Dear Paul,

You stunned me when I received your phone call last April first. I couldn't believe something was being done to bring together the members of old Class 43-C of Primary Flight Training at Douglas, Georgia. I'm surprised you have found so many in such a relatively short time. When did the "resurrection" start? Why did we (or someone) need to get the gang together? Anyway, I'm just happy to know something was being done. I plan to make every effort to attend the reunions.

I haven't made any attempt yet to contact the people listed in your letter. We are in the process of moving to another home in the Rochester, N.Y. area and the house helped keep my wife and I quite busy. To complicate things, on March 29th, I had a bad fall and fractured a vertebra in my middle back (really I had a broken back!) so my physical activity has limited a will continue to be for some months. It's healing well however, for which I'm thankful.

Referring to your letter, I'm sorry to hear that my instructor, Mr. Brittholf has died. I often wished I had a chance to see him again and thank him for starting me into the world of flying. He was a great and kind person, a very considerate and capable instructor and always willing to give the extra help and encouragement wherever it was needed. I'm sure that he's still flying freely in the "Wild Blue" somewhere.

I don't recall with certainty, the other four cadets with me.
when I trained under Mr. Trinkle. As I remember we were
grouped alphabetically. So I think my fellow students were
Clifford Mehl, Ken Reeds, Sammy M. Davis & Roy McCallum.
I flew again with some of them on a B-25 and in advanced
training. But eventually we went our separate ways. I of
have long ago lost complete track of them.
A thank you summary of my military career follows:
- Drafted into service at Fort Totten, New York in July 42
- Immediately volunteered for service with the US Army Air
Corp, and transferred to Camp Millie near Mitchel Field, close
by N.Y. City. Camp Millie was a "holding" facility for candidate's
to be transferred in September 1942 to Nashville, Tenn., for testing
Classification, physical condition, etc. Finally, I was selected for
appointment to the SE training command for pilot training. I
most happy stay in my life.
- Transferred to Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama for Pre-Flight
training with extensive physical training, ground school, around
the clock + harassment by super classmate. (My memory of the exact
dates for these phases of my flying training is vague but I guess
that's not too important anyway.
- Transferred to Dayton for Primary training + my first experience
flying an airplane. I flew the PT-17. Seeing the "first," you know +
earthquake all, but Mr. Trinkle got me out the hangar OK.
I often some problems in landing the PT-17. I loved to
love flying & the PT-17. Down to my way.
- Transferred to Greenwood, Miss. for B-24 training on the BT-13.
Unfortunately, I had an instructor who was a friend of the
BT-13 + he passed some of this fear onto our students. Nevertheless,
we all stuck to schedule + fell to take a dreaded check ride, but
the god told assigned me an angel of a check pilot, so I passed. The test with flying colors - never any
more trouble in this phase.
- Transferred to George Field, Alabama for advanced training on
the twin-engine Beechcraft BT-10. My instructor was a young
22 yr., a friendly & capable guy. The BT-10 never gave me
any trouble & was easy to handle with its make & breaking gear. Best of all, our treatment, meals, quarters were great so this whole training phase was quite pleasant. Finally, it was graduation time when we received our 2nd Lt. Commission & most important, the coveted "Wings," certifying that we were pilots in the U.S. Air Forces. We had a short leave at home & then it was

- transferred to the Lockbourne Air Force Base at Columbus, Ohio for training in the B-17 Flying Fortress, always my "dream" airplane. We hardly had time to unpack at Lockbourne before spending long hours in the classroom, followed by equally long hours learning how to fly the B-17. It was a trying but rewarding experience & enjoyed every minute of it. We all schooled quickly & completed our operational transition on schedule. Then, I was promptly

