

## Comments about Douglas, GA in the letters of William F. Hanchett, class of 1944-B

Below are extracts from the letters of William F. Hanchett, who described in excellent detail his experience at Douglas. He explains the training, the plane, the different check rides and his feelings about the experience. This information could most likely apply to almost all cadets at Douglas.

July 27, 1943: Don't know very much about Douglas, Ga., except that the town is very small, not more than 3000, and the field has only about 300 cadets. As you know, it is Primary and we will fly every day. They say there is a high percentage of washouts, as high as 60%, and so it may be that I'll be back in the GI army, but I'll keep trying you can be sure of that.

July 30, 1943: Arrived here yesterday morning after a rather uncomfortable trip. This is really paradise! You'd never think it was an Army post. The buildings are new bungalows of modern design.

There are only 500 Cadets here and the food is magnificent. Better by far than what we got at Maxwell, because it is not prepared for so many.

There are over 100 airplanes, neatly lined up along the take off apron. The 250 upperclassmen have soloed, and we new cadets begin instruction Monday.

The camp is in the midst of a pine tree forest and is an unusually pretty site. It could very easily be a fine resort.

Since we are to fly regularly here, and that means some considerable strain on us, the army is concerned about our relaxation time. There is a fine reading room. There are also badminton and tennis courts. The whole thing seems like a country club.

Aug. 3, 1943: I spoke a little too soon about our "leisure time," because now that we are in our regular schedule, there just isn't any. Classes, dull, physical training all morning, flying all afternoon. We are only in the air for an hour, but must spend the other four hours in the "Ready Room" studying the different maneuvers and regulations. I am amazed at how complicated the business of flying a plane is.

Everything must be exact. Turns must be precisely 90°, or 45°, not 50°, etc. Wings must be at correct angle when turning, etc. I had no idea that there was so much to learn. When you're up in the air it's not a joy-ride. It's the hardest work I've ever had. The instructor is jumping on you every moment, calls you everything he can think of and makes you feel as intelligent as a jackass. Apparently, this is the best way to teach pilots.

You can see that with my flight work (on the ground and in the air) and my studies (theory of flight and aircraft engines, right now), I am plenty busy – and not only busy, but having to fight

like the devil to keep my head above water. This is hard. There's no fooling about that. I do like the field very much and my barracks are very summer campish. However, am afraid there'll be no reading outside my technical manuals. Guess the time has come when I've got to devote everything I have to my job; and that's exactly what I'm going to do!

Aug. 8, 1943: The first week of flying is over and I've got to admit that I don't like the stuff. That will probably surprise you, but it's not all an unusual reaction at Primary. Riding in a plane is a lot different than flying one, and the business just doesn't thrill me. It's not even as much fun as driving a car!

Ground school is coming along in fine style. We have daily tests and my average is 93+. My flying, however, is rotten; probably greatly influenced by my attitude, which is certainly not the best. I have no doubt but that it works the other way, too. Anyway, I'll have to keep trying and hope that if I can learn to fly I'll learn to like it. If I wash out, though, I won't be anywhere near as disappointed as I once would have been, or as you probably will be.

Aug. 13, 1943: Am pleased to say that I've made some very good progress in flying, and as might be expected like it some better, although I'll still take a V8 to a PT17 any day. Guess I'm not hopeless, but certainly slow.

Aug. 15, 1943: I like the business a good deal better, too, and have the feeling that when I can get up there by myself, I'll like it even better.

The instructor is yelling at you every moment and you try so hard to do things right that it's hard not to become both nervous and confused.

Last time up I made seven landing, one of them pretty good, but I think I'll catch on to the idea in time. The Army doesn't waste much of the latter with its Cadets and most of those who washout, washout because they don't learn fast enough.

Aug. 18, 1943: Am due to solo at the end of this week, or the first of next. Am doing considerably better.

Aug. 20, 1943: Today, after my instructor and I had flown around for 40 minutes and made one or two practice landings, I was told to "take the damn thing up myself". And, by golly, I did!

I wasn't a bit frightened, as I had thought I might be, but I have never been more thrilled! It's really quite something to feel the power of the plane as you take off, and then to cut the motor as you come into land.

I circled the field three times, landing after each circuit and taxiing over to where my instructor was waiting. After a few corrections, or a lot of them, I should say, I took off again. Two of my three landings were fairly good and I think my instructor was perfectly satisfied. I know I was.

There will be three more supervised solos and then I'll start going off cross country by myself, practicing the maneuvers we have to know.

A large percentage of those who wash out, do so before they solo, so I've passed one obstacle. However, at the 20<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> hour in the air, students are "checked" by instructors other than their own, and a large number are washed out on these checks.

