

Remembering Paul

Paul Leroy Michalk
1923 - 1945

by
Erwin R. Michalk
July 1994



Paul broke the mold of the Michalk boys by going to Dallas in 1940 after graduation from Concordia, Austin. War was already raging in Europe, and the US was sending megatonnage of military supplies "Lend - Lease" to our Allies. Many of the Fedor boys were being conscripted for one year of military service ("honest injun", said Franklin Roosevelt) and a popular song of Pappy Lee O'Daniel's *Light Crust Dough Boys* was "I'll be Back in a Year, Li'l Darlin". As an alternative to conscription, full - time employment in a war industry was honorably acceptable.

Many other young men were flocking to Dallas, where North American Aviation had just finished "the biggest plant in the world" out at Grand Prairie, building the AT- 6 "TEXAN". Up till then all small aircraft, and up to the Gooney Bird (DC - 3), had fixed landing gear; and there were dozens of jokes - mostly bad - about hapless pilot trainee Dilbert who kept forgetting to put down the landing gear when coming in for a landing. Paul had heard that Many Lutheran boys were headed for Dallas, and that the Walther League of Zion Congregation (Rev. Luther Poellet) included those working at NAA and at Guiberson Diesel.

First he had to turn 18, and also have some craft training, before being acceptable in war industry. So he took a job as bag boy for Safeway, then flight-line attendant at Braniff (Love Field), while attending night classes in engineering, science, and management war training (ESMWT). It was quite hectic, working a full day, then taking a bus to SMU for night class. On Sundays he'd meet with the Walther League at church and compare notes with the Stelzer boys, the Moerbes, Gus Melde, Elmer Werner, ...and Bob Hejtmeyer about hiring at NAA and Guiberson. They usually had basketball practice in the evening and even entered a WL tournament. The bachelors of the group tended to room around the Gersch home, where Mrs. Gersch served breakfast and dinner. Paul got a job running a high-speed band saw at NAA; one day the blade broke and a fragment tore into his chest. He was transferred to better work after recuperating, but always had a gnawing feeling that something better could be done for the war effort. So he checked with the Naval Aviation recruiting office at Hensley Field.

By this time brother Erwin had graduated from Concordia (1941). but he wasn't even 17. He came up to live in Dallas in desperation, for there certainly wasn't any position available elsewhere in Texas. Paul financed his stay for three months, while Erwin attended ESMWT at SMU; he couldn't get any regular job either during that training, or after, because every potential employer figured he'd be drafted on turning 18. So Erwin went back to Fedor to wait ... and found a school - work program at Blinn College (Brenham) in electronics.

Meanwhile Paul tried to sign on with Naval Aviation Reserve in training to be a pilot. As soon as he was advanced enough to land a plane, the test for tail landings was given (remember, most Navy planes have to approach a carrier deck tail - low, so that the arrestor hook would catch the arresting cable). Out of three tries, Paul made one wheels landing, one three - point, but only one tail - low. So he got the choice of going for something other than pilot, or trying the U. S. Army Air Corps. The Army had no Reserve Aviation component, so once he signed on, he was on for the long haul. Once he finished College Training Detachment (CDT) - somewhere in Kansas -- his lot (literally) fell to be assigned to navigation school - no options, no tests. The US Army Air Corps moved him around several times, but once he became bombardier on a B-24, he was content, because he had one of the scarce Mickey radars to operate, and a whole wing would follow that plane in on a bombing run. Of course that also made that plane the prime German fighter target on any flight.

-- at this point, my memories of Paul fade. Each of us had a last furlough before going overseas, but not overlapping; we last saw each other at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, in early 1942. ERM



pictured, left to right: E. Westcott; N. Boriack; V. Lieder; E. Gloor; P. Michalk; J. Geisler.

Michalk Gives Commencement Address As Six Graduate

The Reverend A. F. Michalk, pastor of the Lutheran Church in Fedor, Texas, addressed the graduates of Concordia College at the tenth annual commencement exercises held in the college auditorium May 30.



