firing his two fifty caliber machine guns at German fighters.

Sgt Robert Langston, from Kentucky, sat at his little desk in front of the radio; and the two waist gunners, Earl Roach, from Texas, and Eugene Cruise, from Michigan, were doing their thing. I couldn't get back to the tail gunner's position as this crew has stowed gear in the passage way, but I know our Texan, Richard Pridemore, was there protecting us from a rear attack.

Our ball turret gunner, Sgt Donald Pubentz from Chicago, was remembered. I can still see his face and I remember he was flying his thirty-third mission when a 20mm shell exploded inside his turret. He only had two more missions to fly before going home. Sgt Roach, one of our waist gunners, named his son "Donald" in Pubentz's memory.

In my mind there are thirty-five chapters of a book; one for each of our thirty-five missions. Of course, there is a prologue and an epilogue to tell of the preparation and the consequences of everything that took place, but on this day I think only of those young warriors.

Yes, I saw all their faces, as they were then; young men in their teens and early twenties. I wouldn't know them now, they are old men - like me. However, as I grow older they will remain forever young, forever brave and forever in my memory.

April 2017 Ragged Irregular Correction - George Kesselring passed away February 23, 2017 at age 93 and not age 91 as previously reported.

President's Corner

Mick Hanou



The *Memphis Belle* on her way back to the United States June 9, 1943.

Reunion 2018 May 16 - 19, Dayton, OH - REMINDER – please book your hotel room as soon as possible. You can use link: tinyurl.com/91HotelOH to book online or call the hotel at (800)228-9290. Be sure to mention the 91st Bomb Group to get our rate. You can cancel up to two weeks beforehand. It really helps me plan the reunion if I know what attendance we expect to have. The itinerary will be in the October RI, but plan on a day at the museum for the rollout of the *Memphis Belle* on the 17th and the banquet on the evening of the 19th. I will be arriving May 15th and we may have some informal activities on the 16th or 20th for those who wish to come earlier or stay longer. Important – the Board has agreed to fund hotel costs for our WWII veterans and hope to see you at this most important reunion.

It seems a good time to summarize some Board meeting notes and let you know what activities we are currently involved in. Our Treasurer report indicates we are still okay, due mainly to donations, but not where we were before the last reunion. Printing costs for the RI are getting to the point we will need to charge supplemental dues if you wish to receive a printed copy. Reunion 2018 is a main activity and we have secured the hotel and are working on the itinerary. The Tower Restoration is another important effort being coordinated by Gary and Tom with Chris and Amy Murphy. The rollout of the crowdfunding site is waiting on checking some details across the pond with regards to the Ministry of Defense, which owns the site.

We are trying to secure parts of B-17 *Chowhound* from McGuire AFB, for display at Chino. The Chino display isn't advancing very well. I was at Chino in May to ask about progress. They have the Mack and LaBlottier artifacts for the cases and a bunch of photographs which Jim used to show at the reunions, but no other memorabilia than that. We are also planning to display a full wall map of Europe, courtesy of donations from the Bartush and Mack families. If you do have anything for the cases, please send it to me and I will log it into our inventory of what the 91st Bomb Group has there and see they get it.

I'll be in England when you get this, visiting Bassingbourn and attending the annual air show at Duxford, and giving our 91st Group thanks to Chris and Amy for maintaining the Tower and working towards its restoration. We will report more on the Tower effort in the October issue.

My dad, Bert Hanou, passed away very suddenly of pneumonia June 17, 2017, at age 94. On Memorial Day, he visited the Collings Foundation stop, our 25th anniversary hosting them, and looked in the B-17 *Nine-O-Nine* and began reminiscing. He spoke to the crowd about his time in WWII when he was taken by the Germans in 1943 and forced to work in a factory. He recalled seeing 1,080 bombers flying overhead (always good at math, that's 10 wings with 3 groups of 36 bombers each) and it gave him hope to be liberated someday. He then thanked the WWII American flyers for giving him that hope and his freedom. The crowd applauded, he had a great smile on his face, and that is the face I'll remember. Thank you.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Re: April 2017 issue:

I so enjoyed Lester Rentmeester's story, "Time Stood Still: A B-17 Pilot's Story." It was beautifully written and very informative. Thank you, Mr. Rentmeester, for your service and for sharing your experiences with us!

