



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 4 No. 3

April, 1971

Western States Rally Round Smash Hit

Racking up another outstanding mission for the Western Division, 83 ex-91st-ers and guests held a mammoth Far Western Rally Round at Anaheim, Calif., Saturday, Feb. 6. Southern California Flight Leader Doug Gibson (401st sqdn.) ramrodded the affair at the Jolly Roger Inn.

While originally planned as a one-day event, a number of members reported in early and activities got under way Friday with an informal refueling get-together in Group Headquarters at the Jolly Roger that continued until the early hours of Saturday. Some of the early arrivals made a tour of Disneyland before scheduled activities started Saturday afternoon.

Taking the "mug" for having travelled the greatest distance to attend were Mr. and Mrs. William Thissell of Charleston, Ill. Other out-of staters attending included Mr. and Mrs. Al Myers of Olympia, Wash., and Mr. and Mrs. Vern Clabaugh of Kearney, Neb.

The Association president, Maj. Gen. S.T. Wray, flew out from Alexandria, Va. to preside over the meeting.

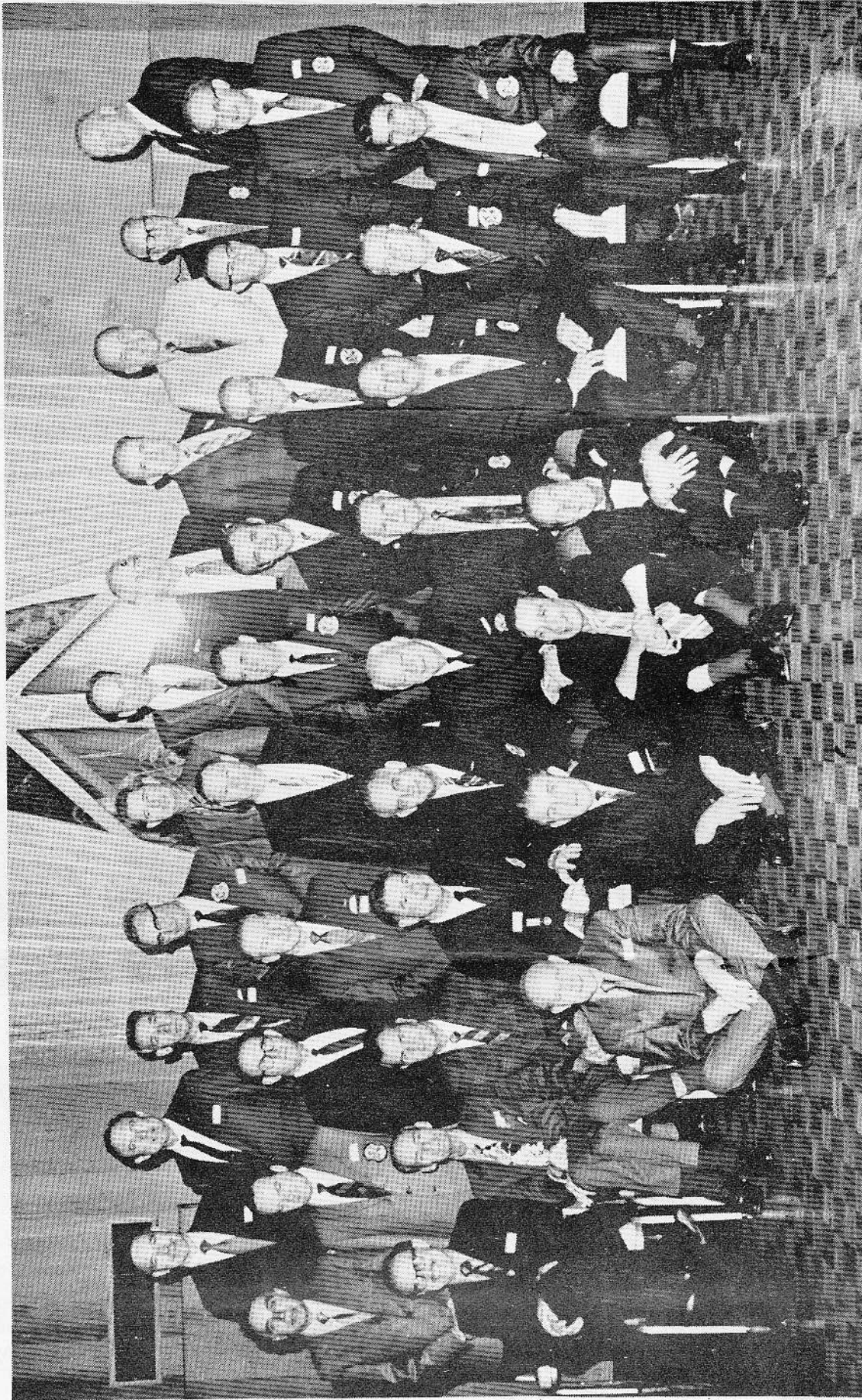
In recognition of his tireless work as flight leader for the Southern California area and organizer of many outstanding Rally Rounds, Doug Gibson was presented an engraved mug and a miniature carved "Rigid Digit"

