91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 17 No. 4

January, 1985

Wincanton Remembers 'Old Faithful'

With almost four decades gone by since thousands of American airmen gave their lives in the battle against the Axis powers it is a common belief that few persons to-day remember or appreciate the sacrifices of these young men. But everywhere there are those who $\underline{D0}$ remember, and who still honor those brave soldiers.

On June 25, 1984, the townspeople of Wincanton, in Somerset, England, near Yeovil, held a special 40th anniversary memorial service for nine 91st B.G. air crew members killed when their plane crashed in flames there while struggling back home from a mission to Toulouse, France, on 25 June, 1944.

They had earlier placed a bronze plaque in a stone wall near the spot where the plane crashed that reads: "This tablet was erected by the people of Wincanton in Honour of United States Airmen who lost their lives when their Flying Fortress "Old Faithful" crashed in flames at Snag Farm near this spot, when returning disabled from an operational sortie over Toulouse, France, on 25th June, 1944.

2nd Lt. Peter Mikonis, Margate City, New Jersey.

2nd Lt. Frank E. Pepper Jnr., Berkeley, California.

2nd Lt. Joseph E. Sullivan, Belmont, Massachusetts.

2nd Lt. Will H. Stevens, Smithfield, North Carolina.

S. Sgt. Roy C. Anderson, Sacramento, California.

S. Sgt. Douglas K. Deurmyer, Topeka, Kansas.

Sgt. Ralph Stein, Savannah, Georgia.

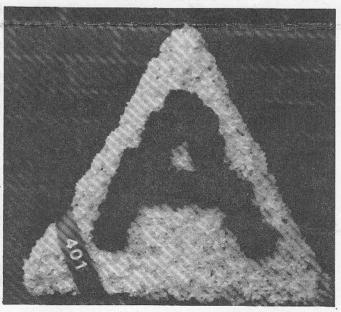
Sgt. Richard A. Mehlberg, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Sgt. Dean A. McDonell, Omaha, Nebraska.

The memorial service was directed by W.T.J. 'Bill' Chapman, chairman of the Yeovil Archaeological & Local History Society, who is also a member and a representative of the 8th Air Force Historical Society.

Wreaths were laid by the Chairman of the Wincanton Town Council, a representative of the U.S.A.F., and the 8th AFHS. The wreath of the 8th AFHS depicted the triangle A





of the 91st B.G., with a '401' indicating the 401st squadron. The card placed on the wreath read: "In memory of 9 men of the 8th U.S.A.A.F. who died a long way from home, along with many of their comrades, so that we might be free."

Editor's Note: One of our British associate members, Rex Poulton, of Salisbury, has been researching the complete history of "Old Faithful" for several years, putting together the plane's complete story from the time it was assigned to the 91st. Several months before the Wincanton Memorial Service he put together this account of the final mission. The Ragged Irregular feels that this additional information will be of interest to Memorial Association members.

Lest They Be Forgotten

By Rex Poulton

Forty years ago, the bombing raids of World War II saw the 8th Air Force lose over 5000 heavy bombers and three-quarters of their crews.

One such loss was suffered by the 401st bomb squadron, 91st Bomb Group, on 25 June, 1944, when the squadron dispatched 12 of the 38 91st B-17s sent to strike at the Luftwaffe at Blagnac Airfield near Toulouse in southern France. Though there may be nothing outstanding about this particular loss, the story serves to remind us of the effort, determination, and skill - and the ultimate sacrifice - of those bomber crews who never returned.

A camouflaged B-17G, serial # 42-37958, was received by the 401st BS at Bassing-bourn on 16 December, 1943, and commenced operations at the end of the month. Over the next six months a number of different crews took this Fortress on missions to practically all parts of France and Germany, but most of her early flights were spent at the hands of Lt. Charles Price and his crew, who had given her the name of "Old Faithful."

As with a great many other Fortresses, her crews received injuries and "Old Faithful" herself suffered flak damage on a number of occasions. On one mission over Germany, during an exchange with Fw 190s, the radio operator was killed and the top turret gunner wounded, in return for which one fighter was shot down and another unconfirmed. On another mission, a particularly narrow escape from flak injuries, most likely fatal, was experienced by Lt. Howard Groombridge, the crew's navigator.