The Rev. A. F. Michalk

May 30, 1940

Inasmuch as Paul's words to the Corinthians, "Quit you like men, be strong" served as the motto of the graduating class, it was entirely fitting that the speaker should choose as his text the words from Paul's second letter to Timothy, "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

As class salutatorian, Paul Michalk gave the address of welcome, while Norman Boriack delivered the valedictory address.

The Reverend F. H. Stelzer of Thorndale, chairman of the Board of Control, awarded diplomas to six graduates, four of whom are preparing for the ministry.

Scholarship awards were made by President Studtmann. The Carl Doering scholarship of \$25, awarded annually to the student having the highest general scholastic average for the year, was won by Vernon Boriack of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, a member of the sophomore class. The average of all his grades for the year was 95.73 per cent. For the second highest average (94.50 per cent) Paul Michalk, a member of the graduating class, received the Board of Control scholarship of \$15.

In the competition for highest honors in religion, Arnold Twenhafel of Caldwell, Texas, with an average of 99.70 per cent, was awarded the H. P. Roepe scholarship of \$5. The second place award, a Concordia Bible, presented by the clergy members of the Board of Control, was given to Vernon Boriack, the winner of the Doering award, whose average in religion was 99.65 per cent.

Michalk Assumed Dead, Memorial Service Sun.



FIRST LT. PAUL L. MICHALK

The Adjutant General's office of the War Department has notified the Rev. A. F. Michalk concerning his son, Paul, who has been missing in action over Germany since April 7, 1945: "In view of the fact that twelve months have now expired without the receipt of evidence to support a continued presumption of survival, the War Department must terminate such absence by a presumptive finding of death. In case of your son this date has been set as 8 April 1946.

"The record concerning your son shows that he was a crew member of a B-24 aircraft which was leading the flight on a bombardment mission over a munitions plant at Duneberg, Germany, on 7 April 1945. His plane was rammed between the left wing and fuselage by an attacking enemy aircraft, and crashed near Soltau, Germany. Three parachutes were seen to leave the plane. Three crew members reached ground safely and are now liberated prisoners of war. They have stated that they believe their fellow crew members did not survive."

Memorial Service Sunday

Memorial services honoring Lt. Michalk will be held at 2:30 o'clock Sunday afternoon in Trinity Lutheran church, with Dr. H. Studtmann of Austin delivering the memorial address.

Trinity Lutheran Church
Riesel, TX

SAN ANGELO
ARMY AIR FIELD
BOMBARDIER SCHOOL



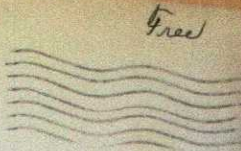
Army Air Forces Bombardier School
of
San Angelo, Texas
announces the graduation of
Class 44-2 DR
Saturday morning, February fifth
nineteen hundred and forty-four
at ten o'clock
Post Theatre

Paul L. Michalk

Lieutenant, Air Corps
Army of the United States

Remembering Paul L. Michalk
1923-1945

of Paul L. Michalk 18231251
Class 44-2 AL
S.A.A.A.F.B.S.
San Angelo, Texas



Free
Mrs. & Mrs. John Michalk
Bishop, Texas

Memorial Service
Dr. H. Studdmann of Austin conducted a memorial service for Lt. Paul Leroy Michalk, son of Pastor A. F. Michalk. Lt. Michalk enlisted in the Army Air Forces in November, 1942, received his "wings" as a bombardier-navigator at San Angelo on Feb. 5, 1944, and joined the 8th Air Force in England on May 20, 1944. He was promoted to First Lieutenant and had received several citations and an Air Medal. He had almost completed the customary fifty missions when on April 7, 1945, in an exceptionally dangerous mission over Duncberg, near Bremen, Germany, a Messerschmidt fighter plane rammed and exploded on the nose of the plane in which he was serving. He was reported missing in action. A year later, on April 8, 1946, the Adjutant General's Office notified the Rev. and Mrs. Michalk that no trace of the plane could be found and that their son must be presumed to be dead. Lt. Michalk attended Concordia College in Austin 1936-1939.