(continued on page 6)



Receiving the traditional "Mug" for the members travelling the greatest distance to take part in a Western Division Rally Round are Mr. and Mrs. Bill Thissell,

from Charleston, Ill. Association president Gen. Wray is "doing the honors."



Members attending the Far Western Rally Round included: Front row, on floor, Robert Paulson, M/Sgt. Eugene Letalieu (Ret.), Lt. Harry House (Ret.), "Hap" Packard.
 Second row: Tony Starcer, Ken Cochran, Al Finnesey, Col. George P. Birdsong (Ret.), Phillip Taylor, M/Gen. S. T. Wray (Ret.), M/Sgt. George W. Parks (Ret.), Maj. Maury J. Herman (Ret.), Doug Gibson, William Thissell.
 Third row: Robert Ortega, Maj. Edward "Ted" Winslow (Ret.), T/Sgt. Henry Hall (Ret.), Raymond Ridings, Robert Bouvia, Robert Wright, Franz Kaufman, Chris Christensen, Vem Clabaugh, Frank Kenely.
 Back row: Maj. John Ryan (Ret.), William Guldner, Aubin Pene, Faber Cripps, Walt Ward, Arthur Thomsen, Charles Newlin, Al Myers, Jack Gaffney, Clive Woodbury, Earl Riley.



Doug Gibson, Southern California area flight leader, is presented with two mementoes in recognition of his outstanding leadership—an engraved mug and a carved wooden replica of the famed "Rigid Digit."



Talking over old times and reviewing pictures of Bassingbourn days are, l. to r., Clive Woodbury, Betty Herman, Mrs. Woodbury, Maury Herman, Ted Winslow, and Malvina Handley.

Hitting The Silk Over Ludwigshafen, or...

Seven Days Afoot In Nazi Germany

By Frank S. Bolen (322nd Sqdn.)

Editor's Note: Frank S. Bolen was a bombardier with the 322nd squadron in 1944. He flew in "Chow Hound" and "The New Roxy." He had made 15 missions when he was shot down while bombing the I.G. Farben Chemical Plant at Ludwigshafen, Germany, on Sept. 9, 1944. Bolen was captured on Sept. 14 and held in Stalag Luft I, Barth, Germany, North Compound II. He was released May 15, 1945.

The account was written just after the war when he was a student at Auburn University. Of particular interest is the fact that he wandered about Germany for almost a week before being picked up by the Nazis.

The sky was yet dark, the time was 6 a.m. on the morning of Sept. 9, 1944, and the place was Bassingbourn, England. Our target for the day was the I. G. Farben chemical plant at Ludwigshafen, Germany. Our unit, the 91st Bomb Group of the 8th Air Force, 322nd Bomb Squadron, had been briefed to fly the right box in the bombing formation, that is, on the right of the lead squadron.

I had been checked out as deputy bombardier for the squadron and was to fly that position on this mission. We arrived at our ship and everything checked out o.k. With twelve 500-pound demolition bombs tucked away neatly in the belly of the ship we left the runway just as the sun peeped over the hills and climbed to rendezvous with our formation and proceed across the English Channel.

All went smoothly and we felt this raid would be an easy one. The altitude we held was 9,000 feet until Paris came into view, at which time we climbed to 25,000 feet as we passed over the front line now about the vicinity of Metz, France.

Our estimated time at target was 11:48 and we turned on the I.P. at 11:35 as I leaned forward and began to set my Norden bombsight in operation. I felt more relaxed so far on this mission than on any of the previous 15 I had flown. Little did I realize what lay in store for us.