"Old Faithful" completed 36 combat bombing missions until that bright summer day, high over southern France, when attention from the German flak-gunners wrecked her number three engine and caused her to lag behind. In view of the long distance back to England, pilot Lt. Peter Mikonis headed initially for Spain while extinguishing the engine fire and taking stock of the situation and his chances of a return to base. Such return journeys were far from uncommon and some were probably made under worse conditions but whatever the state of "Old Faithful" and her crew, the decision obviously required consideration.

He turned the aircraft around and began the long haul of over 900 miles back to England, most likely praying not to fall victim to any marauding enemy fighters en route, for "Old Faithful" was now on her own at considerably lower altitude, and crippled. For nearly six hours Lt. Mikonis coerced his ailing bomber across the Bay of Biscay and the English Channel no doubt transferring fuel from tank to tank maintaining a state of balance and supply of fuel for the remaining engines. Minutes must have seemed like hours with all crew members as were able scanning for the approach of very capable enemy fighters who would delight in hounding "Old Faithful" to the death. It might not have been that certain that she'd make the journey anyway, even with such attention.

Whatever else happened during that time will never be known for sure, for upon crossing the English coast the right wing was trailing thick smoke, and Lt. Mikonis seems to have now been making for an early landing while his Fortress was still in one piece. They had finally made it to the safety of England; all he had to do now was set the burning aircraft down.

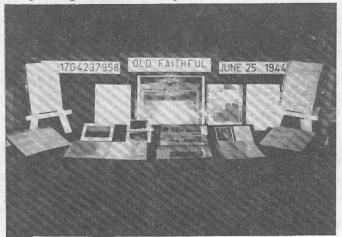
At tree-top height now and with stunning unreality the right wing collapsed, severed at the number four engine, and the bomber rolled over. Within seconds it exploded upon impact in a farmyard. The crew perished. They were: Peter Mikonis, pilot; Frank

Pepper, co-pilot; Joseph Sullivan, navigator; Will Stevens, bombardier; Roy Anderson, top turret, engineer; Douglas Deurmyer, radio operator; Ralph Stein, ball turret gunner; Richard Mehlberg, waist gunner; Dean McDowell, tail gunner.

Inhabitants of the nearby town of Wincanton believe that Lt. Mikonis, probably realising that his aircraft was trailing debris as it flew, had deliberately lenghtened his own desperate flight path to the nearby RAF airfield in order to avoid flying directly over the town. In so doing, he had kept his bomber from crashing into the built-up area.

Lt. Mikonis and his crew are held in the very highest regard by the local towns-people, and they in turn erected a plaque in honour of these brave young men, who, among so many others, had come from their homes so very far away to fight in the war and never return.

As a 91st BG associate member, I continue to research this sad loss together with the history of the aircraft and its other crews. If readers have any information, however little, or photographs relating either to this story or their own experiences in "Old Faithful" (401st sqdn., LL-G, serial # 42-37958) between December, 1943 and June, 1944, please will they kindly contact me, Rex Poulton, 42 Sunnyhill Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3QJ, England. I should indeed be very grateful for any assistance in compiling this small part of 91st BG and 401st sqdn. history.



Old Faithful Display at Wincanton



Flak Damage On 4-25-'44

It'll Be A Real Blast In Seattle!

A super package of entertainment and reminiscence has been put together by the 91st Super Rally Round Committee for the Seattle get-together July 24, 25, 26, helping to comemorate the 50th anniversary of the B-17 Flying Fortress by Boeing. Representatives from a number of B-17 groups plan similar events for the momentous birthday birthday party the Boeing Company will hold for its most famous product.

Rally Round chairman Bob Schuck (ex-322) sends this message to all 91sters: "All 91st members are urged to gather round. Reservations have been made for an evening cruise across Puget Sound to a real live salmon bake, with a tour of fuschia and rhodadendron gardens included... An entire day will be spent at the 'Red Barn', now known as the Pacific Museum of Flight. There will be touring the museum, gift memorabilia, B-17 fly-bys, ceremonies, military bands, etc... We'll also give you time to do a lot of other great Seattle things...

The Hilton Downtown will be headquarters and will give the 91st special rates starting July 22 and continuing through July 28."

All Memorial Association members will receive a complete packet of Rally Round information from Sec.-Treas. George Parks when he acknowledges receipt of your 1985 dues.

Boeing plans to have a couple of currently flying B-17s on hand to revive old memories in ex-aircrew members. Planes and men may both be a bit older now, but not past doing the job! SEE YOU IN SEATTLE!