Thanks also to Marilyn Rustand Lieurance for keeping us informed about the ongoing efforts of the DPAA in their search for information about our POW / MIAs and to Jody Kelly for her wealth of information about their service.

Thank you, Mick Hanou, for all of your work with the reunions.

Lastly, thank you, Gary Hall, for all your work in keeping The Ragged Irregular alive!

Rebecca Vaughn
Daughter of Rufus Youngblood, 324th

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Please send Folded Wings information to Jody Kelly.

October Ragged Irregular submissions must be received by **September 15th**.

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91st on the Web

www.91stbombgroup.com
www.facebook.com/groups/91stBGMA

Collings Foundation Wings of Freedom

B-17 *Nine-O-Nine*, B-24 *Witchcraft*, B-25 *Tondelayo*, and TF-51 *Toulouse Nuts* continue their tour across the United States. Currently scheduled stops are listed below, but visit www.collingsfoundation.org/events/ or call (800)568-8924 for the most up to date schedule of events. Aircraft walk through tours and flights are available at each stop.

7/21 – 7/23	Omaha, NE
7/26 – 7/30	Chicago, IL (Chicago Executive)
8/2 – 8/4	Kankakee, IL
8/4 – 8/6	Valparaiso, IN
8/7 – 8/9	Lafayette, IN
8/11 – 8/13	Akron-Canton, OH
8/14 – 8/16	Jamestown, NY
8/16 – 8/18	Butler, PA
8/18 – 8/20	Altoona, PA
8/21 – 8/23	Hazleton, PA
8/23 – 8/27	Wall Township, NJ
8/30 – 9/1	Millville, NJ
9/1 – 9/4	Cape May, NJ
9/13 – 9/15	New Bedford, MA
9/15 – 9/17	Hyannis, MA
9/18 – 9/20	Plymouth, MA
9/22 – 9/24	Worcester, MA
9/25 – 9/27	Keene, NH
9/27 – 9/29	Auburn / Lewiston, ME
9/29 – 10/1	Beverly, MA
10/13 – 10/15	Westminster, MD
10/27 – 10/29	Greenville, SC

91st Bomb Group Memorial Association donations reach \$7,540 in first half of 2017

Joseph Bessolo

Mrs. Betty Bogert

Donna Bogusz

Kay Duzynski

Charles Egender

James Fullerton

Richard Hamilton

James Hoffman

Robert Kelley

Peggie Kerr

Martha Kinsley

David Mattie

Mark McCabe

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Susan McDonald

Martin McElroy

Kevin McGee

Richard Pridemore

Kathy Rinke

Deborah Rodewald-Charles

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In Memory of

Arthur Burns, Tailgunner on "Hitlers Gremlin" (401st)

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Danny Linn

Fewer E McGee, Pilot "The Wolf" 42-39803 (324th)

Edmund McGee

Herbert Saska (323rd)

Phil Saska

Jack Stafford, Waist Gunner Lt Holmes Crew (401st)

Kent Stafford

Operation Restoration

Gary Hall

US Bank (match to Gary Hall's donation)

Long-Awaited Display of Restored *Memphis Belle* Set For 2018

By MITCH STACY. Copyrighted 2017. Associated Press. 130228:0717PF

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — The fabled World War II bomber *Memphis Belle* will finally go on public display next spring at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force alongside John F. Kennedy's presidential plane, an early Wright Brothers flyer and other national treasures.

The journey from the flak-ridden skies over occupied France and Germany to restoration and display in the Ohio museum has been long for one of the most celebrated American planes to survive the war.

The B-17F "Flying Fortress," feted as one of the first to make it through the required 25 bombing missions, arrived at the museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in pieces a dozen years ago. It was in rough shape, having been on display outside for decades in its namesake city where it deteriorated from weather and vandalism.

Restoration work by an army of volunteers has continued for years, delayed by a major expansion at the sprawling museum near Dayton and other restoration projects vying for attention. An unveiling of the restored warbird now is scheduled for May 17, 2018 — the 75th anniversary of the crew's 25th and final mission. The *Memphis Belle* will be displayed as the centerpiece of an exhibit on the strategic bombing campaign that broke the back of Germany's wartime production.

"This is an American icon," said Jeff Duford, curator of the *Memphis Belle* exhibit. "It's like the flag that flew at Iwo Jima or the USS Arizona. This is one of those things that's truly legendary and represents America and our spirit."