The Rev. and Mrs. Michalk and family gave \$500 to Concordia College of Austin for the Chapel Memorial Organ Fund in memory of their son and brother.

**Michalk Assumed Dead,
Memorial Service Sun.**



Pl. Michalk 0-709950
389th Bomb Group 567590.
A.P.O. 558 6/6 P.M. New York



Miss Florina Michalk
Bishop, Texas

[Handwritten signature]

L. Michalk
A.I.A.C.

**Lt. Michalk
Reported Missing
Over Germany**

Mr. and Mrs. John A. Michalk have received word that their grandson, First Lt. Paul Michalk, is missing in action over Germany since April 7. He was a navigator bombardier with the Eighth Air Force based in England and the son of Rev. and Mrs. Adolph Michalk of Lexington.

Lt. Michalk was a member of the famed Eighth Air Force choir and not long ago the family heard the broadcast of a program given by this choir in one of England's cathedrals. He won his wings and commission at San Angelo Bombardiering School in October, and his uncle, Sgt. Simeon Michalk stationed at the same field, was the first man to salute him after graduation.



In 1949 his parents were called as Missionary to France and while they received notice his body was found in a small grave in Germany and they were present when his body was moved to a Military Cemetery in Belgium.

Pictures, his parents and this grand daughter from India, Audrey Michalk.



March 1, 1945

During Lent I plan to read the following daily Scripture selections.

FEBRUARY

- 14: John 13:12-20
- 15: John 13:21-33
- 16: Luke 22:31-38
- 17: John 14:1-11
- 18: Ps. 7
- 19: John 14:12-22
- 20: John 14:23-31
- 21: John 15: 1-16
- 22: John 15:17-27
- 23: John 16:1-15
- 24: John 16:16-23
- 25: Ps. 8
- 26: John 16:24-33
- 27: John 17:1-16
- 28: John 17:17-26

MARCH

- 1: Mark 14:32-42
- 2: John 18:1-9
- 3: Matt. 26:47-56
- 4: Ps. 9
- 5: John 18:12-18
- 6: John 18:19-24
- 7: Matt. 26:59-75
- 8: Mark 14:54-64
- 9: Luke 22:63-71
- 10: John 18:28-32
- 11: Ps. 10
- 12: John 18:33-38
- 13: Luke 23:4-12
- 14: Matt. 27:15-25
- 15: John 19:1-11
- 16: John 19:12-16
- 17: Matt. 27:26-31
- 18: Ps. 11
- 19: Matt. 27:31-10
- 20: Luke 23:26-32
- 21: John 19:17-24
- 22: Luke 23:33-43
- 23: John 19:25-30
- 24: Matt. 27:51-56
- 25: Mark 11:1-11
- 26: John 19:31-37
- 27: Mark 15:42-47
- 28: Matt. 27:62-66
- 29: 1 Cor. 11:23-39
- 30: Is. 53:1-9
- 31: Ps. 16

EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 1, 1945
Luke 24:1-11

Dear Florina,

I was very glad to get your letter. The mail from home always comes in bunches with a long period in between, and your most interesting letter came at such a time. Thanks a lot!

I hardly know where to begin, so I'll just start telling you about my last pass. It's got a 48 hour pass about every second week. I went to London since I had just heard that a Lutheran Service Center had been opened there. By chance, I ran into an old friend of mine whom I had known in Dallas. He & I went to the Center and had a very good time just talking to the pastor and the fellows who were there. In fact, we stayed so late one night that the buses & subways had already closed, so we had to walk back to our Red Cross room and did we get lost. That was on Saturday. The next morning at services there were 8 men

Compliments Army and Navy Commission of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, 221 N. LaSalle St., Chicago 1, Ill.

and WAC's for the services - this was quite a crowd since the room they have is quite small. But this was the first Lutheran sermon I had heard since I left the States almost a year ago, so you know how much it meant to have the opportunity.