- transferred to Ephrata, Washington, where a new bomb group was being formed. I had just the nucleus of my crew (304 enlisted men), when I was received special orders to report promptly to Great Falls, Montana where the 401st B.G. was in operational training prior to transfer to a war zone. I took over a crew whose pilot wanted "out," and found all of them to be very friendly, capable, & determined young men. We got along just fine. The 401st was in its final training phase & soon we
were on our way overseas to England, after extensive physical mental & flying examinations. We departed the U.S. at 11 PM from Bangor Maine and landed near Glasgow, Scotland the next A.M. The next day, we fly to an airfield near Breda, England, the home of the 351st Bomb Group. Even the chance of joining the 351st, or flying with the 401st, ed transfused into the 351st with a number of other crews. The advantage of flying with an experienced Bomb Group prompted this move. We hardly had any practice flying with the 351st, just a familiarization flight & one formation flight, before we were awakened one morning at 4:00 AM for our first mission. It was to Cremon & I soon learned how very bad English & European weather conditions could be—often more of a hazard than either flak or fighters. The reality of war set in very quickly, after watching B-17's go down on fire or out of control & counting your close friends among the M.I.A.'s. On our fifth mission, we lost two fifth engines on the right side, jettisoned our bombs & started the long trip back. We were forced to ditch in the North Sea, five miles from the English coast on a bitter cold December 22, 1942. Hypothermia, the water 45 minutes (no life raft), just Meas made; pick a six of the crew—we had been in life preservers, before British life-boat Rescue picked up the rest of us. This 5th mission is a very long story which I won't relate here, I've enclosed an
account of it taken from 351st Bomb Group. To continue, I was in and out of the hospital for 5-6 weeks before flying again on missions as a "spare" with other crews. Gradually, we replaced a new crew starting with survivors of the ditching and adding "spares" who became regular crew members. For the balance of my 32 missions we never lost another man or had any injuries. Like most of the other B-17s, we almost always had some flak damage and occasionally some fighter damage. This was compounded by very bad weather conditions and near-empty fuel tanks on the longer missions (7.8 or 9+ hours). My missions included 6 trips to Berlin or its suburbs, 10 to Hamburg, Layer, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, and several to targets in France. After my 13th mission (4/24/44), we (my crew) transferred briefly to the 305th BG where we were taught how to fly B-17s equipped with radar and we added a radar bombardier (called a "radar operator") to our crew. They were a great bunch and we got along very well. From this point on, we always flew lead or deputy lead positions for the 351st, or the 401st or 457th, the other two bomb groups. Comprising the 94th Combat Wing of the 8th Air Force. Accidentally, the 351st is the one in which Clark Gable served for his 5 missions and made the movie "Combat America." When I became a Major in early '45, I flew mostly as an air commander much to my disgust, because I was usually in the right seat and much more concerned with the conduct of the mission (its success or failure), rather than flying.
The plane which I much preferred to do. Actually, as U.S. the German defenses crumbled the task became simpler and fighter attacks infrequent. Our P-51s, P-47s, P-38s, etc. could go all the way with us to our targets with ease, sweeping the skies clear of Me-109s, FW-190s, etc. The last mission was on April 15, 1945 to a gun Emplacement, on the French Coast—a real "milk run". Following V-E Day I made one mission to Lom, Austria, to free my French POW's and return them to France, just south of Paris. Next came orders to return to the good old U.S.A., which we did promptly. After nearly a month on leave (seeing my nearly 3/4 year old son for the 3rd time), I reported to Scott Falls, S. Dakota, awaiting orders to B-29 transistor training. Of course the sudden bombing of Japan brought the end Finally, in late 45, I was back in civilian life with my family.

From this point my whole life has been my wonderful family: 4 boys (2 married, 5 grand children) 1 daughter with 2 grandchildren. We all live in the Rochester area, see each other often and have frequent good times together (birthdays, holidays, vacations). All those events grandparents have to attend. Dear friends from Eastman Kodak Co. in 49 after having worked for them 40 years. I've never piloted a plane following my military service (my wife since my flying) but I am actually interested in any sort of flying, even the Space (Shuttle) program in particular. So lose, will research my folks on The 63rd VAFTTD now report anything of interest to you. Thanks again for contacting me. I'll hope to attend the reunion in Oct. But I hope.
Thirty four planes took off to bomb the marshalling yards and steel mill at Osnabrück, Germany. The mission was abandoned by the Combat Wing Commander before the target was attacked because of bad weather. Fighter opposition was very weak, consisting of only a few attacks by FW 190s and Me 109s. Light inaccurate flak was encountered at a few points along the route.

Group leaders on this mission were Captain D. Harris and Lt. Colonel Cobb, with Lt. Pullen as navigator and Lt. Baird as bombardier, in the high box. Lt. Carson and Captain Boykin, with Lt. Heldman as navigator and Lt. Spinning as bombardier in the low box.