New propellers wait to be installed as part of the restoration of the World War II B-17 bomber known as the *Memphis Belle* near Dayton, Ohio. (AP Photo/Mitch Stacy)

Since B-17 parts are no longer manufactured, volunteers have worked long, painstaking hours fabricating them

from scratch and reassembling the plane inside a cavernous restoration hangar at the museum. The wing tips just went on, but the fuselage skin is still being riveted on. And it's still missing the plastic nose cone, tail section and an authentic paint job.

Greg Hassler, who is supervising the restoration, knows the clock is now ticking.

"We will have it done," Hassler vowed. "The airplane will look like it did on its 25th mission on 17 May of next year."



A new propeller waits to be installed on the restored World War II B-17 bomber known as the *Memphis Belle* near Dayton, Ohio. (AP Photo/Mitch Stacy)

The four-engine bomber bristling with .50-caliber machine guns was piloted by then-Lt. Robert Morgan and had its famous name before it left the U.S. mainland. Morgan, who died in 2004, said it was inspired by his sweetheart, 19-year-old Memphis resident Margaret Polk. The actual moniker came from a riverboat in a John Wayne movie called "Lady for a Night" that Morgan and his co-pilot saw the night before the crew voted on a name.

Before heading for Europe, Morgan flew the bomber to Memphis, where Polk christened it with a bottle of champagne amid much fanfare.

The *Memphis Belle*, with the leggy Esquire magazine pinup girl painted on the nose, survived six months of punishing air combat in 1942-43 during missions to bomb factories and submarine pens. In doing so, the airplane and its crew beat the odds in a big way. Two out of three young men — their average age was 20 — who flew on those B-17 missions from airfields in England did not survive the war. One out of every 18 planes was lost to combat.



The B-17 bomber known as the *Memphis Belle* in the restoration hangar at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force near Dayton, Ohio. The restored plane will go on public display at the museum spring 2018. (AP Photo/Mitch Stacy)

Because the plane's crew members sometimes flew in other planes, they actually completed their requisite 25th mission two days before the *Belle*, which flew its 25th on May 19, 1943, making it one of the first B-17s to do so.

After being honored by the Army brass and the king and queen of England, most of the original crew and plane were reunited for a highly publicized tour of the U.S. to help sell war bonds in the summer of 1943, including a stop at the same Ohio Air Force base where it will now reside permanently.

A 1944 William Wyler documentary added to the lore of the *Belle*, while younger generations were introduced to it in a 1990 hit movie that was a fictionalized account of the final mission.

Despite the *Memphis Belle's* installation at the Air Force museum, the legislature in Tennessee earlier this year designated it as that state's official airplane.

The Story Behind The Name

By Graham Simons

Memphis Belle Memorial Association Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/B17MemphisBelle/

There has been much garbage written about the naming of 41-24485, more so in recent times with the forthcoming roll-out. This is the current state of knowledge on the matter.

Sometime during the time at Bangor 41-24485 gained a name and a painting on either side of its nose of a girl in a swimsuit. But how had the name and artwork come about?

In the days before television, the public got their news from newspapers, and contemporary newspapers of the day reported simply that the pilot had named his aircraft in honour of his fiancée Margaret Polk, his Memphis sweetheart and left it at that. Bob Morgan:

"...I liked Southern belles, and Margaret was a southern belle, so I just called it the *Memphis Belle*".

James Verinis, the *Belle's* co-pilot and Bob Morgan's buddy, remembered it slightly differently:

"...It was in Bangor, Maine, in September 1942, just before we flew overseas. Bob and I went to see a movie. I don't remember its title. I only remember Joan Blondell starred in it. In the movie there was also a Mississippi River gambling boat and I remember that either Miss Blondell or the boat was called the *Memphis Belle*.

We were walking back to our quarters after the show and Bob suddenly said 'Gee, that would be a good name for our plane, the *Memphis Belle*'.

After much research by the *Memphis Belle* Memorial Association it was discovered that the movie was a Republic picture called 'Lady for a Night' and did indeed star Jean Blondell - with a male lead played by none other than John Wayne. Here is a remarkable coincidence - the name of John Wayne's character? ... Jack Morgan, no wonder Bob Morgan paid attention to the movie!

According to everyone's memories, Bob Morgan originally wanted to call the aircraft 'Little One' his pet-name for Margaret Polk, but after seeing the movie, decided that *Memphis Belle* would be better.