That afternoon the pastor, Dr. Dierkes, took my buddy & I to Hyde Park to hear the soap box orators. That was a lot of fun for those crack pots would talk & debate about almost anything. The best & most treated arguments were about Poland. All in all, this pass was nearly as good as a visit home.

The life we have over here is not so bad. Everyone considers himself lucky that we do not have all the difficulties of front line service. I have been over here a long time in comparison to most Air Force men and yet I have only finished half of the missions that I must do before I get leave to the U.S. (you see I am on a lead crew and we do not get to fly every time our squadron does). A few days ago we had a real job for our crew had the entire 8th Air Force (1,100 bombers the radio said). My only worry is that I will not get back in time to see Theodore before he leaves for India.



Tell that's about all I have to write about. Give the Grandparents my best regards. And may God keep all of you in health and bless you.

Your nephew,
Paul.

Paul's letter written to his Aunt, his father's sister Florina, in March 1945.

(from a scrapbook of Florina's found by Nancy Michalk with her parents records. 2/11/2016)

Paul's last letter to Bernice
from East England

April 5, 1945
East England.

Dear Sister,

I am getting behind on my correspondence and I know I owe you a letter, so tonight you have a No 1 priority. I have even received a letter from Erwin but he didn't say where he was. If he came here to England the chances are pretty good that I will be able to see him. I've been at this field so long that I know all the powers that be (wheels, we call 'em) so I could even probably get a plane to take me to his base. I surely hope he came to this theater of ops.

Bernice it looks like I won't have much longer here. I can count my missions on my fingers now and even if that should drag out like some of the others, this place won't have any more targets in Germany. I hope I make it before that day because there will probably be an awful rush for transportation. Boy how I'd like to see Texas by May! In the middle of that month it will have been a month that I have been

... you probably saw some very long time for an aircrew man. Most have finished after 4 months, but what should I kick for I've got an easy job, a place to spend money, and I get a lot of satisfaction out of my job. I've got two clusters to the Air Medal and greater things seem to be in the wind (I hope).

I wonder if Bob Young has called you yet. I hope he doesn't forget or maybe fails to make connections.

See Beed had a wonderful experience on Good Friday. I heard Handel's Messiah performed in a large cathedral. I had a rather poor seat though and the organ sometimes nearly drowned about the poor soprano & contraltos. It was really good nevertheless. I think I have finally found what I've been looking for for a long time - a good set of playback equipment. A friend of mine has built one that he wants to sell and I think I can carry it back with me easily enough. Boy wouldn't