Lt. Maginn in 42-39778 was forced to ditch in the North Sea when returning with engine trouble. This incident is described by Lt. Maginn:

"Our aircraft, 'Lucky Ball', had just completed an overhaul and had two engines replaced with rebuilt ones. It was our fifth mission and the target was Osnabrück, Germany. The weather was damp and cold with very strong winds blowing from the west. Even though our plane was pronounced in A1 condition, I was nevertheless concerned about the engines and felt that I would be much happier with them after they had accumulated some more hours of running time. From the start things went wrong. Two of our regular crew could not go on the mission, so two spares were assigned to fill their positions in the ball turret and tail gun. The mission plan was to assemble over a radio beacon on the East coast, then the Group in formation was to join the other Bomb Groups and start the climb to the proper altitude en-route to the target. For some reason our Group Commander did not join the stream of Bomb Groups crossing the English Channel at the proper time, and it was only when we saw B24 Groups approaching, and they were supposed to be behind us, was it realized that we were far behind our assigned location in the stream of Bomb Groups. To regain our position the lead aircraft of our Group gradually increased power both to gain speed and altitude. We soon found ourselves running at near full power and we were still falling far behind in our formation, as were many others of our Group. We had not yet reached bombing altitude when the oil pressure on our number four engine started dropping. We took all corrective measures possible, but the oil pressure continued to drop and before it reached the critical point, I pressed the 'feathering' button to stop the engine and turn the propeller blades so that they would provide no drag. By this time we were quite
some distance behind our squadron, but the target was not far and I felt that we might still stand a chance to catch up even with three engines running at near full power. However, our position changed drastically a few minutes later when the oil pressure on our number three engine started dropping rapidly and I had only a very short time to try corrective measures before it was necessary to push the feathering button on the number three engine.

Now, with two engines out on the same side, it was no longer possible to catch up, or remain airborne indefinitely for that matter, so reluctantly we turned back. With no targets of opportunity in sight we jettisoned our bomb load into the Zuider Zee, and then also jettisoned most of our ammunition and other unnecessary equipment. I trimmed our plane as best as possible to maintain a true course but we continued to lose altitude gradually, even with our number one and two engines running at near full power. At this point I felt we had sufficient altitude and short enough distance to go to the English coast, and that we would not have to ditch in the sea, but our situation changed a few minutes later.

The tail gunner called out 'Fighter six o'clock high', but I could not identify it immediately. In our crippled condition we would have been an easy victim for an enemy fighter so we promptly dove to a cloud cover at about 10,000 feet. Just as we reached this altitude, the gunner identified the fighter as a P47. We leveled off and the fighter came up alongside us and after waving his wings at us flew on ahead. We had lost precious altitude in our dive and then to make matters even worse, the oil pressure on our second engine started to fluctuate and then drop. At about the same time we started to get some flak from the German guns, although I don’t recall that any hit us. Anyway we had to take some evasive action which cost us more altitude and, with the oil-pressure still dropping on the number two engine, I had to feather it. We immediately jettisoned all remaining expendable equipment including our guns and ammunition, but with only one engine now running we were losing altitude rapidly.

We still felt, however, that we might get to the English coast and crash land wherever possible. Nevertheless, we prepared to ditch, running through the ditching procedure and assembling the crew in the radio room. The radio operator Sgt. Palmer started sending the SOS signal. We were heading for Norwich across the North Sea and with a very strong headwind it soon became apparent we would not reach land, even though the English coast was now in view. I could see that the water was choppy. No chance to land in the trough of a wave as the 'book' says you’re to do. We dragged along on one engine until we were just above the wave tops, then I had to cut the remaining engine because it was causing the plane to swerve and I wanted to land as straight as possible. At about 85 mph we hit the water, and for a few seconds both Lt. Brooks, my co-pilot and I blacked out as we were thrown violently forward by the rapid deceleration. I actually thought we were under water, and in fact we were until the nose of the plane started to rise and then I could see that we were floating.

Brooks at once pulled the emergency release cord on his co-pilot’s window which allowed the window to fall away, and started to climb out. I opened my window but became stuck in the small opening, so I rapidly backed away and climbed out of the co-pilot’s window. Just as I stepped onto the wing it started to sink, so both Brooks and I inflated our 'Mac Wests' and went into the water. The shock of the cold water was instantly numbing, but even worse was the shock I experienced when I looked at the rear of our plane. The tail from the radio compartment back was sticking up in the air indicating that the plane had broken in half on landing. This fracture had jammed shut the escape hatch from the radio room and therefore the rest of the crew could not get out. Brooks and I immediately started swimming to the side of the plane to see what we could do. Then gradually the nose and wings started to sink, causing the radio hatch to break open, and one by one the crew scrambled out. I called to Dave Shrom our engineer, to pull the cables to release the life rafts, but he replied that they were jammed and bent and that he was unable to release them. Unfortunately the plane had no exterior release cables so we could not get at the rafts, therefore the men had to take to the water.

We assembled together in the water and watched 'Lucky Max' sink. Our efforts to remain together proved fruitless — the first big wave came crashing over us, and we could no longer hold on to each other. Palmro assured me that the air rescue squadrons had a 'first class' fix on us and that a rescue boat was probably already on the way. However 30 minutes and finally 45 went by before the boat appeared. By this time we were scattered over a 1,000 yards of sea making it difficult for the boat to find us all, much less to pick us up.