Notes From The President...

The big holiday season is past: I do hope yours was great! Now all we need to do is lose those extra pounds that Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's seem to produce. And for some of us, we still need to pay for the Christmas just past (when I had a wife, her shopping always started December 26, and that was no problem). Of course, we also need to set aside a little for the Super Rally Round in Seattle this year and then the national reunion next year.

Speaking of our next reunion, there is always the possibility that Shoo Shoo Baby will be flyable in '86 (though the current schedule indicates a later date). If this possibility becomes a probability, I think we should consider the Dover area. There are dedicated members in the area who undoubtedly would produce yet another outstanding reunion.

Hopefully next year and at succeeding reunions, the hosts will be able to post in the hospitality room a timely list of attendees (with room number) so members won't have to repeat "Is so-and-so here?" so many times. Many do not rendezvous until the last day simply because they were not aware the other was present until then. (Could it be true that we no longer look like we did when at Bassingbourn? I suppose so. I do know some of those English "girls" who are now in their sixties don't look the same now.) I believe you will agree that one-on-one contact is one of the most important aspects of any reunion. Although the process may entail adding an "extra" host, the 91st can do anything!

Continuing the strong support of the rebuilding of "Shoo Shoo Baby" since the 91st first persuaded the government to seek the return of the old bird from the French government in 1969 the group has donated \$500 toward the rebuilding on December 6. Our letter from Sec.-Treas. George Parks says: "On behalf of the membership and the duly elected officers of the 91st Bomb Group (H) Memorial Association Inc., we wish to make this donation of \$500 to the rebuilding program of B-17G, Ser. # 42-32076 "Shoo Shoo Baby" 91st Bomb Group (H) 401st Sqdn. aircraft, and with our many, many thanks for the fine and outstanding work your organization is doing to make this aircraft flyable once more. We wish each and every member of the 512th Antique Aircraft Restoration Group a very Merry Christmas and a most Happy New Year."

In reply the chairman of the 512th, Lt. Col. Emmett Venett, Jr., sent the following: "Dear Col. Gunn: On behalf of the 512th Antique Restoration Group, Inc., thank you for your \$500 donation for the restoration of the B-17G "Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby." I am inclosing a couple of photographs of the B-17. Since these photographs were taken the elevators and rudder have been installed. More recent photographs of the plane are being processed and I'll have our public relations director send you copies when they are available. Once again, thank you for your generous Christmas present which will help us restore this important part of aviation history to its proper place in the Air Force Museum. Sincerely, Emmett Venett, Jr., Lt. Col. USAFR, Chairman.

Here is a summary of the business meeting held at the National Reunion at Colorado Springs September 8: After unit photographs had been taken, the business meeting was called to order about 9 a.m. One hundred and sixty-five voting members attended.

Under "old business" the reading of the membership minutes of 1982 business meeting and financial reports were waived as copies had been posted on the bulletin board for everyone to review. All reports were enthusiastically accepted and approved.

To clarify the status of the "Friends of the 91st In England", which surfaced in the 1982 business meeting, the president read excerpts from correspondence between the C.O. Bassingbourn and himself. To capsulize that exchange of letters: "Friends of the 91st in England" has not been sanctioned by our association and therefore has no legal status; any funds required (none anticipated) of the 91st for maintainance of the prop memorial will be handled by a request from the C.O. Bassingbourn to the president of this Association."

Under "New Business" a discussion of whether a national reunion should be held in

Seattle in 1985 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the B-17 ensued. for a Super Rally Round there on July 24,25, 26.

The members voted no change in By-laws to make the 91st a perpetual organization.

Following some discussion pertaining to the validity of certain proxy votes, the following officers were elected: President, Thomas H. Gunn; 1st Vice President, Glenn V. Boyce; 2nd Vice President, John R, Paget; Secretary-Treasurer, George W. Parks; Editor-Historian, Paul C. Burnett.

Selection site and date for the 1986 reunion will be handled in the same manner as was followed for the '84 reunion, i.e., through The Ragged Irregular.

Despite some heated discussions the shortest business meeting on record adjourned after two hours in session (pain is always more bearable when it is comparatively brief!)