We were getting close to the target, for as I looked ahead the sky was made dark by flak bursting at the exact altitude we were flying, right in our path and directly over the target. Again I bent over the bombsight, expecting any time to see the chemical plant come into view. Just as I lifted my head to check the lead plane, since I would take over if anything happened to the lead bombardier, there was a terrific jolt as though we had hit a large air pocket. As I learned later it was a 90 mm German anti-aircraft shell hitting our number three engine.

The next instant I was flung to the floor of the ship and could not move due to the intensity of the centrifugal force. Don Bragones, the navigator, was behind me but I couldn't look around to see how he was. Before I could think further everything went blank and I found myself out in the air, somewhat stunned.

Gathering my wits, I looked under me, as I was on my back, and saw the ground far below. First, I had to get rid of my flak suit. I pulled the red cord and it fell away. I decided to pull the rip-cord of the parachute right away



in case it might have been damaged. To my delight, however, it opened with no difficulty. I looked toward the earth again and saw another chute open below. I felt almost certain this was Don and later found out that it was.

My next concern was ground fire, and I saw that I was floating down directly toward the burning plant we had been bombing! Just then we entered smoke clouds from the target and could see nothing for about 30 seconds. As I emerged from the smoke, the burning plant was behind me and I saw that my landing place was to be a small island in the midst of the Rhine river separating the twin cities of Ludwigshafen-Mannheim.

Floating backwards I barely missed a large tree and struck the ground at the end of a plowed field on a slight embankment. As a strong wind was pushing me I hit pretty hard and was again momentarily stunned.

From a dazed condition, I rapidly returned to consciousness. Immediately the realization came to me, like a booming crash of thunder, that I was in the enemy territory—alone! I gathered my frayed wits and hurriedly took stock of this situation that had been so violently thrust into my frightened hands.

Bombs from succeeding waves of airplanes were still falling onto the chemical plant about one-fourth mile to the west, and the ground under me trembled and shook as though it were in the throes of a violent earthquake. I surveyed my island quickly! Spotting a heavy growth of bullrushes down by the water's edge, I picked up my parachute and stumbled off toward them. The impact of striking the ground had sprained my right ankle severely and I was having difficulty walking.

Once inside this dense foliage, I began to lay definite plans. The hands of my wrist watch showed twenty minutes past noon. This meant I must remain hidden until darkness fell. Because I had landed so near the target no one had witnessed my landing, and I knew I was safe for the present.

The escape kit that had been issued before take-off that morning was intact in my flying suit knee pocket, and a similar one I had assembled myself was safe in the back pocket. Examining these I had the following items: A map of Germany and France printed on rice paper, a compass, several fish hooks, a razor and three blades, toothbrush, one pack of cigarettes, six pieces of hard candy, halazone tablets, pocket knife and a cellophane water bag. Each item had been designed to aid the downed airman and already I began to use them.

The nearest Allied forces were 150 miles to the west and the border between France and Germany was 75 miles to the southwest. My course of action was clear; I would start travelling southward, cross the line into France and seek help from the Free French.

About five-hundred yards from my position and on the rivers edge was a small ferry that resumed operations an hour after the bombing. I noticed several rowboats tied to the ferry landing and chose one of these as my only chance of escape from the island. It began to rain by mid-afternoon and the hours dragged by painfully slow until at last the black shield of night settled over me. Two hours passed and slowly I stepped from the bull-rushes, moving toward the landing pier. Reaching a rowboat cold sweat broke out on me when I discovered it was chained and locked! Fortunately, the next one was only tied to a post, and so, easing the chain loose from the skiff, I gently pushed the craft away from the starting

point and presently the wooden bottom touched shore. I had been very careful to note that this section of the river was uninhabited so there I hid the rowboat. Keeping close to the Rhine I found the going rough and after three hours of walking found a fairly comfortable, grassy spot and fell into an exhausted sleep.

The next morning I found that I was on the east side of the river and must get across before continuing southward. Ten miles to the north was the city of Worms, Germany, and by late the next afternoon I arrived there. Concealed in a clump of trees, in sight of the only bridge that led to the opposite bank, I saw, to my good fortune, that the span was loosely guarded. At approximately eleven o'clock that night, acting as nonchalantly as my quaking heart would allow, I started across toward Worms. Half way over I met a German guard patrolling his post who stopped and looked straight into my face. I prayed fervently with the blood pounding, pounding through my veins, I continued on without flinching. Apparently satisfied, and to my great relief, the guard clomped off in the other direction. The streets were empty and sinister as I hurriedly made my way into the enveloping protection of the country. A very warm and comfortable haystack provided me lodging for that night and through the next day.