I’m sure that by this time some of my crew were overcome by exposure, the wind and bitter cold water took its toll rapidly, I had just about given myself up, when the boat threw me a line, I caught it and hung on for dear life whilst they hauled me aboard. Three others were already on the ship and shortly after a fifth was brought into the small cabin in which we were huddled. I then discovered Lt. Brooks and Sgts. Schrom, Palmer and myself had survived. Lt. MacMurrow, Sgts. Bucceri, Mayes, Nadene and Rowleson were not found.
Dear Paul,

I'm sorry I didn't get this started in time to catch you at home in Indianapolis, but hopefully, it will catch up with you at Jekyll Island. As you've already guessed, I'm sure, I am unable to attend this year's reunion of the 63rd A.A.F.-F.T.D. When I first received your letter back in June, I fully planned to attend the reunion and, in fact, was looking forward eagerly to seeing some of my wartime friends again. Unfortunately, we have somewhat made plans to move to another location in the Rochester area, and as such, would have it, our moving occurs during the week of the reunion, which makes it impossible.
To get out of Rochester at the time of the reunion, in any case, I appreciate very much your taking the time to locate me and send me the literature and to organize these reunions. I just wish I had known about these reunions sooner and you can bet I would have been at most of them. It pains me to know that I have missed all eight previous ones & now I can't attend the ninth. Please make certain you let me know all about next year's get-together & I'll do my best to get to it.

Since all of my military stuff is now packed preparatory to our move, I can't send you anything in the line of photos or other momentos, but here's a brief account of my military life after I left Douglas, Georgia:

Basic training (BT-13) at Greenwood, Miss.
Advanced (AT-10) at George Field, Ill. Then with my "wings" and commission, I was transferred to Lockbourne Army Air
Force Base at Columbus, Ohio, for B-17 flight training. This was my dream right from the start, so I really enjoyed flying the B-17, a really great airplane. Then, eventually, after some brief assignments here and there, I arrived at Great Falls, Montana, for training with the 401st Bomb Group, 94th Combat Wing. Here, I was assigned a crew, learned formation flying, bombing procedures, gunnery and all the rest. All too soon, I found myself flying the Atlantic with my crew, finally winding up at Polebrook, England. Polebrook was the home of the 351st BG. They had suffered some heavy losses and urgently needed crews, so I transferred into the 351st together with 6 or 8 other 401st BG crews. After a very few days, which included one familiarization flight and one "test" formation flight,
we were on our way to Hamburg, Germany, for our first mission. I soon learned that weather could be as big an enemy as the Luftwaffe. I served in the Luftwaffe. I completed 32 missions with the 357th B.G. About half of them were flown as a "lead" crew flying radar equipped B-17's. I ended my tour in June '45, with five (including myself) of the ten original crew surviving. There is no concise way for me to describe aerial combat. I just did a lot of praying. I hoped the good Lord would hear me. I can say enough about my crew. The others I flew with. They were all great, dedicated, proud people. I loved them all like family. I was discharged in December '45 following the surrender of Japan.

The past fifteen years, the 8th Air Force has had reunions and I've been at most of them. It's a great feeling to talk to the with these wonderful people with whom I flew in combat.

Well, Paul, this is a capsule account of my military experience. I could
351st BOMB GROUP
Reunion Association

8TH AIR FORCE—BOMB SQUADRONS: 508th—509th—510th—511th
POLEBROOK, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, ENGLAND
APRIL 1943—JUNE 1945

write a book and never tell it all. I’m looking forward to seeing you and all the others from the 63rd AAF-FTD in 1993. If you ever get to Rochester, New York or in this area, I’d be happy to see you and I’ll do the same if I get to Indianapolis. Meanwhile, here’s wishing you good health and the very best of everything—

Sincerely,

Lew Maginn

P.S. My address after October 23, 92 will be: 29 Hellbridge Dr.
Rochester, N.Y. 14612
My Military Biography

Lester J. Magrini
34 Hillebridge Drive
Rochester, New York
14612-2847

7/13/42
Served with the U.S. Army - Rochester, N.Y. I had the choice of serving in the U.S. Army or the U.S. Army Air Corps, as it was then known. Chose the U.S. Army Air Corps. Two-weeks furlough granted.

7/27/42
Reported to U.S. Army base at Fort Niagara, N.Y. Passed physical and mental exams for the U.S. Army Air Corps.