Morgan reports the story slightly differently in the 2002 Robert K Morgan / Ron Powers book. It seems that when he told the crew what he was going to call the aircraft *Memphis Belle*, no one liked it, so Morgan decided to convince each crew member one at a time - through the application of liberal quantities of 'liquid refreshment'.

As to where the artwork came from, Bob Morgan remembered it well, as he told Memphis newspaperman Menno Deurksen in 1987: "...I was a reader of Esquire magazine. I always admired those Petty Girl paintings they ran every month. I wrote to the magazine and told them what I wanted. They sent me a picture and we painted it on the plane"

The events were again described differently in the Morgan / Powers book. On page 99 Morgan says that he called Esquire, got Petty's phone number and called the artist direct, telling him that he (Morgan) would like Petty to draw one of his girls to go on the aircraft. According to Morgan, Petty was gracious about it and was thrilled to be a part of things.

So, was this particular item of artwork specifically and carefully selected as is often claimed, or was it just a random, accidental selection brought about by a member of staff at Esquire picking up a back issue and

mailing it to 2nd Lt Morgan in response to his request? Or was the artwork created at Morgan's request as Morgan and Powers suggest in their book?

Unfortunately no-one remembers when and who originally painted it onto the aircraft, but a consensus of opinion among the other crewmembers seems to suggest that it was originally painted on to the aircraft by a civilian worker at Dow Field, Maine before they left the USA. It was some time after they arrived in England that Corporal Anthony 'Tony' Starcer of the 441st Sub Depot and Bassingbourn's resident nose-art specialist touched up and eventually repainted it and it is this design that is on the aircraft today.

Again, on page 99 of his 2002 book, Morgan claims differently, saying that he ordered Tony Starcer to paint one girl in a red swimsuit on one side of the nose and one in a blue suit on the other.

It is often been said by many who have visited the aircraft on display that this particular George Petty artwork is called 'the *Memphis Belle*'. It has also been said that the painting is a representation of Margaret Polk. Neither of those statements contain a single shred of truth.

The story of the artwork and the background to how it eventually appears on the aircraft is as follows. This particular 'Petty Girl' appeared as a foldout in the April 1941 issue of Esquire magazine between pages 36 and 41, and is thought to have been modelled by either Petty's wife or, more likely, his twenty-two year-old daughter Marjorie. The caption that appears on the piece in Esquire itself is somewhat enigmatic. It says "I'm the one with the part in the back". In the table of contents, the caption is abbreviated to "... the one with the part in the back". The quotes forming part of the caption. So, is this the title of the artwork? A caption is something very different to the 'name' of a painting. Much of Petty's work is known to be untitled and it is likely that this one is also. Even the staff of the Art & Architecture Library, University of Kansas, where the original artwork resides, will only say it is 'captioned' as "I'm the one with the part in the back." As to what the caption actually means - we have no idea!

As for the girl being Margaret Polk, clearly the Petty Girl was nearly sixteen months old when she first appeared in different coloured swimsuits on either side of the nose of a certain B-17 - so at very best the painting can only be said to 'represent' Miss Margaret! The April 1941 date also clearly repudiates the Morgan / Powers 'suggestion' that the creation of the artwork was at Morgan's request. That edition of Esquire appeared nearly sixteen months before Morgan got his hands on the aircraft that was to become the *Memphis Belle*!

Folded Wings (continued from page 8)✪ **Willis W “Mac” McQuain 322nd Age 93**

February 1, 2015, San Antonio, TX



Mac proudly served the Army Air Corps as the crew chief of *Queenie* and *Sweet Dish*.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Doris M. McQuain; and daughter, Donna M. McQuain. He is survived by sons, Terry (Chris), Danny (Kathleen), and Larry (Andrea); his loving grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

✪ **John “Jack” O Renskers HQ Age 94**

December 12, 2015, Crystal Lake, IL

Jack served with the Royal Air Force and later with the 91st Bomb Group as a Radar Maintenance Officer in WWII, and the Signal Corps Supply Agency in Korea. He achieved the rank of Captain and earned 6 bronze stars.

Jack married Violet Collins in Cambridge, England in 1945, and they had a wonderful 64-year marriage until her passing in 2009. He is survived by sons Robert (Mary Lou) and Kevin (Sharon); and four grandchildren.

✪ **Edward J Fitzpatrick 322nd Age 95**

March 19, 2016, Columbia, PA



Ed was the Ball Turret gunner on William Snipes' crew.

