

Norwood, New York
Sept. 28, 1993

Paul D. Schlundt
Indianapolis, Ind.

Dear Paul:

What a surprise to receive a telephone call from one familiar with, and took an active part in the training of my Cadet Class of 43K at Douglas, Georgia. You are the first, and only one that I have ever heard from, that trained, or was a student at the Raymond Richardson Training School. After all these years - WHAT A PLEASANT SURPRISE. You cannot imagine the incidents, occasions, fellow Cadets, Instructors, etc. that have passed through my mind after we broke off our phone conversation on July 12, 1993.

What a commendation you deserve for all your efforts, time and expense to put this together. No one can ever forget those first days of flight training, and the war years that followed. Your efforts bring back so many memories. My Instructor was John Fraser, and was sorry to hear that he had passed on - probably the stress of flying with we Cadets didn't help his longevity.

I was born in the small rural area of Chazy, New York on October 3, 1919. My birthplace is located on Lake Champlain in Northern New York and only 14 miles from the Canadian border. I am the 6th of 10 children. Enlisted in the Aviation Cadets at Baltimore, Maryland in August 1942, where I was employed by Crown Cork and Seal Co. as a Milling Machine operator.

Sent to classification center, Montgomery, Alabama for ground school, then to Douglas, Georgia for primary, under John Fraser. There were five students that were assigned to Fraser. Shortly after the first flight training, one "washed out," and I do not recall his name. The remaining four were myself, W.R.P. Surbaugh, A.J. Stokes, and W.D. Underwood. I have a good picture of this group with Fraser, that I am still looking for. I put it away for safe keeping, and at my age, it is almost lost. From Douglas, Georgia, we went to Cochran Field for Basic. In the final phase of Basic we were called to fall in on the training field. A Captain asked for any Cadet that could speak French to hold up their hand. I was hesitant to do so, but did raise my hand along with one other Cadet by the name of A.W. Pothier of Worcester, Massachusetts. The Captain dismissed the rest of the Cadets and took Pothier and I to the flight line, where he proceeded to talk, and ask us questions in French, and requested that we answer in French. At this stage, he said, "we would be qualified." He informed us that there were French Military personnel in the states to learn flying and that they were looking for French speaking flying personnel to help train. Nothing more was heard about it until we finished Basic. The Class of 43K was assigned to go to Moody for advanced with the exception of myself and Pothier. I was assigned to Turner Field, at Albany, Georgia, and he was assigned to a single engine advanced in Alabama. When I got to Turner, and checked in, they wouldn't believe that I came from Cochran, and if so, why? I figured my orders would inform them why I was there, so didn't volunteer anything. And, at that point I decided that I wanted to go Combat instead of instructing. I was assigned to the Tourist barracks and for a few days went to the movies and chow. I knew that the class that had been shipped in, from where, I

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do not remember, were flying A.T. 10's, and I was still in the Tourist barracks. I proceeded to the flight line one morning and asked when I was to start flying, of course, they in turn wanted to know what field I had come from, and when I said Cochran, they said it couldn't be, no one had come from Cochran. They did assign me to an instructor and I began training in twin engine. I met several of the French speaking Cadets at this field, and had a "ball" with them. They had all been in the French service for a few years, so held ranks equal to our Sergeants, Staff Sergeants etc. They were being paid flight pay and longevity pay in U.S. funds, in commensurate with the rank, so they had pockets of money. They would seek me out to go into town with them to interpret for them. It was no time before they knew how to speak "Steak and Wine" in English. I never disclosed why I had been sent there, so graduated with the class and commissioned a 2nd Lt.

Orders were to report to Sebring, Florida for B-17's with "delay enroute", so headed home to West Chazy, N.Y. (60 miles South of Montreal, Canada - which is why I knew how to speak French)

Somewhere, the train I was on, hooked up with another train going North, and lo and behold, I met my Class of 43K that had graduated from Moody, and they were on "delay enroute". This is where I found out that my orders, instead of going to Turner Field, had gone with the Class to Moody, and I had picked up dozens of "gigs" for failing to meet assignments. So, I don't know what ever did become of those orders.

Arrived in Sebring a little late because of a train wreck ahead of my train. At Sebring they had us fall out after only 4 hours sleep, they asked for volunteers to go to B-24's as they had too many students for Sebring, I, along with several others volunteered, so, they immediately loaded us on B-17's and flew us to Smyrna, Tennessee. My baggage was involved in the train wreck, so went to Sebring than on to Smyrna, so I had to buy a whole new wardrobe, as it was several weeks before it caught up to me.

B-24 training at Smyrna, than to Westover Field, Massachusetts for a crew. Than on to Charleston, South Carolina for phase training.