8/24/42
Transferred to Camp Mills, Mitchel Field. This was a reception center for unappointed cadets.

9/15/42
Appointed Aviation Cadet. Transferred to the Classification Center at Nashville, Tennessee. Passed all qualifying tests (mental, physical, endurance, response, etc.) classified as student-pilot cadet.

9/28/42
Transferred to the South East Army Air Force Training Center at Maxwell Field, Alabama. The normal six-weeks training course 43-E was condensed to 18 days -- eligible cadets were urgently...
Primary needed in flight schools. It was classes and physical exercises from early morning until late evening; flying was minimal.

10/22/42, Granted an 18-day furlough. More cadets passed the accelerated course at Maxwell Field Pre-flight training center than expected, slowing creating an excess of cadets for Primary School. Returned home (Rochester, N.Y.). Our first child, Patrick, was born November 4th while I was on furlough. Returned to Maxwell Field on September 8th.

Transferred to 63rd Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment in Douglas, Georgia for flying training in the Stearman PT-17 (bi-plane) flying trainer. Squadron B, Class 43-E

11/24/42. My first flight, one hour and two minutes in the Stearman PT-17. My instructor was Mr. William Fret sche. My fellow cadets being trained by Mr. Fret sche were:

Clifford H. Mohn
Kenneth W. Marks
Emory H. Mc Atee
Roy L. McAlinn

All five of us successfully completed flight training in the PT-17. None washed out. Soloed after
21 hours, 6 minutes of instruction. Completed required 60 hours of combined dual (26 hrs, 43 min.) and solo (33 hrs, 12 min.) flight training in the PT-17 (per my log book). Last flight was Jan. 26, 43.

Jan. 43
I have no copy of orders transferring me from Douglas, Georgia to Basic Flying Training, Greenwood, Miss. First flight was the BT-13A on Feb. 1, 43, Instructor - Green B. Thompson; soloed 2/12; last flight - Mar. 28, 43.

3-28-43
50 84
Transferred from Greenwood, Miss. to 4th Flying School, George Field, Ill., for flight training in the twin-engine Beechcraft AT-10. First flight - 4/6/43; soloed - 4/11/43; last flight - 6/26/43. Instructor - 2nd Lt. April 8 - William O. Curtis.

50 148
23 May 43
Transferred from 4th Flying Training, George Field, Ill., to Combat Crew School, George, 8-17, Lockbourne AAB, Columbus, Ohio. Commissioned Pilot and 2nd Lt. AUS. First flight (B-17) - 6/14/43; soloed - 6/21/43; last flight at Lockbourne AAF base July 14, 1943.

50 195

50 71 (7) Transferred (as a crew) from 401st B.A. (Deenstropp, England) 25 Nov. 43 to 357th B.A., 511st B. Sqd. (Palebrook, England) 5th AA.F.

First Combat Mission - Nov. 26, 43 - Bremen, Ger.

First Combat Mission - Dec. 1, 43 - Solingen, Ger.

Lost tail gunner (anoxia) - heavy fighter attack.

Fifth Mission - Dec. 22, 43 - Oranabooch, Ger.

Ditched in North Sea, five miles off English coast (Norwich), five crewmen lost (hypothermia).

remained rescued by British Air-Sea Rescue Craft.

This is a

Climatic Summary - Completed a total of 32 missions, went on 30 day R&R back to the States after 26 missions. Returned until V-E day with last mission on Apr. 14, 45. No crew loss was incurred after the fifth mission. Returned to the States on June 45. Discharged from military service in Sept. 45 after the nuclear bombs were dropped.

Never came in contact with any of the men I

Trained with, while I was flying combat missions with the 357th Bomb Group. This Group has an annual reunion in various locations around the
United States. At one of these reunions, seven of my crew attended.

I wish I had been aware of the reunions of the 63rd AAF TD. Unfortunately, I could not attend in 1992 and was eagerly looking forward to attending this year. However, for medical reasons, my doctors have advised against it. But I am not ruling out the possibility of attending the next reunion in '96 - or in '95 if one will be held next year.

If any record of those attending the reunion is kept or a summary of the events or discussions recorded, I would like very much to get a copy if at all possible. Again, I regret very much that I cannot be there, however, I send my best regards to all those attending, especially those from Class 43E.

The P-17 still is one of my favorite WWII aircraft, even though it wasn't the easiest plane to bring in for a good smooth landing. A number of them always show up at the air shows held locally. Accidentally, Paul, if there is any "blanks" in my "Military History" you would like clarified, let me know: maybe I can fill them in.

Wishing yours yours the best as always,

Lee Maginn
(716) 723-6086