Having had only a small ration of my chocolate bar each day and what food I could find growing in the fields, I was getting weaker. By this time, too, my right ankle had swollen to twice it's original size and was very painful. In spite of this however, I was more determined than ever. Again after darkness had fallen I set out, still on a course I hoped would lead to friendly hands.

The fourth and fifth days passed uneventfully and the
(continued on page 6)



Here is Bolen's original crew, standing before their plane "My Baby." He was flying with another crew on the raid to Ludwigshafen. Standing, l. to r. are David McCarty, pilot; James McElroy, co-pilot; Earnest I. Austin,

navigator; F. S. Bolen, bombardier; David Woolnitz, radio operator. Kneeling are: (unidentified), ball turret; Cecil Seekings, engineer; Floyd Dillion, tail gunner; (unidentified), waist gunner.

Seven Days Afoot...

morning of the sixth found me at the outskirts of a small German village, named Lambsheim. I had been without water for three days, and decided that, even at the expense of probable capture, I would enter this town and quench my thirst. I could go no farther without doing just so. Summoning all the courage I could muster, I walked down the street toward the railroad station. Passing a group of older men, I nodded to them and was not too surprised when they acknowledged. I had gone about five city blocks before finding a water hydrant where I drank all I wanted, then filled my cellophane bottle. Lighting a cigarette I headed toward the highway leading out of town.

At this point it should not be difficult for the reader to imagine my utter bewilderment that this bold venture had been a success. I would not believe such an action could take place—but it had!

Greatly strengthened by this experience, I began hiking in daylight. This proved my undoing. By afternoon of my seventh day in Germany, I calculated that my course had covered approximately thirty miles. Speyerdorf, Germany, was just ahead and it looked too well populated. People hurried about and there was a busy air among them. At that very moment, two German soldiers with their girl companion approached me on bicycles. Assuming my nonchalant air, I tried not to notice them, but out of the corner of my eye I saw that they had spotted me. In the same instant, the rider nearest me yelled "Halt" in French, and stopped his bicycle. As the soldier walked to where I was standing, he pulled his long-nosed Luger from its holster and pointed it in my direction. With the sweat in great beads on my forehead, I stood stock-still and waited.

This was the moment I had lived in fear and dread of, but my prayers were answered. The two soldiers were of the German Luftwaffe and when they satisfied themselves as to my identity, treated me in a fairly respectable manner. Nearby was an anti-aircraft installation and it was there that I officially became a prisoner of war. After undergoing an hour of interrogation and being searched, the officer in charge decided to send me to an airbase approximately ten miles distant. And so— with a guard, riding a bicycle, I was escorted there and placed under arrest.

Subsequent transfers took me through Frankfurt, Wetzlar, and finally to Barth, Germany where I was permanently stationed in "Stalag Luft I"— A prisoner-of-war camp for American and British airmen.



Stalag Luft 1 Barth, Germany

In the July issue of *The Ragged Irregular* we will include details of Bolen's life at Stalag Luft 1 and many more pictures of the prison camp. We even have a great chocolate pie recipe using prunes and crackers and Kregie bread.



Another view of the POW camp

Western States Rally Round...

award by Gen Wray at the Saturday night banquet.

Several members met again for the first time since Basingbourn days, making the affair particularly memorable for them. Western Division co-chairman Maury Herman and Clive Woodbury, both members of the 401st in 1943, got together for the first time in 28 years. Recently retired Col. George "Tweet Tweet" Birdsong and Earl "Una Pelota" Riley, both original members of "Wray's Ragged Irregulars" at Basingbourn and both holders of the "Royal Order of the Rigid Digit," also met for the first time since those days.

Attending the Rally Round were: Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, Maj. (Ret.) and Mrs. Maurice J. Herman and sons David and Steven; M/Sgt. (Ret.) and Mrs. George W. Parks; Phillip R. Taylor and Judy Farina; Mr. and Mrs. Doug Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Al Myers, Col. (Ret.) and Mrs. Paul Fishburne, Maj. (Ret.) Edward Winslow and Malvina Handley, Mr. and Mrs. William Thissell.