He was predeceased by his loving wife of 66 years, Catherine Siena Hess Fitzpatrick. He is survived by his sons: Edward Jr. (Kathleen); Mark (Barbara); and Kevin. His daughters: Geraldine (Harry) Simpson; Donna (Donald) Anderson; and Karen Becker. 11 grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, eight step-great-grandchildren and six great-great-grandchildren.

✪ **Harold S Kline 322nd Age 97**

August 29, 2016, Boyertown, PA

Harold served as a Ball Turret Gunner on Paul Kahl's crew. He was wounded June 22, 1943 when their plane *Night Shade* was shot down over Germany. He was a POW for two years, and a Purple Heart recipient.

Harold was predeceased by his wife, Eleonore. Surviving are two daughters, Cynthia Akers, and Patricia (Richard) Capaldo; two grandsons; and two great-grandsons.

✪ **Roy E Loyless 401st Age 91**

April 17, 2017, Kerrville, TX



Reported by his daughter Renee

Roy joined the Army Air Corps when he turned 18. He received his wings at Kingman, AZ, completed final training in Sioux City, IA. He was subsequently sent to England without a furlough because of the need for bomber crews after D-Day. On his 15th mission, November 2nd, 1944 his crew was sent to Merseburg. On that mission, his B-17 was hit by flak and caught fire. He bailed out into sub-freezing weather only to begin a seven month ordeal as a prisoner of war. Thirteen bombers were lost that day, the highest loss of the war for the 91st; 49 KIA and 68 became POW.

He was awarded the Purple Heart, two air medals, the Prisoner of War medal, Europe, Africa and Middle East medals, Northern France medal with 3 battle stars and the air combat medal. The French government awarded Roy the Legion of Honor, their highest award given to citizens, equivalent to the U.S. Medal of Honor, for his decisive role in the liberation of France.

Roy was married to his wife Joyce, for 71 years and was blessed with two daughters and two grandsons.

✪ **Myron “Mike” Cohen 324th Age 91**

October 7, 2016, Boynton Beach, FL

Reported by his son Mark

Myron, whose friends called him Mike, was enrolled in MIT, but chose to enlist in the Army Air Corps. He served as a Radio Operator / Gunner and attained the rank of Staff Sergeant. After his plane was shot down over Germany, he escaped through France, and returned to fly more missions. In 2012, he was awarded the French Legion of Honor for action over Central Europe.

Predeceased by his beloved wife, Bobbie; and daughter Beth Hoover. He is survived by sons Mark, and David; three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

✪ **Bertel E Larson 324th Age 91**

November 13, 2016, Tacoma, WA

Reported by his daughter Nancy



Bert was drafted into the US Army upon his graduation from high school. He completed 35 missions as a ball turret gunner of Crew #4129 on the B-17 *Shirley Jean*.

Bert is survived by his wife of 70 years, Betty; three children, Linda Marshall, Nancy (Jerry) Johnson, and Brad (Maureen) Larson; seven grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

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:

✪ David L Hanst 322nd Age 98

June 20, 2017, Huntington Beach, CA



Reported by his son David David joined the 91st Bomb Group in May 1944. He piloted *Hikin' for Home* which he and his crew named as that is what they looked forward to after each target – hiking for home. After completing 35 missions, he returned to the United States where he flew for the Air Transport Command.

✪ Wayne F Lutz 324th Age 84

March 15, 2001, Kimberton, PA



Reported by his son Tom Wayne served as a Navigator on DF-Q *Sure Shot*. He flew 22 missions, mostly over Germany.

Wayne was predeceased by his wife, Jane. He is survived by a daughter Kathleen Wagner; and sons Thomas, and John.

✪ Merle L Choffel 401st Age 92

May 20, 2017, San Antonio, TX



Reported by his son Rick Merle entered the Army Air Force at the age of 19. He proudly served three years including time as a bombardier with the 91st.

Merle was preceded in death by his wife Betty Jane, and son James. Survivors include sons Rick (Erika), Ken (Harriett), and John; daughters Barbara Thurman, and Susan Feeney; 17 grandchildren; and 24 great-grandchildren.

✪ Joseph P Franke 323rd Age 94

July 8, 2016, Columbia, MO

Joe was a member of the 323rd Squadron's sheet metal crew. He is survived by his wife of 73 years, Alberta "Bert" Franke.