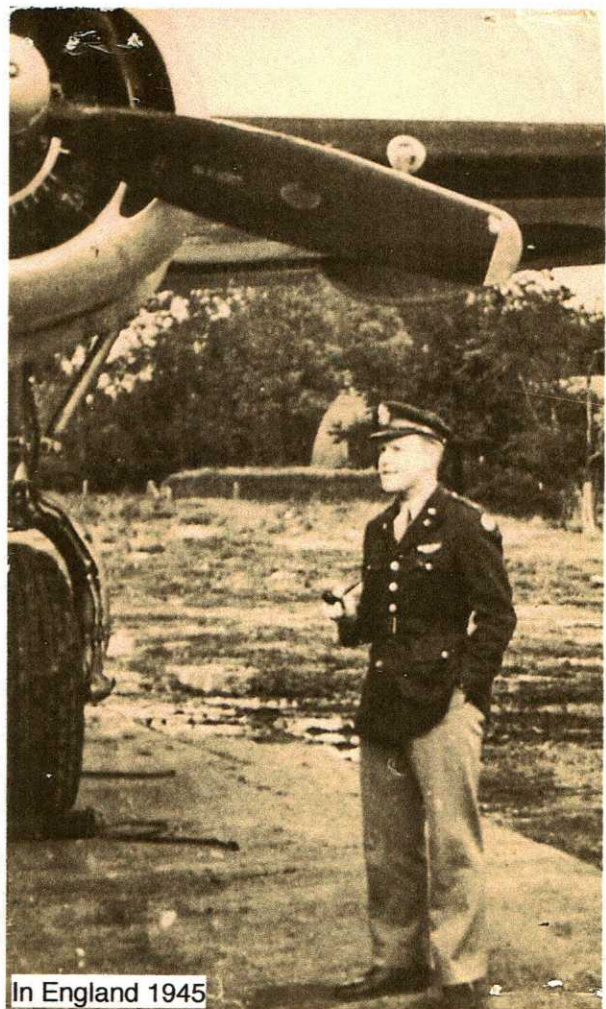
April 5,

1945

just grand to have something like that at home and at any time have good music within your reach?

My gal in Virginia writes me quite often here lately. I surely would like to hurry back to see her (maybe if I stay here too long, she will lose interest.) This entire thing will & is causing me a lot of serious thinking. If I had some job or work for postwar years all would be rosy. But I don't think I have the right to take Frances' time if she must wait years before I can give her some definite plans. Do you get what I am trying to say? Probably not but if you do, can you give any advice? Your view point would cover that about which I know nothing - a woman's mind.

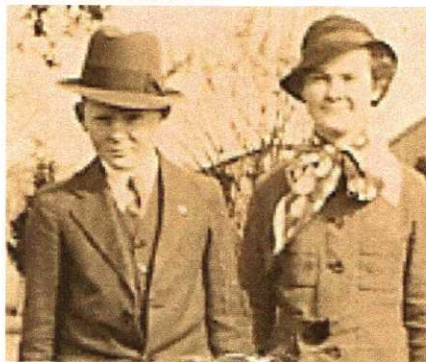
Hell I'd better end this before it gets completely out of hand. Answer soon Bernice. May God guide & protect you
Your brother,
Paul.



In England 1945



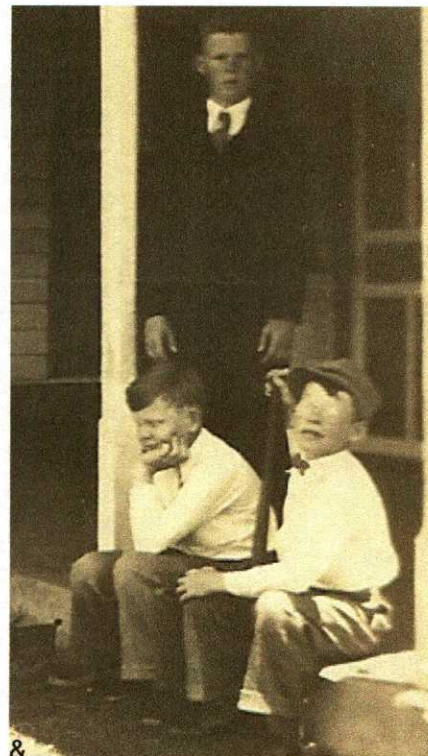
The A.F. Michalk family
Adolph & Paul, Emilie
Theodore, & Bernice
1923



Paul & Bernice about 1936



1923



Theodore, Paul, &
Erwin

Grave of Michalk's Son, Missing in Action, Located

The following letter from the Rev. A. F. Michalk in France was sent to Paul Nerger.

The letter speaks for itself.

MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE
U. S. Military Cemetery,
Neuville-En-Condroz, Belgium.
May 30, 1952

(With grateful appreciation to the U. S. Graves Registration Division)

Of the many military cemeteries our government is maintaining in Europe, the large one at Neuville en Condroz is of special interest to us, because our son, 1st Lieut. Paul L. Michalk, has finally found a resting place there in Plot C, Row 21, Grave 5.