M/Sgt. (Ret.) Eugene J. Letalien, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Cochran, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gaffney, Reino Latva, Lt. Ret. and Mrs. Harry S. House, Mrs. Goldie Cahill, Col. George P. Birdsong (Ret.), Mr. and Mrs. Frank T. Kenely, Mr. and Mrs. A. Finnesey, Mr. and Mrs. Faber H. Cripps, Maj. (Ret.) and Mrs. John W. Ryan and daughter.

Charles Newlin, Harold Packard, Tony Starcer, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Franz Kaufman, Mr. and Mrs. William Guldner, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Thomsen, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Paulson, Raymond Ridings, Mr. and Mrs. Clive Woodbury, Mr. and Mrs. Vern Clabaugh, Mr. and Mrs. Chris Christiansen, T/Sgt. (Ret.) and Mrs. Henry Hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ortega, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bouvia, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey Capps, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Riley, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Terzo, Mr. and Mrs. Aubin Pene, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Ward, Mack Wray, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley T. Wray Jr., Mr. and Mrs. George Royce, Mrs. Lois Birdwell, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Gowers, Mrs. Clara Smith, Robert B. Standish.

From The Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett Box 909, Auburn, Ala. 36830

The Hon. Secretary of the East Anglian Aviation Society, David C. Crow, has passed along an invitation to all 91st-ers who may be in England in June to a special Open House to be held by the Depot on June 26. The Station Commander has extended a special welcome to 91st-ers not only to attend the Open House but to visit the station any time.

The EAAS will have an exhibition on all the history of Basingbourn as an air station, both as an RAF base and as an Eighth Air Force Station.

Sec. Crow also reports that the Army is taking up all of the runways except one. So while all the buildings and hangars remain, Basingbourn is losing its identity as "our" flying field.

They weren't able to make the Feb. 6 Rally Round at Anaheim, but Mr. and Mrs. Willard F. Meier (ex-324), 1989 E. Kingston Ave., St. Paul, Minn. 55109, staged a mini-Rally at George Park's house Feb. 13. They were visiting in the San Francisco area and stopped by the Division Secretary's house for several pleasant hours.

Received word that three devoted Western Division members have passed away in the past few months—Mike Fenchak, of Costa Mesa, Calif.; Norman E. Wittman, of Montevideo, Minn., and Edward Stucin, of Panama, Okla. Wittman was flight leader for Minnesota and had planned to hold a state Rally Round in the Spring of 1971. His wife Ethel will continue to be member of the 91st B. G. Memorial Association and has sent in a donation to the Group in honor of Norman.

In an earlier issue on The R/I I commented on what a world it is—how often old friends who had been separated for some years had found themselves assigned to the 91st at the same time, etc. The story in this issue by Frank Bolen illustrates another angle—you can discover fellow 91st-ers in the most unusual ways!

Last year my nephew Hub Harrington from Huntsville transferred to Auburn University to complete his degree in electrical engineering. As nephews will, from time to time he would stop by the house for a visit or a meal or what not. After a time he began bringing along a "friend," a tiny, beautiful girl named Ann who was completing her master's degree in History.

On one visit, just after the R/I had come off the press I gave Hub a copy to take to my married daughter in Huntsville. Gasping in surprise, Ann exclaimed "Is that The Ragged Irregular? My daddy gets that!" Turns out "Daddy" was Frank Bolen of Selma, and though I had known her name was Ann Bolen and that she was from Selma I had not connected them at all, just as she hadn't connected Hub's "Uncle Cliff" with the Paul C. Burnett who lived in Auburn and edited The Ragged Irregular.

"Daddy keeps saying he must look up the editor the next time he comes to Auburn," Ann explained. "I'll bring him by the very next time." She did, too, and Frank and his lovely wife Frances visited with us several times. While we were not at Basingbourn at the same time, Frank had been a member of my old squadron, the 322nd, and of course we had much to discuss.

Last month Hub and Ann both received their degrees. More important, they have set their wedding date for July—so two ex-91st-ers will have a common bond even closer than membership in the old group!



The 91st lost a good friend and a frequent Basingbourn visitor with the death March 16 of the famous actress Bebe Daniels at her home in London. She is shown here with her husband, actor Ben Lyon, when they were on a visit to the base in July, 1943.

Bebe became internationally known for starring in "Rio Rita" and movies with Harold Lloyd and Rudolf Valentino as well as husband Ben Lyon. Lyon was the star of the great classic of WW I flying, "Hell's Angels."

