

Col. MARCUS C. WEST ^{USF}
29 May 1990

Dear Paul,

I wish to apologize for this belated response to your letter requesting info about 63rd RAFTD, Douglas, Georgia graduates. So much has happened since I received your letter, including the illness ^{and death} of my brother in Nashville, and I also needed time to research old records & try to come up with some of the info you requested.

First of all, I still have the class book for 43-F. It includes your picture along with my last Douglas instructor, Eugene W. Gillespie. We often wondered about him because he appeared to be a very fine person. I don't remember the name of my first instructor but I'm sure his picture is there in the class book. I recall, I was almost through primary and I still had not been able to do a slow roll and my final check ride was due in just a few days. Gillespie told me that if I did not learn to do the roll that he would have no choice but to recommend that I be washed out. I thank him to this day for his patience with me because he had me try the maneuver over and over and over until - all at once I got it - and I never had trouble ever again doing a slow roll.

Oh, so many things have happened since Douglas. I went to Hunter Field for basic and Naples Field at Dothan for advanced. After graduation I was sent to Roanoke, Va. for airlines transition training - DC-2's, DC-2's and DC-3's. After that I was assigned to Washington National Airport where I flew as co-pilot (in AT uniform) on DC-3's with the old Penn. Central

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airlines which later merged with Capital Airlines and Capital later merged with National, and as you know, National later merged with Pan Am. The purpose of this training was to teach us how to fly transports. After that training I was sent to St. Joe Missouri for instrument school (C-47's & B-25's), after that I flew various twin engine aircraft to stateside and foreign destinations.

After a short stint in the ferry command, I was one of approx. 100 Air Corps pilots selected to go through ~~the~~ Navy undergraduate pilot ~~training~~ training at Pensacola. We graduated along with all the Navy flight trainees and received our Navy wings of gold. For several years we were able to wear the Navy wings on the right side of our blouses until a new regulation came out precluding the wear of 2 sets of wings from the same specialty (this did not apply to those who received flight training from foreign countries such as the R.A.F.).

After completion of Navy flight training, I received ~~an~~ operational training from the Air Corps in PBY's (OA-10's) at Keeler Field, Miss. From there I received my crew and was sent to the mid Pacific for search and rescue. In 1949 I was sent to Germany where I flew hundreds of missions flying C-54's on the Berlin airlift. After a short return to the States I was sent to MacDill Field to learn to fly the SA-16 (later called the HU-16). From there I crewed up, picked up a new airplane at Brumman's factory at Bell Pugs and proceeded to the far East where I flew hundreds of search and rescue missions during the Korean War. Many of the missions were picking up aircrew members

who had been shot down behind enemy lines as well as evacuating injured South Korean infiltrators who had worked clandestinely in North Korea. Incidentally, about six or seven years ago ~~we~~ my wife and I spent a week in South Korea as guests of the Korean Veterans Association. They wine and dined us, furnished all sightseeing and would not let us pay a dime, even for meals.

Following the Korean war, I decided to try the civilian route for a change. I entered business in South Carolina where I built and managed a motel, restaurant, and service station - and it was successful but I soon became bored with the routine and in a very short time was back flying with the Air Force Reserve.

In 1960 I returned to the Air Force as a major where I assumed command of an Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. While there I was promoted to Lt Col and ~~was later~~ went to TAC where I assumed command of a Tactical Air Support Group. While there I received my eagles and soon was sent to the Pentagon where I served on the Air Staff as Chief of Plans for all Air Force Reserve bases and facilities, and for anyone not familiar with their ~~own~~ setup, one would be surprised as to how much real estate the Air Force Reserve controls. Finally, I was sent back to the field to assume command of a Close Air Support Group and I stayed there until I retired in 1971.

I had always wanted to build my own home so I designed and built the home and ~~and~~ I mean literally - every block, every board, all the electrical and plumbing - was quite a task but very fulfilling. ~~as~~ my commander and I have been here 19 years and have enjoyed it immensely. We travel a lot and I have many projects going all the time.

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Recently, my boss and I visited the Air Force museum at Wright-Patt AFB and it sure was interesting. They had on display at least 18 of the approx. 30 aircraft that I have flown at one time or another - including one that was one of my actual planes that I had as a squadron commander. The museum thoroughly enjoyed the visit. On our return to Florida, we stopped at Douglas for a picnic lunch under the pines near the road in front of the old 63rd AAFSTD Admin building. We stop there often. Believe it or not, most of the buildings are still intact. For sometime the facilities were used to supplement the local school system but I don't know what they are used for now. The picnic tables have been set up under the pines and each time we stop there many memories keep flooding back.

You probably have copies of all the class books, but in case you don't, I have enclosed copies from a couple of pages of the class 43-F edition. I'm sorry I don't remember you - but you must remember, you were one of the brass, so it is not unusual that I don't recall you. As for my classmates shown there with Gillespie, I'm pretty sure that Winston washed - and I lost track of all the others except Weitzel. Just before WWII ended, he came through Hickham field in Hawaii. He was flying a rescue B-17 with a rescue boat attached to its belly. When I was serving in the jungle palace I visited him in his home in North Carolina where he was a tobacco farmer. I have since lost his address. Incidentally, I had a long telecon with M/D Simon in Crystal River.

Due to the fact that my commander and I have had numerous medical problems, I'm not sure if we will be able to attend the reunion in Pa. this year - but don't rule us out yet. We have a worst case reunion ~~attendance~~ and we usually attend AAS reunions ~~each year~~ and the PBY-Catalina Catalina reunion each year. It was great to hear from you, Respectfully, Mark West



Wick - Winston - Gillespie - West - Westray



MARCUS & GLADYS WEST
1992