

Redd Boggs'

# SPIROCHETE

Number 17

OMPA #50

December 1967

## HISTORICAL

Some few of you have seen Spirochete before, and perhaps are beholding this fanzine now with the mien of one who is confronted by a tiger on the road. Well, then, a terrier. The first 16 issues appeared in that stronghold of grimy mediocrity, Apa L. That group, which was still extant at last report, is less of an organization (like OMPA) than a distributing service for fanzines produced by and for members, local and otherwise, of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy society.

As a long-time member of the Fantasy Amateur Press association, I have been inclined to regard OMPA as an upstart among the Big Three apas. And yet I notice with a shock that OMPA was founded in September 1954, and -- despite the year's lapse due to "dire sickness," as Archie Mercer puts it -- this apa has already produced 49 mailings, which makes it somewhat more venerable than FAPA was when I joined it. (I joined FAPA in July 1947, though due to the secretary's dereliction of duty I did not actually receive my first mailing till more than three months later. That was FAPA mailing #41, dated October 1947.)

Speaking of dereliction of duty, I did not receive OMPA mailing #48 and was therefore considerably surprised to receive the revival mailing, #49. Evidently in posting mailing #48, Association editor Brian Jordan grew a bit tired of it all, petulantly skipping over a few names on the roster -- mine and Gretchen Schwenn's, at least. One wonders whether OMPA has recovered, or ever will recover, from Jordan's AEsShip. I met the new OMPA president, Don Studebaker, at a concert of the University Symphony orchestra on the campus of the University of California a few weeks ago, and he was enthusiastic and optimistic about OMPA's future. On the other hand, a few days later I encountered Bill Donaho at the Berkeley main post office and he spoke of OMPA in the past tense. (I believe he may not have received the revival mailing, as yet.) So who can say? Nobody in Berkeley knows anything. Perhaps when Archie mailed #49, it was OMPA's Last Post.

## GEOGRAPHICAL

In 1944-5 I spent 13 months in England (later I spent another six months in Belgium and France). The first night in England I stood in the cool dark night and watched, more curiously than fearfully, as needles of distant light dazzled in and out of the clouds north of the airbase, searching for a Nazi raider in the area. At that time there was a momentary lull in the air war, but a month or two later V-1s were crashing on London.

I remember England as a cool green land, somber under a grey overcast. The clouds broke away occasionally for fleeting glimpses of blue

sky, and there were always planes of some sort up there, roaring over unseen, or streaking in and out of the scud, like timid minnows gliding through the seaweed of some vast bowl of murky water. And I actually saw the sun gleam through a few times during those 13 months, believe it or not. One morning, while picking my way on the cobblestones toward Base Headquarters, I felt a warm feather of sunshine tickle my face unexpectedly, and looked up in wonder. The heavens overhead were opening up. Directly over my upturned face I beheld the tiny splash of a signal flare, one of those fired as a beacon for American bombers assembling for a strike against the enemy (whose identity I have forgotten). The flare burned so far above me that it looked like a small scratch on the blue sky, but sharpening my gaze I was able to see the bombers it was summoning. B-24 Liberator bombers in flights, squadrons, echelons, wings, were swooping around up there, so high that the terrific thunder of their four Pratt and Whitney engines was lost to my ear. I can no longer remember how many bombers were up there, suspended, as it were, directly above my upturned noggin, but I think I counted several hundred -- each with a crew of nine or ten: perhaps three thousand men in all.

Till I came to California more than five years ago I had never discovered weather that resembled England's. In southern California, where I lived 1962-4, the sun shines every day, albeit glassily, through the infamous omnipresent smog; in that "balmy, unrealistic climate," one can hardly be said to experience weather at all. Occasionally, when one drives out to cities on the Pacific shore, like Santa Monica (where the Pelzes live), Playa del Rey, or Long Beach, one runs into genuine fog, but seldom the persistent overcast that shrouded England when I was stationed there. However, 400 miles north and a considerable distance west (because of the jut of the coastline) of Los Angeles, residents of the San Francisco Bay area experience weather that oftentimes resembles that of England.

Of course there are palm trees growing here, and the mean temperature of January is only eight degrees below that of July, but the sea wind here, especially blowing across San Francisco west of the bay, may often bring us the same somber grey overcast, the high rolling fog, and the cold drizzle that characterizes London weather at its worst. (But seldom if ever snow: the Bay area never resembles the scene painted by Dickens in the opening passage of Bleak House.)

In England I was stationed, by the way, at a place called Rackheath -- lovely name! -- north and east of Norwich, as I recall, and before that at North Pickenham, not far from King's Lynn. North Pick, as we called it, was such an insignificant airbase at such a tiny flyspeck on the map that I thought I would never hear of it again after I left the place. But a few years later I read in the newspaper about a "Ban the Bomb" march on an American airbase in England -- and by St Bertie, the doughty English had marched on the base at North Pickenham, then one of the fields where "atomic" bombers were headquartered. I wonder what has become of the base in the interim? I assume that the village of North Pickenham is still there. And long may it stand!