Though Ben's work was in public relations at London headquarter he flew several missions with the group. He an associate member of the 91st Memorial Association.

Plans Set For 1972 Reunion

Plans for the 1972 National Reunion have been completed, though a collapse of restoration plans for the Queen Mary forced a last minute change in location.

Firm dates have been scheduled, beginning Tuesday, July 11, and continuing through Saturday, July 15, at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim, Calif.

Entertainment plans include visits to the Queen Mary, Disneyland (across the street from the Jolly Roger), Movie World and Planes of Fame, and many other places in the Long Beach area.

It had been earlier planned to use the Queen Mary as convention headquarters, since many 91st-ers had gone overseas aboard the ship in 1942. But financial and location difficulties confronting the Queen Mary have considerably delayed the refurbishing of the vessel, and it will not be ready for the 1972 date.

The Jolly Roger, which has been the site of several outstanding West Coast Rally Rounds, is considered by Western Division committee members to be an especially convenient and cooperative spot for the national reunion.

Make your plans now to take part in this tremendous event!

91st-er National Policeman of Month

A former 91st bombardier and active Memorial Association member, Joseph S. Gagliano, Jr., has been named National Police Officer of the Month in the March issue of Master Detective Magazine. Gagliano is Chief of Detectives of the Police Department of Memphis, Tenn.

The award was given for Joe's distinguished leadership, an outstanding record in crime control and prevention, and for high qualities of citizenship and civic responsibility.

Joe was born in Memphis in 1921 and began working for the police force there in 1941 as a clerk in the identification bureau, training to become a fingerprint technician. He left to become an Army Air Corps cadet in August, 1942. After graduating from bombardiers school in Deming, N. M., in June, 1943, he was assigned to the 91st at Bassingbourn.

The magazine relates several of Joe's experiences as a member of the 91st. On his first mission with the group, aboard the 322nd squadron's famous "Wee Willie," his plane was hit by flak and lost an engine. The barrage punctured a fuel line and gasoline poured from the plane as it struggled back across the English channel. There was no hope whatever of getting back to Bassingbourn—touching any solid ground would be landing enough! They barely staggered down on a Royal Air Force landing strip on the coast, with only 15 gallons of fuel still left in the tanks.

Once over Wilhelmshaven, flying in "Sleepytime Gal," they were hit by flak that riddled the plane and bounced it 500 feet higher in the air, but the bomb load was delivered right on target. On a later flight in "Sleepytime Gal" Gagliano dropped six 1000-pounders on six buildings at Avard, France, where the Germans were building radio-

controlled torpedos. For that feat he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He completed 30 missions with the 91st.

After leaving military service in August, 1945, Joe immediately rejoined the Memphis police force as a probationary detective. Three months later he was promoted to detective lieutenant.

Surprisingly, he worked as a lawman 19 years before ever donning a uniform—first as a clerk-technician and then as a plainclothes detective. In 1960 he became commanding officer of a duty shift and was transferred to the uniformed division. He became Chief of Detectives in 1968.

Among the many outstanding crimes solved by Joe was the tracking down of a killer responsible for five Memphis murders.

He has autographed pictures and letters from Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon for serving them as an armed escort on their visits to Memphis.

In addition to his police work Gagliano is a devoted family man and active in civic affairs. Joe and his lovely wife Mary have four children: Joseph S. "Bubba" Gagliano III, a 23-year-old Marine; Cathy, 19; Mary Joe, 13, and Gina, 10. He finds time to attend Mass almost every day at St. Louis Catholic Church, is active in the Memphis Italian Society, and has served as adjutant of Post Number One of the Memphis American Legion.

When the 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association held its first National Reunion in Memphis in 1967 Joe was one of the flight leaders responsible for planning and organizing that memorable event.

His home address is 4946 New Haven Avenue, Memphis, Tenn. 38117.



Gathered under the nose of the 322nd squadron's "Wee Willie" is Gagliano's crew. In the front row, kneeling, are Sgt. Elroy (waist gunner), Sgt. Zastenchek (tail gunner), Lt. Gagliano (bombardier).

Standing are: Sgt. Relley (waist gunner), Sgt. O'Neil (Radio), Lt. Harry Lerner (navigator), Sgt. Southworth (engineer), Sgt. Martin (ball turret), Lt. John Moller (co-pilot), Lt. Paul Jessup (pilot).