Suggestions for the 1986 national reunion site should be sent in as soon as possible. Next year's reunion should be east of the Mississippi river, consistent with our policy of alternating between eastern and western locations. In nominating a spot there are a number of practical points to consider. For one thing, reunions are usually part of the family vacation, so there should be interesting and entertaining things to do in the vicinity. Since many persons fly in there should be direct air routes available.

The specific reunion headquarters should be able to handle an estimated attendance of 400 without having to resort to other hotels/motels, and with banquet facilities capable of comfortably handling the estimated attendance. It should have adequate rooms for displays, film showings, and a reception area devoted to receiving arriving members. Considering the monetary value to the facility we would anticipate that the management would make concessions in room rates in addition to providing certain complimentary rooms. These are customary requirements which the management will be prepared to meet.

There should be at least two (hopefully more) 91sters in the area willing to take on the job of serving as hosts and prime directors of the reunion, though they will receive much advice and help from the board of officers and previous hosts. Hosts will further be assisted greatly by the management of the facility in setting up the event.

The Memorial Association does not have a magic wand for creating our great reunions; it has always been the hard work of dedicated members who have made them possible.

From The Editor's Desk...

Paul C. Burnett Box 909 Auburn, Al. 36830

installed at the National Reunion are: LTC Charles R. Hackstock (Ret), ex-322nd sqdn. and ex-POW, 14224 SE 288th, Kent, WA. 98042, Nov. 28, 1984.

Armando J. Sinibaldo, ex-323rd sqdn., 2402 Chippewa Crt., Lisle, IL. 60532, Dec. 3, 1984, a Christmas gift from his wife Norma.

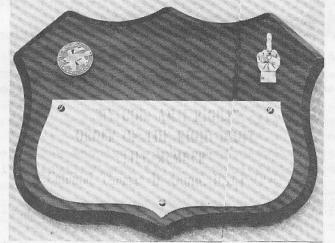
This has been a truly great year for the Association. We have had 27 members to donate their \$100 for a Life Membership, the most we have ever had, and this issue of The Membership ribbons (for hife Members only) Ragged Irregular will go to almost 1900 members and associates, another new high!

Large engraved pewter mugs complimenting the 1984 Reunion Committee for their out-

standing work in the Colorado Springs gettogether in September have been presented to Col. & Mrs. Paul D. Jessop (Ret), LTC & Mrs. James D. Fletcher (Ret), and Mr. & New Life Members since the seven who were Mrs. Glenn V. Boyce by the Memorial Association.

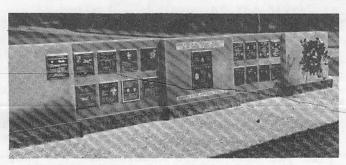
> Also recognized with a mug for his devoted service to the Association in helping plan the 1982 Dayton Reunion and the preparation of the memorial plaque at the Air Force Museum was outgoing first vice-president Sam Cipola.

From the Memorial Association "P.X." run by Sec.-Treas. George Parks we have on sale 4" 91st B.G. cloth patches, \$5; Life \$1; Group tie-tacs, \$3; Group decals 4". for auto windshields, glasses, etc. 50c; Group insignia bolo ties, \$5; and a few 1984 reunion caps (baseball type) with Group insignia, \$5. All funds received go to support the Association.



This new plaque has been approved by the Memorial Association Board of Officers to recognize new Life Members, replacing the Rigid Digit statue used here-to-fore.

Sec.-Treas. George Parks constantly receives requests from commercial firms, book publishing companies, other non-profit organizations, researchers, and even members of our organization requesting copies of our membership mailing labels which cannot practically be provided. With the continuous updating and address changing we can keep on hand barely enough copies to take care of Memorial Association needs. You can contact our members by sending a notice to the R/I 30 days in advance of the quarterly publication.



The Memorial Association has nearly comcompleted work to install a 91st B.G.
plaque on the Air Force Academy Cemetery
Memorial Wall. Work on the project was begun by Col. Paul Jessop prior to the national reunion in September, but unwinding the
necessary red tape in getting design approval by the USAF Academy Memorial Board and
the bronze plaque cast has been a timeconsuming task.

Interestingly enough, the Memorial Wall was established and the first plaque placed by the 379th B.G., who took over Kimbolton some time after the 91st abandoned that

field because of its understrength runways designed for British "Wimpys" and not B-17s for the coup that gave us the "8th Air Force Savoy" at Bassingbourn.