My attitude, as you can probably tell, has changed and I think it will continue to be better as I get off by myself more often. I am definitely not a born flyer and I seem to learn slowly, but this solo has done an awful lot to encourage me.

Aug. 29, 1943: I've had several hours solo flying now. It's a real thrill to be up there alone practicing stalls and spins and S turns, etc. I keep thinking that it can't be me. The most fun of all is coming in for a landing, cutting the throttle at 500 feet and gliding down to a few feet above the ground, and then leveling off. You'd love it, Mom, and I can't wait till the time I can take you up.

That last sentence sounds much more confident than I really am, however. Sometime this week I have my 20 hour check. This is really tough, and I'm not kidding. Already two of my roommates at Maxwell have gone.

Several of the boys got some pretty raw deals on this elimination and the general feeling is that luck counts about 75%. Quite a number have gone; too many.

Sept. 1, 1943: Tomorrow I have my twenty hour check with a check pilot and am reasonably confident of passing it. I just hope that I don't make some obvious error, like heading downwind for forced landing practice, as I did today – by myself luckily.

From now on I'll fly 2-1/2 hours every day and have a half hour every other day in a Link Trainer. You've probably heard of these and know something about them.

Every few weeks the Army has us fill out preference forms concerning the planes we want to fly. If at the end of our training, we are qualified to fly the plane of our choice, that's the one we fly. I have requested medium bombardment three times. I like the B25, Billy Mitchells. If you ever see a picture of one, you might be interested.

Of course all that seems a very long way off, but time has a way of passing quickly, and February will be here soon enough. I only hope I am still a cadet when it comes.

Sept. 5, 1943: I've got some swell friends down here and it's tough when any of the fellows wash out. One of my roommates from Maxwell flew a plane into the ground yesterday. He

wasn't hurt, but is all through here of course. The plane was totally wrecked (carelessness on his part).

Am glad to say that I passed my recheck and now don't have to worry until my forty hour check, which I will probably have the week after this one.

It's lots of fun to take the ship out alone. We now have two solo hours to every dual hour. Naturally enough, everything goes perfectly when you're up there by yourself.

Sept. 12, 1943: I have 36 hours now and am due for the much dreaded 40 hour check this week. All of us live in expectation of sudden elimination and it's gotten so we don't give a d- one way or the other. Don't know if I'll pass the check or not. Everything is so uncertain it's getting hard to concentrate on studies or be anything but indifferent to them. I'm still in there pitching, of course.

Sept. 12, 1943 (to his father): I have 36 hours in the air now and will be up for my 40 hour check this week. I was confident of passing my 20 hour check, but frankly don't know if I can make this one or not. A certain degree of precision is expected up there now and I may fall short of the mark. We have several different figure eight maneuvers, stalls, spins, etc. So far about 25% have washed out and every one of us lives in constant fear of being eliminated. The indefiniteness of it all makes us indifferent to what happens, somewhat at least. We would just like to know one way or the other.

Sept. 19, 1943: I squeezed by my forty hour check last week and yesterday I did my first loop. I have 50 hours now and am working on acrobatics. Already I have enough time to get my private license as a civilian pilot. I've come a fair way, but I frankly don't know if I can get much farther. You couldn't understand it, but I'm very indifferent to success or failure. We all are, as a matter of fact.

Sept. 26, 1943: For the past week I have been practicing aerobatics. The loop is the most spectacular and the easiest to do. For tops in thrills there's nothing like flying upside down in a slow roll, especially in an open cockpit plane!

I'm enclosing a picture of the ship we fly. Students fly from the rear cockpit and the instructor talks through a tube, or rather, yells through one.

The motor is 225 Horse power and the plane cruises at about 95 mph.

On Wed. and Thurs. I went on a cross country hop, using the navigation we have learned so far. Flew in formation (though we weren't supposed to and we weren't really close together) and had a swell time. I flew with two other boys and we had a swell time dipping our wings to each other.

Both trips were only 80 some miles and were made in about an hour.

For the past 10 days I have been working on acrobatics and would like 10 more for practice before my check, which, unfortunately, is tomorrow.

If I pass my 60 hour check tomorrow, I'll go on to Basic the end of the week for 9 weeks in a Basic trainer. The plane is much more advanced, but I'm not at all confident of ever flying it.

As I told Mother, if I wash out as a pilot, I'm pretty sure I'll be a bombardier, which runs a pretty close second anyway.

You asked about the degree of climb for an airplane. I've stood mine on its tail a lot of times, but that's only for a short distance and the normal rate is much less. Our P38 Lightning will climb straight up for some time and is a steep climber in any case.

Sept. 28, 1943 postcard: Hooray! Passed final check. Will be promptly washed out at Basic!

Oct. 1, 1943: Leaving tomorrow for Basic. New address: Class 44B, AAF Basic Flying School, Bainbridge, GA.