For six long years we knew only that he was "missing in action." Our government had notified us that his plane had been shot down over Northern Germany on April 7, 1945. A few of his buddies who had managed to parachute to safety told what they knew. There was no chance for Paul and the others who had been up in front when the Messerschmidt swooped down on that first plane of the formation and exploded upon colliding. The few men who were in the rear had time to bail out. So we knew before our Government reported him 'presumed to be dead,' as of April 8, 1946, that he was no longer among the living.

But when our church sent us a call to come over to France to serve a pastorate for a few years, mother and I accepted that call and came in the fall of 1948. The silent hope that we might possibly some day chance to find over here some trace of our son's body, had much to do with our accepting that call. Our government had given us a general description of the section of Europe where the plane must have come down. But we would never have hoped to experience what actually happened later.

The untiring and painstaking efforts of the P. S. Graves Registration Division discovered a mass grave at Gestacht. There were 7 bodies of American soldiers in that grave. They exhumed them and brought them to Neuville-en-Condroz and interred them as unknown. The peculiar circumstances, however, led our faithful department to examine the records more closely. An anthropologist was employed to examine the remains of these 7 graves a bit closer. So, one day there came a letter informing us that our son's body had been positively identified, and asked us whether we would want the body brought home to Texas or have

After considering carefully what to do, we decided that it would be best to choose the latter. We did request, if possible, that we might attend the committal service, choosing Chaplain Lindemann of Frankfurt to read the burial service. That request was readily granted and ~~shown~~ shown us on that occasion last year.

So after six long years we did hold a sad reunion once more at Neuville-en-Condroz. A cold, steady rain enveloped the small procession and somehow shut out everything around us and let us concentrate on the solemn words: 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the glorious hope of a final resurrection unto life through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The lads who folded that flag and gave it to mother tried to get as much of the rain out, but it was soaking wet as we lodged in Arlon for the night.

We did not have much desire to look around a bit on that occasion.

This year, however, we plan-

ned to attend the Memorial Service. Our oldest son, a missionary to India, is spending a couple of weeks with us on his furlough trip to the States. He and his daughter were with us then as we drove down the well-marked road that led to the huge cemetery. We came pretty early, for we did not know the time for services. We were warmly greeted by the Caretaker who still remembered us from last year, and his assistant.

The weather, this time, was more agreeable. We had plenty of time to walk around. We soon found the little white cross among all the 5,000 which meant most to us. We noticed that much progress had been made in preparation for the little Italian Marble crosses that will soon replace the wooden ones, and so give more permanence.

The little flags at the head of each grave -- one American and one Belgian -- were lustily fluttering in the breeze, somehow giving the impression that all these boys here knew there were many visitors coming this day, and they were to celebrate with them. Little Audrey could not understand why her father and grandfather and grandmother were in tears while taking pictures, and none of us could tell her at the time all about her uncle Paul whom she never saw in her young life. She saw the Belgian soldiers on parade, and the little Belgian children putting flowers on graves (she calls them by the Tamil name: 'poohs'), she jumped when the honor guard fired the volleys, and all. It was very interesting.

But for us it was pr last, last farewell in th

We had all done it enough down there on road station platform dings, Texas. We were proud of the young L in his snappy uniform leaving for the East Coast and England. He did not like the fogs of the long winter months in England. But he had almost finished his 50 arduous missions and longed to be back in the States soon after Easter, 1945.

Our son, the Rev. Theo. Michalk, and his family will soon sail for the States. Mother and I may be here in France another year. It will probably not happen again that we get up to Neuville-en-Condroz. We should like to see everything in that big cemetery when the plans are completed. But, even the Italian marble crosses, with all the care our Government is giving them will some day perish. The old, old trees that flank the scenic spot on the left have seen several generations of men come and go. Yet they too are not eternal. A grateful Belgium will probably repeat for decades its homage on Memorial Days. And that Star Spangled Banner, long may it wave also over spots like these here and there in this troubled world where American boys have found a last resting place.

In sincere gratitude,

yours,

Rev. A. F. Michalk
Mrs. Michalk and children

May 30, 1952