The beautiful Fall colors of the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains caused a minirally of six 91sters at the Village Inn, in the quaint village of Lovettsville, Va., in October. Left to right: W.W. Hill, Joe Giambrone, John Parsons, Mannie Klette, Harry Hovermill, and Joe Camelleri. Joe Giambrone won the award (a free drink) for coming the greatest distance.

Since our last report in the R/I we have learned of the deaths of 4 of our former members:

LTC. Edward W. Leathers, (USAF Ret.) ex-323rd sqdn., died Sept. 14, 1984 of lung cancer. His wife Nelle resides at 2163 Fielding Road, Riverside, CA. 92506.

M/Sgt. Grenville Prideaux (USAF Ret), ex-401st sqdn., died Nov. 18, 1984. His wife Marjorie resides at 17 Anza Crt., Fairfield, CA. 94533.

Wallace R. Beyer, ex-323rd sqdn. and ex-POW, 1702 4th Ave., Windon, MN. 56101, died July 9, 1983.

Raymond Bartusek, ex-322nd sqdn., died in 1980.

91st BOMB GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

Col. Tom Gunn......President
Glenn V. Boyce...lst Vice-President
SMS John R. Paget..2nd Vice-President
Paul C. Burnett......Editor
M/Sgt. George W. Parks...Sec.-Treas.

New Members - Address Changes

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ABRAMSON, Matt W.	24703 Hearthside, Apt-50104.	Farmington Hills.	MI.	48018	(a)
ALLISEN, Chris P.	2091 S. Lowell Blvd.	Denver.	CO.	80219	(N)
BEASLEY, Freeman C. LT(Ret)				98382	
	305 Lakewood Dr.	Anderson.		29621	
DEMUELL, MAX D.					
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BLACK, Charles K.				26439	
BOWLAN, Delma M. Mrs.	P.O. Box 582.	Note Dame.	IN.	46556	(C-A)
BROUGHTON, Richard N.	778 Knollview Blvd.	Ormond Beach.	FL.	32074	(N)
CAYER, Robert J.	27 Bowen St.	Rumford.	RI.	02916	(N)
	P.O. Box 147.			02718	
CHAPMAN, Allan K. WO(Ret)				95405	
CHRISTOPHER, Frederick L.				32867	
	F.U. BOX 2/02).	Offando.	tп.	22007	(0)
LTC.(Ret)	/				1-1
CHUMBLER, Robert N.	633 Por La Mar Cir,	Santa Barbara.	CA.	93103	(C)
	Suite D-108.				
COOLEY, Robert W.	P.O. Box 789,	Baldwin.	MI.	49304	(C)
	Putman Lake.				
CORSON, Charles L.	94 Joshua Dr.	Manahawkin.	N.T.	08050	(N)
DEARTH, Ralph E.	Rt. 4, Box 206.	Marietta,		45750	
		The state of the s			
De BAUN, Clyde E. LTC(Ret)	Plantation Point.	Lincolnton.		30817	
DUMONT, Homer P.	2922 Yulupa Ave.	Santa Rosa.	CA.	95405	(N)
FALKENMAYER, Charles W. LTC. (Ret)	990 Northgate Rd.	Colorado Springs.	CO.	80908	(N)
FERRY-O'KEEFE, Dan J.	171 O'Keefe St.S.E.	Palm Bay.	FT.	32907	(C)
FEWSMITH, Joan J. Mrs.	P.O. Box 8274.	La Jolla.		92038	
				1000	1 1
FITTON, George G.	1108 Ridgeview Dr.			24060	
FITZPATRICK, Edward J.	30 Gibbe Ave.			08244	
FLINN, John C. Jr.	2708 Daviess St.			42301	0.0000000000000000000000000000000000000
GLASS, Homer A.	11 Eleanor Dr.,	Bella Vista.	AR.	72714	(C)
GLEN, Harry R.	336 Santa Kosalia Wy	.Santa Barbara.	CA.	93111	(N)
GRISWOLD, Randy L.	2120 Fairfield.	Portage.	MI.	49081	(C-A)
HANSON, Robert J.	E. 7124 Uhlig Rd.			99207	
HANZEL, Albert P.	3583 Austin Rd.#137.			44041	
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		Marietta.			
KIRBY, Harold E.	2686 Dellinger Dr.	TABLE TO SERVICE STATE OF THE		30062	
LEACH, Gordon H.	205 S. 54th St, Sp-# 102.	Springfield.	OR.	97478	(0)
LETHERS, Nelle Mrs.	2163 Fielding Rd.	Riverside.	CA.	92506	(N-A)
LIPSCHUTZ, Martin.	4086 Ford Rd.	Philadelphia.		19131	
LYTHJOHAN, Bruce.	Box 5105 Star Rt.	Solon Springs.		54073	
MEYER, Aad.	Mangaanstraat 16.	Apeldoorn.		land.	(N-A)
				112	
MEYERS, Robert E. C/O Mrs. Meyers.	5426 - 12th Ave.	Sacramento.		95820	
MILLER, A.P.	3505 N. Robison Rd.	Texarkana.	TX.	75501	(N)
MILLS, Jimmie D. Jr.	3330 Cleveland.	Paris.	TX.	75460	(C)