Ruptured an eardrum at Charleston (flying with a head cold). Was assigned to control, and my Crew was assigned to the pool, so I lost my original Crew. Back on flying status, was assigned a complete Crew that had lost its pilot. Completed the phase training at Charleston and assigned to Langley Field, Virginia for Radar Training. Got overseas orders via Maine, Greenland and Iceland.

Was assigned to the 702nd Squadron of the 445th Bomb Group in the 2nd Air Division. We got the hell kicked out of us at Kassel, Germany, on Sept 27, 1944. I didn't fly that day, but we lost 25 of 37 planes attacking the target. Our Mission the next day, which I flew, was back to Kassel, with only 10 planes, as that was all we had left that were air worthy. It was a "milk-run", but sure was stressful. Normal missions until my 22nd to the outskirts of Berlin. Picked up anti-aircraft flak, everything working, until number 3 engine failed. My engineer Robert Berberian, had drained the fuel sight gauges before target. Had him check fuel, found we were low. Had him transfer fuel and got engine running. We were heading back toward the English Channel, so had navigator give me time element for the coast of England. According to the time element and

the engineers fuel measurement, we would barely cross the Channel - we could see fuel running from our wing, so wasn't sure we could even cross the Channel. I didn't want to ditch, as the B-24 wasn't a good ditching plane, and the Channel water was frigid at that point of crossing. I turned away from the formation and headed toward Belgium. During all this time, an engine would cut out, and we would transfer fuel to get it going. We were losing altitude all this time and most fearful of enemy fighters, we were fortunate that we had a cloud cover below us. At about 7500 feet, I was going into the clouds with 2 engines, so ordered my crew to "bail out". When I went out there was only 1 engine running.

As it turned out, we were scattered over an area between Spa and Liege Belgium, I was in Spa, along with my engineer, Bob. In my descent from the plane, I never saw the ground until I hit a tree top, the cloud layer was that low. I was about 10 miles on our side of the battle line, in an area controlled by General Hodges. Fortunately we had been paralleling the battle lines before we bailed, so we were all in friendly territory. I was taken to the site where my 24 had crashed. They had Military guards to watch the wreckage, because of the bomb sight. Wreckage was scattered over a couple acres. I walked through the wreckage and found nothing of the sight. The wreckage never burned, so it was completely out of fuel. I had them discharge the guards. I picked up the balance of my crew the next day in Liege, except for my navigator, which I found out later, had a head injury and was hospitalized by the Belgians. We were moved by truck to Brussels and flown back to base at Tidenheim, England. About 3 days later, flew another mission (supposedly to re-establish the nerves). They then sent us to a rest home for 10 days. A coincidence that occurred in the "bail out", the Captain that took my engineer and myself to Liege to pick up the balance of my crew, happened to be from the same city as my co pilot, Frank Gorman of Shaker Heights, Ohio. When we met, they knew each other and had been school class mates. On our way to a little restaurant, for them to rehash old times, we observed a line of Army personnel across the street, one called out my last name, so I crossed over, and it was one of my class mates, Henry Dickinson, of Chazy, N.Y. He was in a pay line, so he later joined us and we had a rehash of our High School days.

At 32 missions, they shut me off, why I don't know, as the tour of duty at that time was 35. While waiting for orders to return to State side, the war with Germany ended, so, my orders were changed, and I flew a brand spanking new B-24 back to Bradley Field, Connecticut.

Home, for recuperation period. Reported back to Fort Dix, supposedly for assignment, and duty in the South Pacific.

In their reviewing my records at Fort Dix, I was offered a discharge on the point system. I mulled it over in my mind - never was crazy for over water flying, which the South Pacific would be, so took the discharge effective on August 2nd 1945 as a 1st Lieutenant.

Married August 4, 1945 to a local girl I knew from school days. Two girls were born from the marriage. I worked at different jobs, such as, Manager of Wholesale Meat Co., U.S. Customs Service and then as a Sales Representative for a Heavy Equipment Distributor, with the main line of equipment being Caterpillar.

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I lost my wife in a tragic house fire in January 1958. Married my present wife, Sonia, a widow with one son, in January 1968. I retired in 1981, after 28 years as a Sales Rep. with the same Company.

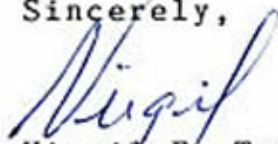
Spend the winter months, namely December through April in Daytona Beach, Florida - the balance of the year at our home in Norwood, N.Y.

Other than flying commercial, I have never flown a plane since discharge.

This is kind of lengthy, use any part of it that you wish, for your History of 43K. I am still looking for the picture (very good condition) of instructor Fraser and his students of 43K.

Please keep me informed of the next scheduled reunion, I would love to meet my old classmates.

Sincerely,



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VIRGIL AND SONIA TROMBLY
SUMMER OF 1992