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MC EWEN, George S. LTC(Ret		Florence.		97439	
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				94558	
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PETERMAN, Fred F. LTC (Ret		San Antonio.		78227	
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REYNOLDS, Gene V.	1226 Sheri Cir.	Brigham City.		84302	
ROBERTSON, George D.	824 E. Burford St.	Marshfield.	MO.	65706	(N)
ROBINSON, Marvin B.	P.O. Box 36.		NC.	27325	(N)
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RUMPH, John P. MSGT (Ret)	17102 Woodcrest Dr.	Bothell.		98011	
***	NE.				
SCOTT, John C. III.	2316 Golden Camp Rd.	Augusta.	GA.	30906	(N)
SHERK, Maurice Davis.	428 Crest Dr.			35209	
SHOPE, Berchel L.	P.O. Box 901.	Los Molinos		96055	
SMELSER, Harold C. Mrs.	2217 W. Pacific,	Snokana		99204	
Mindolat, Halold O. Als.	Apt-313.	bpokane.	n 21 e	77204	(N-A)
SMELSER, Laurence L.		Mashinston	n a	20002	(x x)
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SNOOK, Lester B.	P.O. Box 697.	Tewksbury.		01876	
SOBIESKI, Julius.	0844 N. Holmesville.			46360	
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STUTS, George C.	225 Clifton St.#116.	Oakland.		94618	
SWIERZ, Norbert F.	13539 W. Houghton,	Houghton Lake.	MI.	48629	(C)
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TAYLOR, John S.	407 Mills Dr.	Benicia.		94510	
THEIS, Anthony W.	1222 Southbay Dr.	Osprey.		33559	
WEAVER, Elmer.		Pagosa Springs.		81157	
	Sunetha Branch.		GIVE 1		•
WELLINGS, Donald J. COL.	C/O S.R. Wellings,	Sacramento.	CA.	95818	(c)
(Ret)	3601 Land Park Dr.	Daoi anion oo .	051.8	75010	(0)
WHITTEN, Edwin E.	1 Cloyster Rd.	S. Portland.	ME	04106	(0)
WILLIAMS, Clyde R.		El Dorado.		67042	
WILMONT, James C.					
WILHUNI, James C.	11409 Markab Dr.	San Diego.	CA.	92126	(C-A)
FRIEND, John C. Jr.	P.O. Box 17.	Madi son	TNi	ומסבת	(C A)
		Madison.		47250	
FLEMMING, Thomas F.	1724 Pine Valley Dr.	rt. myers.	T.T.	33907	(0)
LTC. (Ret)	Apt # 119.		77.4	20405	(5)
HUNT, Daniel J.Rev.C.P.	St. Gabriel's	Brighton.	MA.	02135	(C)
CH. COL. (Ret)	Residence.	201 Washington St.			
BANNON, Frank H.	Box 928.	Ganges.		VOS 11	
SOMMERS, Sam L. MSGT (Ret)	P.O. Box 442.	Diamond City.	AR.	72644	(C)
ZAGARIS, Nick.	1314 Trinity St.	Redding.	CA.	96001	(N)
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Don't Forget To Pay Your 1985 Dues!

January is our annual dues month, so don't put off sending your \$5 to our Sec.-Treas. George W. Parks, 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, CA. 94591. How is the 91st able to stay at \$5 when almost every other group has gone to \$10? By following a rule set by Gen. S. T. Wray when it was established: "Nobody who works for this outfit will get so much as a five-cent cigar for what he does..." But with increasing cost of supplies and postage it gets tougher every year.